

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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- \* Hale, Greater Manchester, 12 May 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Douglas Rendell
- \* Transcribed by Joan Simpson/ Standardised by Julia McDowell
- \* DR=Douglas Rendell, VB=Valentina Bold
- \* Notes: First of two interviews with Douglas Rendell; Sound Quality: Fair; this interview was originally transcribed in a phonetic manner; the original phonetic version can be accessed through our physical collection; please contact Lancaster University Library for more details.

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[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

**VB: Right, erm, okay so I think that should be about right now.**

**DR:** Is that just about right?

**VB: That's about right, yeah.**

**DR:** [inaudible; asks something about tape recorder].

**VB: It's got one of these recording levels—**

**DR:** I see [inaudible].

**VB: So, as long as it's got a bit of range in it, it should be okay.**

**DR:** Yeah, right.

**VB:** Erm, just make sure I've got the thing on. Yeah. That should be fine [laughs].

**DR:** All right [laughs].

**VB:** They're quite nice little machines.

**DR:** Are they? Yes.

**VB:** Not cheap I believe, although I didn't pay for this myself [laughs].

**DR:** I shouldn't think so. No.

**VB:** Erm, they're very efficient. Are you ready to begin?

**DR:** Yeah. I'm completely lost with electronics these days.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** I haven't kept up to date. I can just about use the eh, video recorder. But only just. [laughs]

**VB:** Yeah. [laughs]. I think these ones are probably simpler than the bigger versions anyway.

**DR:** Yeah. Yes.

**VB:** Simple enough for me [laughs].

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB:** Which is just as well. Erm, I was wondering actually if before we talked about the cinema, if I could ask you just one or two questions about yourself.

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Just so I get a better idea of your own erm background. Can I ask what your first name is?**

**DR: Douglas.**

**VB: Douglas. That's great. And can I ask what it was your father worked at?**

**DR: Eh, engineer.**

**VB: Right. And did your mother work?**

**DR: No.**

**VB: Right. Do you have sisters and brothers?**

**DR: Erm, one of each.**

**VB: Right. And can I ask about your educational background?**

**DR: Eh, well first, what? From the year dot?**

**VB: Well just--**

**DR: Eh, little private school.**

**VB: Right.**

**DR: And then the eh, Altrincham Grammar School.**

**VB: Okay.**

**DR: And then the erm Manchester Technical College.**

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** And the Polytechnic, London.

**VB:** That's great. And was it--

**DR:** Photography.

**VB:** Photography. Yeah.

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB:** And as you say, you started running the shop just after the war.

**DR:** Eh all that was before the war.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** Eh, I'm sorry eh--

**VB:** I was just wondering about your, your work. Have you always worked as a photographer?

**DR:** Eh, yes. But not until after the war.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** I mean, all that was training, yes.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** Then of course, the war years interrupted it.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** So, from about 1946. Yeah.

**VB: Were you in the forces during the war then?**

**DR:** Eh, doing photography during the war, yes.

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DR:** Most of all anyway.

**VB: Yeah. Of course, I mean such skills you had must've been really valuable.**

**DR:** That was in the navy, yes.

**VB: Yeah. Right. Can I ask if you have any strong political views or if you've ever been in a--**

**DR:** Eh, well I haven't really.

**VB: I see.**

**DR:** Apart from the present Government [amused voice].

**VB: Yes [laughs]. Right. So, fairly neutral or--**

**DR:** Erm [pause 1 second].

**VB: Do you lean more one way or the other.**

**DR:** Eh, the other. Yes.

**VB: Yeah. Towards?**

**DR:** Conservatives and Liberals.

**VB: Okay. And can I ask if you have any strong religious--**

**DR:** Eh, I haven't got a religion, no.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Well it was C of E wasn't it?

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** My grandfather was actually a minister in the Swedenborgian Church.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** I don't know if you've heard of that.

**VB: I have actually, but I don't know very much about it.**

**DR:** No, well I don't either [laughs].

**VB: Right [laughs].**

**DR:** I've tried to understand it but I can't. And I think my father got fed up with it and he never, he never eh bothered with it.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Only went back to his old church, you know, at weddings and funerals.

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DR:** I think he'd had enough of it.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** But eh [laughs].

**VB:** [laughs]. The other thing that I was interested in was places that you've lived at. I know you were saying you were born in--

**DR:** Only Sale.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** And Hale.

**VB:** Right. When was it you came to Hale?

**DR:** Eh, immediately after the war. 1946.

**VB:** Right. 1946. So that was the same time you were setting up your business.

**DR:** Yes. We started then.

**VB:** Right. I see. Erm, can I ask what year you were married in?

**DR:** Eh 1943.

**VB:** 1943.

**DR:** One of these wartime, eh, wartime marriages.

**VB:** Ah. And did your wife work?

**DR:** Eh, yes, she was in photography.

**VB:** Ah I see!

**DR:** During the war she went into some war work.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But eh photography originally, yeah.

**VB: And did she work in the business with you as well then?**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: Ah! That's interesting. Must've been quite an unusual occupation for a woman to have at that, that period.**

**DR:** Erm [pause 2 seconds]. Yes well, at the erm, the Manchester Technical College,

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** There were eh, there was myself, and a German and an Indian and about four girls. Eh, and at the Polytechnic, in the School of Photography they were mainly, mainly girls.

**VB: Ah! Really! That's interesting.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: I wouldn't have imagined that.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Whether they got jobs I don't know.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Probably didn't [laughs].



**VB: Erm, the other thing is, is it just the one daughter that you have?**

**DR: Two daughters.**

**VB: Two daughters. That's great. As I say, it's just really to get an idea of--**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: The background. The other thing, because I'm taping this, and as I was saying in the car, they're going to be kept, probably in Glasgow University and maybe listened to by scholars, researchers in the future.**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: Would you have any objection to that?**

**DR: No. Not at all. No. No.**

**VB: "Cause in that case I'd like to ask you sign forms.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: Just to say you don't mind.**

**DR: Eh, here?**

**VB: Just there. Yeah. And then I'll sign that as well, just to keep, keep everything straight really.**

**DR: Yes. Erm, this is the 11th isn't it?**

**VB: I think so. Yeah.**

**DR: There you are.**

**VB: That's great. So that's the, as I say, the official things.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: That I was wanting to ask you. I mean as I said, there were so many things in your letters I just immediately wanted [laughs] to ask you about.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: The first thing really was to find out a bit more about all the cinemas that you mentioned in--**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: In Sale.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: Erm, there was the Palace and the Pyramid. Did you have any favourite cinemas yourself when you were a child?**

**DR: Yes. Erm [pause 2 seconds]. Not really, no. Eh the first one, are you going right back from the silent days or--**

**VB: That would be great. Yes.**

**DR: Eh, the first one was the Savoy. In Sale. I think that was a purpose-built cinema. And that's when I first started to go to the children's matinees. And that's where we got hooked on that. Eh I think it's rather like today where the children sort of get glued to the television, don't they? And eh, I got glued to the cinema. Erm, of course with the big screen and everything, it's sort of more impressive, isn't it I think [laughs]. So anyway I got hooked and eh, that was it really. [pause 2 seconds] And it was erm, the cinema itself, I can remember it quite clearly. It didn't have a balcony. Sort of sloped up to the side. Typical in that day. And that survived until about 1929 I think, then it was rebuilt. And I**

remember going into the eh, the new one, the first week, if not the first night. And the eh [pause 3 seconds]. So the sort of films they showed, is that of interest for you?

**VB: Very much so.**

**DR:** Erm, the ones we enjoyed, I think all my friends and myself were the cowboy pictures. And he, in particular Tom Mix.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** Yes. And eh, there was another one, Rin Tin Tin. I remember that very well. And of course the two-reel comedies. They had a lot those. I don't remember any cartoons at the time. May have been. But I can't remember. Erm, but I went regularly, on a Saturday afternoon. For quite a few years to the, the old eh Savoy. And then the Palace. That was, that was over the border in Ashton upon Mersey. Not far away. That had been eh originally a skating rink. And I think it was quite usual for old skating rinks to be eh, turned into cinemas I think at the time, wasn't it? There was a craze at the turn of the century. In roller skating. And these places were built. And eh, this was turned into a cinema. Eh, but it wasn't as comfortable. It was a sort of a, a metal eh, supports for the roof and all that sort of thing. And it eh, wasn't built as a cinema. But eh, I went there quite a lot. But not in the silent days so much. I only remember that from the sound days.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** The Palace. And then the Pyramid. Which is erm, one of the super cinemas. Came in the thirties. I got a photograph of it.

**VB: Oh, great!**

**DR:** Erm [pause getting photograph out]. Not a very good one but [pause 3 seconds]. That of course is of architectural interest now.

**VB: Wow! That's quite amazing isn't it?**

**DR:** Mhm.

**VB: With Robert Montgomery and Piccadilly Jim.**

**DR:** It's erm, now a sort of night-club.

**VB: Ah.**

**DR:** It's more or less eh, as it was. They've ruined it of course. I think some little details have gone. And the clock's gone. And of course the name's gone. But eh, it was quite eh, quite a nice place inside.

**VB: It really is. And I mean, even all the lighting and everything.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Makes it look so inviting. You just [laughs].**

**DR:** That's right. Yes.

**VB: Ah. And the usherette. The,**

**DR:** That was, I think eh, two or three, well, perhaps two or three years after it opened I think. I've got a date somewhere. I think somebody, well, you can easily date it from that, can't you?

**VB: Oh yes, yes.**

**DR:** The *Piccadilly Jim* film.

**VB: Yeah. It's really amazing. There's so much, as you say, the architectural detail and everything. It's—**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Really quite stunning. I mean that must've been quite exciting to go to it after having been to the sort of skating rink--**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: Type places.**

**DR: Oh yes. Yes.**

**VB: Ah.**

**DR: Erm, so of course when they opened they had eh, of course the organ. And they had, what they called the Pyramid Girls. About [twelve-year old?] girls. [laughs]**

**VB: [laughs].**

**DR: They didn't last long but eh, for the first two or three weeks they eh [inaudible]. But of course you had to queue. Because there was a hall inside but it didn't eh, there was not enough room for people all to get in.**

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR: And the queue used to go right round here out in the main road. Get wet and everything so, [sighs], mhm.**

**VB: Aye. So what sort of films did they show there? I mean I can see the Robert Montgomery one. Was it Erm, did they have any sort of film associated with it or did they just show--**

**DR: No.**

**VB: Everything.**

**DR: No. Just showed all the general films, yeah.**

**VB: Yeah. 'Cause I was interested when you were saying that you erm, you know it was the stars that attracted you to the films.**

**DR: Yes. Yes. Well that was mainly my parents really.**

**VB: Ah I see, yes.**

**DR: They went everywhere. I mean they didn't go because they liked the place so much. It was the film or the stars that were in them that--**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Attracted them and I got into that way as well really. [laughs].**

**VB: So you went quite a lot with your parents then?**

**DR: Oh yes, yes. I went on my own to the eh, to the matinees. Eh, certainly I was six. I was trying to work out just when, I can't really pinpoint it. Certainly six. Eh, and I certainly remember seeing the Chaplin film erm, eh *The Kid*. Which I think was released in 1921. If you give it a couple of years to get up here so, I must've been five or six. And erm [pause 4 seconds]. What else is there?**

**VB: 'Cause you were saying that your parents had some favourite stars. I just noticed that you'd written it down.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: That your dad liked Myrna Loy and William Powell.**

**DR: That's right. Yes, that's right. That was the erm, that detective series.**

**VB: That one with the little dog in it?**

**DR: Eh was it *The Thin Man*?**

**VB: Eh, yes, I think so. Yes.**

**DR:** Well that set him off. Yes, that's right. Yeah [laughs].

**VB: [laughs]. And your mother liked Jessie Matthews.**

**DR:** Eh, Jessie Matthews. Oh yes. And Jack Buchanan. She'd go anywhere to go and see Jack Buchanan. I remember going to the eh, theatre in London to see him.

**VB: Oh!**

**DR:** One matinee. But erm but eh [laughs], he wasn't on that afternoon.

**VB: Aw! [laughs]**

**DR:** Great disappointment.

**VB: Was it the musicals that your mother liked more?**

**DR:** Eh, yes, yes. Fred Astaire. Yes. Oh I did enjoy them. I still do.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes. Very good. I say our daughters have enjoyed the old films too. Quite a lot. Mhm. But on the other hand, there was a lot of rubbish about. You know we used to go regularly, whatever it was [laughs].

**VB: Did you go to more or less every film that was on then?**

**DR:** Eh--

**VB: I mean how often were you going?**

**DR:** Well we were going eh, when we come to the sound days, we were going eh, certainly twice a week. Eh, with my parents. And I could easily go up myself, on my own, perhaps three times. Certainly twice a week. Often more. Mhm. And erm, you'd see the same newsreel, you know, once or twice a week. [laughs] But a different cinema. And eh same, well not, different newsreel, but the same subjects.

**VB: Did you enjoy that aspect of it? The news and the--**

**DR:** Eh, yes. The news. Yes. Erm, and of course there were the news cent, theatres as well. Eh, I think one tended to go to those. If in town and an hour to spare [you'd cruise?] the news theatres. But what did build up I found, in the newsreels were these German propaganda things. These eh, you see them on TV now. These marching [pause 2 seconds] soldiers. And aircraft. And tanks. We got a lot of that. And when the war started I honestly thought we'd had it. You know, I thought, this is it.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** It certainly eh, affected me quite a lot. Mhm. [pause 3 seconds] But it was not to be fortunately.

**VB: Yeah. Yeah when you put it like that, it must've been quite terrifying.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Seeing these images on a large screen.**

**DR:** I know there was another series, the 'March of Time' series. That was pretty powerful. They made one or two on Germany and France. Mhm. Certainly good propaganda eh medium.

**VB: Yeah. 'Cause you were saying that, just to pick up on that, that you went into the cinemas in Manchester and South Manchester.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: As well.**



**DR:** Eh, I used to go on my own. Certainly by the time I was about twelve I think. Into town. Nobody seemed to bother. And I wouldn't let our daughters do that now. [laughs] Erm, I had a great deal of freedom really. And then, in town, there was the Paramount. Which is now the Odeon. Been split up into I think seven cinemas. Eh, the Gaumont and eh the Deansgate. And quite a few. I went to all of those.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Piccadilly. But there's only one left now. That's the Odeon. In the town centre.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Mhm. [pause 2 seconds]. And eh [pause 5 seconds]. I can't really think of anything else about that.

**VB: I mean they seem to have been quite spectacular cinemas. 'Cause I don't know if you've seen this erm, book they did at the North West Film Archive of picture houses in Manchester.**

**DR:** Maryann's?

**VB: That one.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: Yes. Erm,**

**DR:** Have you seen Maryann's? Yes?

**VB: I have, yes.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Yeah. Have you been in contact with the archive then?**

**DR:** Oh yes. Quite a lot.

**VB:** I was just thinking. You must have [laughs] actually.

**DR:** Oh yes.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** They're putting on an exhibition.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Next year. I suppose you know. Yeah. I'm involved in that. Tell you about that later on.

**VB:** Yeah. That would be great. 'Cause there was one thing I came across there. Just when you mentioned the Gaumont as well. Erm, was a thing about, is it Robert Donat? Opening the Gaumont.

**DR:** Oh did he? Oh. Oh! That's interesting.

**VB:** Yeah [laughs].

**DR:** Yes.

**VB:** I mean were there particular stars that were popular locally? Or stars that you liked yourself?

**DR:** Round here? Eh, eh Robert Donat was another favourite. My wife liked him. We've seen one or two of his just recently. [pause 4 seconds] Yes, Maryann might get the foundations down. Did she tell you?

**VB:** No, she didn't.

**DR:** Ah well, she'd been offered it.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** [inaudible] movie. [turning pages of book]. *The 39 Steps*. Yes, I remember that one. Eh, now the Hippodrome. I remember the Hippodrome. The Hippodrome was erm a music hall. And eh, we went there quite a lot. My father was keen on the music hall. George Robey. I remember seeing that. But they had there erm [pause 3 seconds], a swimming pool. The whole, the whole stalls sort of went down. And they'd fill in the place with water. I remember seeing a swimming show there. And the curtain, a circular curtain like that, they came down, to eh, hide the water. It just lifted up and I saw a swimming show.

**VB: Aw.**

**DR:** Can't remember [amused voice] what the show was but eh--

**VB: That's amazing.**

**DR:** Yes. A tremendous place.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And now of course that's eh, gone. Mhm. [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: 'Cause I was really impressed by some of the photos there of the--**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Big cinemas in town.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: Did you take a lot of pictures yourself of the cinemas?**

**DR:** Unfortunately, no.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** No, that's the eh [pause 2 seconds]. See although I've been taking photographs, I've not had much historical sense. Until late in life.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And now of course eh, I've great regrets I didn't do this, I didn't do that.

**VB: Yeah. Of course, only at the time these things don't seem quite so--**

**DR:** But eh, that was taken, my grandfather gave me a camera, an old Victorian camera.

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** A plate camera. Eh trying it out really you see. And eh, course I wish I'd taken more. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Now this eh, this film is a local, Mobberley.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I've got a copy of that. A children's outing to Mobberley. From Altrincham to Mobberley.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** That's, that's erm one of the best that Maryann's got.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** And that turned up in the local library. I became interested in collecting old photographs. Eh, probably in the, I the sixties. Because we had people bringing in pictures to copy. And I got

interested in postcards. So that eh, got me interested in history 'cause each, we had to research dates, and so on.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But nobody seemed to bother with films at the time. And then eh, what set me off was a series of TV shows and I think it was in the mid-seventies. 'Caught In Time'. Which was a series of amateur home movies. And these were fascinating.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** As an historical document. And eh, 'course I got home movies. Eh, nothing of particular interest. But eh, that set me off. And I went round trying to research, trying to get, see what had survived. With the intention of giving a show to the local civic society. Which I did. And that was one of them that turned up in the Altrincham Library.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** And they've been there since the 1900s. And, and two others. [pause 2 seconds] That's a good one, isn't it?

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** That's in Manchester. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds]

**VB: 'Cause I was interested, when you were saying that as well about your own films of the canal.**

**DR:** Yes. Yes. Yes I'll tell you about that later. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Erm, I think these are [pause 3 seconds]. Don't think there's anything else.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Oh that's the Altrincham one. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** That's the other that was is in the library. That's the unveiling of the Chapel Street eh [pause 2 seconds]. And that one, that's Ronald Gow. Tell you about him. That's a separate story really.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Ronald Gow. [pause 3 seconds; sifting through photos]. Look at all these here. Mhm, nothing local here I don't think.

**VB: I didn't, I mean, I didn't—**

**DR:** Now there's erm... that's Stretford there. [looking through photos] I don't know whether I've got a new--

**VB: Mhm. Was it mainly locally that you went to the cinema then?**

**DR:** Eh, in the early days.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But when we got a car. Probably about the 19, 1930s.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Erm, my father would go anywhere. Maybe it was because he liked driving or [laughs]. He probably did but, we went everywhere. And their favourite was Hale cinema here.

**VB: Ah, right.**

**DR:** When we lived in Sale. It was only about five miles away.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** You came through Sale Station.

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** Eh, we often came to Hale. Eh, because that was erm [pause 1 second]. Now that, this only turned up quite recently, well, a few years ago. This we think is an Altrincham eh, Altrincham fairground.

**VB: Oh-h!**

**DR:** This is the fairground cinema.

**VB: "The Great American Bio", is it Bioscope?**

**DR:** Bioscope.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yeah. Mhm.

**VB: "Bang up to date". That's wonderful.**

**DR:** We managed to identify two of the films.

**VB: [gasps]**

**DR:** And trace them.

**VB: Yes.**

[pause 4 seconds]

**VB: It's a wonderful photograph. I like the children [laughs] at the front.**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: Totally oblivious [laughs].**

**DR: It was eh a lantern, a lantern slide it was.**

**VB: Yes.**

**DR: I just found it by chance, flicking through old lantern slides in the library. [inaudible] copied. That is eh, Hale cinema.**

**VB: Ah! It's a beauty.**

**DR: Like a, what we call a tea shop architecture [amused voice].**

**VB: Yeah. Mock, mock Tudor [laughs]. Or something.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: So that's the cinema house. Aye. So it had a cafe in it, as well I see.**

**DR: Yeah. [I asked my wife; inaudible; quite a gathering of people?] This, eh that's the same as I took on the day of closure.**

**VB: Ah right.**

**DR: I think the eh, the colours have been altered.**

**VB: Yes.**

**DR: That's 1978.**



**VB: Yes.**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: It's rather a splendid building though. It's really lovely.**

**DR: Yes. Everybody was sorry to see it go.**

**VB: Yeah. Was it quite big inside? I mean it looks like a--**

**DR: Yes. Yes. Eh, got some [material?] somewhere. [pause 2 seconds] Eh, that was the [inaudible].**

**VB: Oh!**

**DR: That's just it in detail of the--**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: That's looking the other way. [pause 2 seconds]**

**VB: It's really splendid.**

**DR: Yeah. Now the eh, the Pyramid of course turned into the Odeon at one stage.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: And eh, that's the Odeon.**

**VB: Ah right. Yes. That's interesting.**

**DR: After they got rid of these.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Erm, and the clock's gone. [pause 2 seconds] It's a pity, yes. Mhm.

**VB:** It's interesting, the way they've adapted it to look like an Odeon [laughs].

**DR:** Yes. And then they changed it to eh, I think it was called Tatton.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** Before it closed. Eh, but the inside, they just painted it all in one colour.

**VB:** Ah I see.

**DR:** Before, it was all ornate and eh, yes.

**VB:** Yes.

**DR:** That was, that was quite something, that was in... that was in the box office.

**VB:** [gasps]

**DR:** Eh, a friend of mine did all the numbering [laughs].

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** So there were numbered seats then.

**DR:** Yes. And eh, Hale was one of the few places where you could book your seats on a Saturday night. But everywhere else was continuous.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Eh, and being continuous was a perfect nuisance because eh, as you know, it eh, the place filled up during the first house, and anybody going to the second show eh, had to wait until some of the people had [amused voice] seen it round. So, [laughs]--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Although we did try and, we always went to the second house. But eh, often it meant queueing. And waiting. And missing a bit of the programme. Until someone came out. Mhm.

**VB: These are wonderful. Have you, have the North West Film Archive got copies of these ones?**

**DR:** Yes, they should have. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes. Erm [pause 3 seconds]. Don't know that I've got the thing I sent you. Just reminded me. I don't know if anything else. [looks through material]. Yeah.

**VB: I was interested about when you were saying as well, about having gone with the school to the cinema.**

**DR:** Eh, yes. Eh this was the eh, the little private school. *Chang*.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Which had quite a [pause 2 seconds] something at the time. A nature film, wasn't it? Erm, have you, do you know about *Chang*?

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

**DR:** No, it's mentioned in one of the books I got. But eh, I can't remember the story but they had these charging elephants and animals and things.

**VB: [laughs].**

**DR:** I think quite unique for the time. And they got us altogether, warned us. Erm, in actual fact I had already been to see it a few days before. I didn't [laughs] tell them! But it didn't frighten me particularly. I'd probably got used to the, everything by then. Huh! [laughs]. Yes. Erm [pause 2 seconds] well Chaplin, certainly eh [pause 1 second]. The one film that stands out [pause 2 seconds]. I think above all others, is Chaplin's eh *The Goldrush*.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Now I don't know, I must've been about [pause 2 seconds], I think about eight, or nine at the time. But there was a sequence in it where he erm, where he invites some girls to dinner, to a meal in his cabin. Do you know the film at all?

**VB: I've vague memories of it but--**

**DR:** Yeah. And these girls don't turn up. And this upset me quite a lot [laughs]. I don't know why at the time. And it was the first time I've been emotionally involved in a film. And I've remembered that ever since, I don't know why. And after that sequence, of course there's the famous one where he starts eating his boot. With the nails. That followed that. And [laughing] I've always remembered that. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** Strange but eh. And the other eh, of course Harold Lloyd. And the clock. Climbing the eh, the building with the clock. That stuck in my mind. A lot of Harold Lloyd films. Trams. He had quite good sequences with trams, didn't he? And eh, and Buster Keaton. Those were the three that I certainly enjoyed. But erm, mhm. But then as I said, it's being given that projector that eh, got me interested in the technical side.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And eh, that was one of those toy machines. You've probably seen them I suppose, have you?

**VB: I haven't seen one. No.**

**DR:** No, well I have got one.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Not that one but eh, I'll show it you after.

**VB: That's be great.**

**DR:** Erm, and then later I went onto a 9.5. That's the amateur, what they called a sub standard at the time. Eh, there was of course 16 millimetre. 9.5 was quite a bit cheaper. And eh, I got one of those for a present. Little hand turn one. And then eh, an electrical, a motor driven one at a later date. And then my father bought a camera, a cine camera. And eh, we took a few home movies. And eh, which I've still got on nine five. But mainly, family.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** People walking about. Which a bit boring.

**VB: Oh it must've been exciting for you.**

**DR:** Oh yes. It was. Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And eh, I made titles and so on. Eh, but the first, we made a film at school, at the grammar school. Eh, we erm, we thought of an idea to [pause 3 seconds] perhaps inspired by Ronald Gow. I'll tell you about him later. But eh, we thought we'd make a story film. So we got someone to write a story. And we got quite a few of the boy actors, together. But on the first afternoon [pause 2 seconds], half the s... [tape cuts out

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**DR:** This was 1935. The Silver Jubilee year. So we made this film and it was, what I remember, it was pretty good. And eh, they showed it to the whole school. Twice to the seniors and the juniors. Unfortunately the friend I made it with took it home with him to Plymouth and it got lost in the Blitz. But eh, otherwise it would've been [laughs].

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** A very good one that. [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: I expect that made you popular with your friends. That you had this erm camera. Was it something that you did with your friends or was it mainly the films that you shot on your own?**

**DR:** Eh, well, it's an [inaudible] camera.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** We took it. And my friend had a camera.

**VB: Ah, I see.**

**DR:** A Coronet.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** I had a patho, pathoscope. We had two cameras. And of course film was expensive in those days. It was about four hundred feet. About quarter of an hour.

**VB: Did you plan out what you were going to do pretty carefully then? Before you actually--**

**DR:** Did it. Oh yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes. Yes. Eh, we started off with some snow shots in winter. We did it by seasons I think, if I remember rightly. And then we had some of the school events. A Sports Day. I remember one of the popular teachers retired and we had some shots of that. And so on.

**VB:** Ah, that's a shame that one was lost.

**DR:** Yeah. Mhm.

**VB:** Ah. [pause 4 seconds] **Do you think you were influenced in the way you shot it by films that you'd seen.**

**DR:** That I'd seen. Yes.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Oh yes. Yes. Yes. Eh [pause 3 seconds]. Well, you've come back to film. I don't know whether the Ronald Gow interests you. Do you know Ronald Gow at all?

**VB:** I've heard the name but eh--

**DR:** Yeah. Well erm [pause 2 seconds] 'course he influenced me. Well, his work influenced me. He was, erm... when I got to the school, well I was at this small private school. Very shy, reserved. A bit apprehensive about going to the big school but eh, what erm attracted me, what I was looking forward to, was that I'd heard that they got a film projector. And eh, someone told me it was the first school in the country to be equipped with a projector for educational purposes. Eh, I've never been able to prove that. But that was what I was told anyway [amused voice]. And eh, sure enough, they got this 35 mil [mm] projector. And of course with it being 35 mil they had to comply, come within the fire restrictions. And eh, I think [pause 2 seconds]. I haven't got any pictures of it. [pulls out photos] Now that's the school as it was built. You can't see it now because all these trees are way up here.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** Eh, there's a single storey bit there. And the projector was in a box on that single storey roof.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** In an asbestos metal box. And they knocked some portholes in the, in the wall. And that's the school hall. And they showed films, a roll of screen at the end. And there were blackouts on the curtain you see. So of course I was very interested to see all that and what was going on. Now, strangely, this, I learnt later that it had been installed in 1923. And I got here about 1929. Eh, but they never showed, well the, the disadvantage was that they couldn't use the classroom. And 1923 was I think just before 16 millimetre came on the market from Kodak. But one of the teachers gave shows at a school each week in the winter. And they showed eh, comedies and so on. I suppose you could call some of them were educational. Travel films, things like that. And in particular I remember Felix the Cat. That's the first time I saw Felix I think, there [laughs].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** Of course it was operated by boys and it kept breaking down [amused voice]. And getting on fire. You know. [laughs] You'd see a picture of something, on fire. Eh, one of the projectionists told me quite recently that erm, there's a cable come from the cellar to supply the power. But when it rained the projector box got live. Pretty dangerous. But, apparently there were no accidents anyway.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** [laughs] Anyway, eh, I soon became aware of one of the teachers, Ronald Gow. And eh, although he never taught me, he sort of had a presence. He taught English I think. And he was one of the first boys, when the school opened in 1912. And then he went on to Manchester University. Now during that time, I think when he was still at school, he brought a small 35 millimetre cine camera. And erm, he made some home movies which were quite, at that period, this would be about eh, well 1912 it opened. So it would probably be 13 or 1914, just before the war. He made some home movies with a friend. And erm, they showed them at his home. Or his friend's home. They turned the attic into a cinema. And then, eh, during the war, I've come to this picture in that book.

**VB: Mhm.**



**DR:** His mother, his mother had a connection with the Altrincham, eh, what do they call it? Eh, Altrincham supply, Hospital Supply Depot.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Where they had a lot of nurses making eh things for the troops. I suppose they were bandages and things. And they organised a lecture. By Hilaire Belloc.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** Have you ever read any of his?

**VB: I have, yes.**

**DR:** I've never read any of his. I should have.

**VB: It's wonderful.**

**DR:** Is it?

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Ah. Eh, he was a poet wasn't he? That right?

**VB: That's right.**

**DR:** Yeah. Well he came to eh, the Altrincham cinema. To give a talk about the progress of the war. And he brought some war films along with him. And Gow's mother suggested that they ought to make a film of the eh, this hospital. Supply hospital. To give it a bit of publicity. 'Cause apparently they were a bit short of volunteers you see. So, Gow went along. And did this on one Sunday morning. Of course when it got around the town that he was coming with a cine camera, there as a great turnout [laughs]. And eh, on the film itself you can't see any shortage but that, that's a shot from it there.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: Right.**

**DR: And it was shown eh, at the local cinema. It was only a little tiny camera. I don't know what the quality was like, but eh--**

**VB: Yeah. That's interesting. With the sewing machines.**

**DR: Yeah. And that film survived. In Altrincham Library. And that came out with these others.**

**VB: Right.**

**DR: Which we didn't know anything about.**

**VB: Yeah. Well I must see if I can get a chance to have a look at that. 'Cause I see they have a copy in the archive as well.**

**DR: Yes. Well I've got a copy here.**

**VB: Oh!**

**DR: Got to have time to show it though.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: We'll see how time goes. Erm, well now Ronald Gow. The headmaster, after he'd been to university, the headmaster invited him back to school. And he said to him, these were I think in Gow's own words, what he said to me. He said, "Look Gow, I've bought a cinematograph machine. I think it's the coming thing. See what you can do with it." Well, Gow found that there was a shortage of educational films so he thought he'd make, make some himself. The idea being to show the professionals what sort of thing that was wanted. And eh, as much as anything, an activity for the**

boys. So, he made eh, a historical thing. He made one, I think it would be about 1925, 26 was it? Eh, and he made these at the school camp. Eh, *The People of the Axe* it was called. And this seemed to go down well. And they made another one the following year, *The People of the Lake*. And eh, after that he became a bit more ambitious. I think he got dropped the idea of education, and made a scout propaganda film. He was a scout at the time. Eh, *The Man Who Changed His Mind*, which was three reels. The other two were one reels. This was a three reeler. And then, the following year, *The Glittering Sword*. Which was a theme of disarmament. And his last one was a bit different. It was about the River Dart. And all these were made at camp, in Devon. There were a lot of extra shots taken locally, in the local park and so on. And eh, I think erm, of course they look a bit crude today but erm, what's survived of them. But erm, they are interesting because it's unusual for amateurs to be using 35 mil. And also two of them, the last two, *The Man Who Changed His Mind* and *The Glittering Sword* were taken up by a film company, shown in cinemas all over the country. Eh, and when I got to school I remember seeing one. At the local cinema. It was... I remember the noise, you know, the kids created [laughs]. The censor's, the censor's erm, the censor's certificate came up, you know. They cheered that [amused voice]!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** Eh, but during my time at school these films eh, Gow left the school and he went into the theatre. That's another story. Eh, about a year after I arrived I think. But these two were kept in a wooden cabinet, in a dining room and they weren't all in tins. You know some were loose, nitrate film hanging about [laughs].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** And eh, that was my last vision of them. Eh, for some reason or other. Eh, I didn't get round to enquiring about these films until this 'Caught in Time' series [when I started searching out these?]. I wrote to Gow. His sister lives locally. And eh, we just caught them in time. He'd kept them in his garage. In his garden shed. [laughs] And eh, he'd been in touch with the National, the Film Institute. And they were interested. Eh, fortunately he'd had two 16 mil copies made of two of them. But not before they deteriorated. They were in very bad condition.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Anyway, to cut a long story short, Erm, he gave them to me. And eh, I gave them to Maryann and she's... the National Film Archive have got two, two 16 mil prints.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** They weren't interested in the bits and pieces. Some aren't complete you see.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** *The Man Who Changed His Mind* is only two reels instead of three.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** So we saved all those. And eh, that's it really [DR gets up to locate something; pause 6 seconds]. This went up a couple of days ago when he used to live in the eh--

**VB: Oh! That's "Ronald Gow, dramatist, lived here 1898 to 1910. Pupil and Master at Altrincham County High for Boys. 1937 married actress Dame Wendy Hiller. Sponsored by Barclays Bank." Whereabouts was that?**

**DR:** That's on the bank in eh, they lived above the, it's a bank now, below. They lived at the top of the bank in a flat.

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DR:** As a family.

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** Eh, why they've put Wendy Hiller there. He was more famous as Wendy Hiller's husband I think [laughs].

**VB: Yeah. [laughs]**

**DR:** He never quite made it. Now Erm, have you heard of this 'Cinema 100' organisation?

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** And their idea for plaques. They're giving away a hundred plaques apparently.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** So eh, I told the school about it, and they're enthusiastic. So I've applied for one, for the school. So we may end up having two plaques in the same area.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Which is unusual I should think [laughs].

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But on the other one, make sure we get something about the films on that.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Uhuh. Mhm. Yes he died a couple of years ago. He was ninety-five. And I'm hoping to make a video of them. Or sponsor one. Eh, this, we're waiting for this to go up. They're going to have an unveiling ceremony.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Hopefully shortly. And whilst we've got that, we can make the video. Which we managed to get an interview with Gow. Before he died. His memory had gone. But at least we got him. And also, one of the erm, the schoolboy cameramen who worked his camera.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Which is quite a famous one. There's a picture of that somewhere. In his later years he bought a Pathe camera which, which he used in Hollywood in the early days. On the Chaplin films and eh, oh I haven't got a [pause 4 seconds]. That's not the best one but that's eh--

**VB: Right. I've never seen one of these.**

**DR:** No.

**VB: It must've been very inspirational to you, with your interests.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: As a boy.**

**DR:** Well, oh I know, I gave one some the other day that's disappeared. I can show you some inspirations. I'll get one now. [DR leaves room; pause 13 seconds; returns] That's it.

**VB: Ah.**

**DR:** You've probably seen that. [pause 5 seconds] We're hoping... Gow gave me the camera. And I gave it to the museum in town. Bit of a mistake really.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** But anyway I gave it to the museum. And we're trying to get it out for this exhibition.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But there's problems I'm afraid.

**VB: Ah.**

**DR:** Yes, [inaudible] [I should've seen that, shouldn't I?].

**VB: Right. So that's where [inaudible; overtalking].**

**DR:** The unusual thing about it is that the handle is at the back.

**VB: Mhm!**

**DR:** Most awkward place.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** I mean, you're trying to work the camera and work the tripod as well. It's [laughs].

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And yet it was a very popular camera.

**VB: So, I don't know how these things work at all. Do you look through this bit, or?**

**DR:** No the eh [pause 3 seconds]. Oh the viewfinder's the other side.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Oh that's the other end of the viewfinder.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Sorry, you look through there. That's the viewfinder.

**VB: Right. So that's the wee bit at the back.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Yeah. Ah, I see.**

**DR:** That's the front of it with the cover off. That's the lens.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** And quite an interesting mechanism there. [pause 4 seconds] The film [c?] and so on. And those are of course the film magazines.

**VB: Ah, I see. Right. Yeah. They look very efficient actually. It's quite a--**

**DR:** Yes. Yes. It was a [pause 8 seconds]. I think it was Gow that set us off with this idea of doing a school film you see.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** And it didn't work out [laughs].

**VB: Oh [laughs].**

**DR:** Yeah. [pause 2 seconds]. Now, where were we? [pause 4 seconds]. About my grandfather's cinema, you've got--

**VB: Yes. I'd be very interested to hear something about that.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: Erm, that was the Queen's, the Queen's Hall.**

**DR:** The Queen's Hall.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Eh, now, have I got [looks through material]. Take a bit of time to find that.

**VB: Ah.**



**DR:** I'd forgotten about that. Eh, yes well he eh [pause 2 seconds]. This is in Accrington. We used to regularly to Accrington. To see, see my grandfather. And eh, he'd been there in the textile trade. As a designer I think. And eh, when he retired he eh became a director and owner of this Queen's Hall. Presumably to give him something to do during his retirement. Because he had no connection with the cinema before. Erm, in actual fact eh, he and some of his pals apparently went round Accrington buying up bits of old property. And I, many years later in the 1960s, I became, I got a tenth share in one of these properties. It was about £50.

**VB: Ah.**

**DR:** So you can imagine what--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** [laughs] What sort of property it was.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Even then, £500 they got for it, I suppose.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Anyway, this cinema, which I can, you know, clearly see, was in the town of Church, near Accrington. With the trams and things. Real Lancashire background. And we used to go there on Saturday night. We'd go during the afternoon to see my grandfather and have tea, and go down to the first house pictures. And we had erm, we met, as I said, with this erm, this manager. Great big fellow.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Smoking big fat cigars. And he would, my grandfather would go into the office and talk business with the manager. We'd go and sit in reserved seats in the circle. And then he would come and join us later on. And the cinema itself, it was, there were no carpets. In fact it was an echoing place.

When there was no audience there which not [laughs]. It was a, echoes and the sound and everything. But eh, I remember the films in the silent days there. And eh, gradually, they were a long time turning into sound. I think it must have upset them a lot that they were the last in the area. And the business was very very bad. There was very few people went. But the introduction of sound was erm, seemed to increase the attendance quite a lot. And I was shown the projection room there and it was sound on disc, the first ones. I remember seeing the disc. And that seemed to work all right. I don't know how they did it quite but eh [laughs], how to synchronise it.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** But I remember, as I said, that the eh, the first week, the Saturday of the first week, the image suddenly varied from [streaky?] to clear.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Which I knew was the shutter had gone out of sync. But they fixed that all right. Now, as I say, this became a regular thing. And then the manager died suddenly.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And my father engaged this [pause 2 seconds], new manager. I always remember his name. His name was [Rudd?]. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs].**

**DR:** It's funny how you remember things. Eh, small dapper little man. Quite a smart chap. Who got things going and eh, redecorated and reseeded. Don't know where they got the money from. And business eh, increased, quite a bit. And then he suddenly eh, one Saturday night, departed with a week's taking and that was that.

**VB: Tch! Oh [laughs].**

**DR:** My father sold up. He'd had enough. So, mhm. And eh, I got some tickets for the trade shows in Manchester.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I used to go to one or two at the Gaumont and the eh [pause 2 seconds]. Was it the Gaumont? Might not have been built then. But certainly the Piccadilly in Manchester. Eh, as I say, a Tom Walls film I remember seeing there. *Turkey Time*. That's all eh, stood in my mind. [laughs].

**VB: What was that about?**

**DR:** *Turkey Time*. I can't remember what it's about. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** It'll be in the record book [laughs].

**VB: Yeah [laughs].**

**DR:** Eh, pretty terrible probably but eh, sounds like a Christmas thing doesn't it?

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB: So your grandfather got tickets for the trade show through being in the business.**

**DR:** Yes. The manager, yeah.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Would get them.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And erm, and after that I was given a lot of eh trade magazines which I've never kept actually.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** Except for one and I, I'd forgotten about that. I'll see if I can find that for you. Mhm. Erm, but that sort of kept the interest going you see. [pause 3 seconds]

**VB: Were these trade shows quite busy, or?**

**DR:** Pardon, the?

**VB: The trade shows. Did a lot of people go to them? Or were they--**

**DR:** Eh, eh not a lot. No. They had the local managers you see.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Of the cinemas. I suppose they could pick and choose. I'm not quite sure what the system was.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** But I don't think there were many there. Eh, and I was quite young. I'd have been about fifteen or sixteen. They'd wonder what I was doing there [amused voice].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** Yeah. Eh [pause 4 seconds]. Eh, would you like a pause? Have a coffee or something.

**VB: That'd be lovely. Yes. Yeah.**

**DR:** Erm, and I'll--

**VB: So this was one of the, presumably the sort of trade magazines, that you,**

**DR:** Yes. These would be given to--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** To the managers. To try to sell the pictures I suppose.

**VB: Yeah. Golden gallery of attractions from 1931 to 2. Some of these pictures are quite lurid [laughs] aren't they?**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB: Really amazing. [pause 5 seconds]**

**DR:** Like a biscuit?

**VB: Erm, that'd be nice. Thanks. That's great. Thanks.**

[door squeaks; DR leaves room; pause 10 seconds]

**VB: Richard Dix [inaudible; reading from magazine] [pause 10 seconds]**

**DR:** [comes back into room] I was in Accrington recently and eh I went to look at the Queen's Hall.  
Erm, this is it.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** Now, originally, it looked better than that [laughs].

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** It had two shops at the front.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** With a, with a gangway down the passageway down the middle, to the box office at the back.  
Now, with removing the shop,

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** You see they revealed this very nice [inaudible]--

**VB: Ah! Oh that's beautiful.**

**DR:** I'd forgotten about that.

**VB: The Queen's Hall.**

**DR:** But eh, it's still in part of the pavement.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** I'd love to have that. Put it in the garden.

**VB: Aw it's great. Yes.**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** [inaudible] I don't know if it looked purpose-built. I think it was.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** But this looks like an old original building doesn't it?

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** With a, particularly with the auditorium stuck on the back.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And eh, you had to climb up to the projection part in a sort of Jacob's ladder thing. Mhm.

[laughs]

**VB: I like the mosaic though. It's nice.**

**DR:** Yeah. Anyway, it's still there. Survived. Mhm.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And that was my eh, grandfather's house.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** We'd never had a picture of it, so when we went a few weeks ago I took it.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Looks like it's got a nice garden. The garden looks really nice.**

**DR:** Yes. It's got, it's quite an extensive garden.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But prior to that it they'd originally been in a terraced house in eh, in Church.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I'm not sure when they came here. But it looks, it looks quite prosperous. But it wasn't really.

Didn't need much money. Anyway,

**VB: That's interesting as well.**

**DR:** That's Accrington there.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** That's where I used to go as well. There was the Empire.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** There were two here. There were two theatres.

**VB: Oh!**

**DR:** And eh, I used to go there to the cinema. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] Now it's a [store operator?] place now.

**VB: Mhm. That's a grand building as well.**

**DR:** Yeah. [pause 8 seconds; rustling]

**VB: I'm enjoying looking through this one as well.**

**DR:** Yeah. [pause 4 seconds]

**VB: All the RKO stars. Dolores del Rio and--**

**DR:** Yeah. Huh!

**VB: So was you grandfather getting all these big pictures to...?**

**DR:** Eh, yeah, [setting out coffee cups]. I can't remember eh, what things, I remember him mention that *The Man of Aran*. I remember that well enough.



**VB: Yes.**

**DR: But erm,**

**VB: That's a very imaginative choice isn't it?**

**DR: Well for that area.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Yes, yes. Erm, as I say, it didn't, he said it didn't do very well.**

**VB: Ah [laughs].**

**DR: Apart from the supporting picture.**

**VB: I saw that quite recently myself 'cause I was in the Aran Islands last year and--**

**DR: Oh.**

**VB: Made a point of seeing it when I got back. It's a wonderful film that. I really enjoyed it.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: Do you like these sort of documentary films as well?**

**DR: Yes.**

**VB: Yeah. [rustling noise in background]**

**DR: *Turn of the Tide* was another one. [rustling noise; inaudible]**

**VB: What, what was that about? I've not seen that.**

**DR:** It had a fishing theme to it I think, wasn't it?

**VB: Right. Yeah.**

**DR:** And then the eh, the other one. Eh, my memory's gone again. The one take on the island of Foula [probably referring to *The Edge of the World*].

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Erm [pause 5 seconds]. Oh dear, don't know.

**VB: I think I know the one you mean but I can't remember the title either.**

**DR:** Mhm.

**VB: Erm, very different from--**

**DR:** Oh I'll show you the *Chang* [book?] now.

**[DR leaves room; pause 10 seconds]**

**VB: [to herself]. All the RKO stars.**

[pause 5 seconds; DR voice in background; DR comes back]

**VB: Mhm. I just noticed the bit with all the RKO stars in as well.**

**DR:** Oh yes.

**VB: Ah [laughs].**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB: Did you like any of these?**

**DR:** Erm--

**VB: Any of your favourites?**

**DR:** Well, I remember them all.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes. Those were a comedy couple. Wheeler & Woolsey--

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Which today look pretty grim.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** But they were enjoyable at the time. Mary Astor. Yes. I don't know her. Yes. Now yes, she was one of, one of the supporting stars earlier on, wasn't she?

**VB: Edna May Oliver.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And [Roscoe HSM?]. Don't know those. No. Yes. Know her. Kay Francis. She was well known. Joel Macrae. Yes. Oh yes. [pause 3 seconds] I don't think these were [pause 2 seconds]. They haven't got Hugh Herbert. He was a very well known--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Supporting actor. Seemed to be in every film you ever went to.

**VB: Yeah. She looks familiar. Rita Laroy.**

**DR: I don't know her. No.**

**VB: Mhm. Again I think in sort of supporting roles.**

**DR: Mhm.**

**VB: The face looks familiar.**

**DR: Yes. This is the more popular one-- [tape cuts out]**

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

**VB: They must've been exciting things though, again, if you were getting the chance to look at them when you were,**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: Fifteen or sixteen.**

**DR: Yes, indeed they were, yes.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Yes we've got *Chang* here. Do you know eh, what's his name, Kevin Brownlow?**

**VB: No, I don't.**

**DR:** Well he's, he's erm rescued a lot of the early silent films.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** On television. The Thames, Thames Silents they call them. And he's written this book. Eh, but there's an illustration I think. Yes, that's one of the illustrations from it.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** And here, he's in a hide there, you see. They're trying to get a shot of a leopard.

**VB: So is that 'Chang' himself then? The wee boy.**

**DR:** I don't know what, 'Chang'. I don't know what, what 'Chang' is. Whether it's the name of an animal perhaps [referring to the film *Chang*].

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DR:** Not sure. [pause 3 seconds] [inaudible] quite a bit.

**VB: Yeah. Looks like there's some lovely shots in it anyway. They're really nice.**

**DR:** Yeah. Oh there we are. Cast and crew. Oh that's interesting. You've got a, a [travelling?] shutter to keep them all in focus. All round I suppose. Keep them the same distance from the camera.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB: [laughs] [pause 5 seconds] It's an imaginative technique that, isn't it?**

**DR:** Yes. Indeed.

**VB: Yeah. I'm enjoying looking at all these pictures. It's great. Did you like, you were saying that you liked the musicals yourself as well.**

**DR: Ah musicals, yes. [Very jolly?].**

**VB: Yeah. Any favourite stars?**

**DR: Eh, well Gene Kelly. All the usual ones.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Yes. And eh, Ginger Rogers.**

**VB: Yes.**

**DR: [laughs] Yeah.**

**VB: Yeah, I was hoping for lots of Ginger Rogers films after erm, her dying so recently.**

**DR: Yes. Probably... I think they had one on this, the day after. No, it was the [pause 2 seconds] biographical thing, wasn't it?**

**VB: They'd shown *Top Hat* not long before that.**

**DR: Yes. That's right. Yes. Oh, they're always showing *Top Hat*.**

**VB: Yes. Do you like Astaire and Rogers as a team?**

**DR: Sorry, the--?**

**VB: Do you like Astaire and Rogers together?**

**DR: Oh yes. Yes.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yeah. [pause 2 seconds]. Yes, they seem to just eh, just get it together don't they, somehow.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Mhm.

**VB: Were there any films that you weren't so keen on? Any types of films.**

**DR:** [pause 4 seconds] Well, early on, as a child. 'Cause I was being brought up in the silent days of all action, eh, sound was a bit of a mixed blessing really because it slowed everything up. And eh, love scenes of course as a child, you get bored stiff don't you [laughs]?

**VB: Yes.**

**DR:** Had some very lengthy dialogue I remember. But erm [pause sips coffee]. It used to bore you to tears.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Mhm.

**VB: So it was the action and--**

**DR:** The action, yeah.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Eh, and of course there was the, a lot of the, a lot of the supporting films were a bit eh, long winded too. I remember once at the Palace, where the main feature I think lasted about an hour, and then they had the whole series of one-reelers. To fill up the hour. They had these one-reelers of orchestras and eh, soloists. I don't know if you've seen any of those. Terrible. Just picture of a band,

playing you see. On the stage. And eh, you had to wait ages and ages for the film you came to see. But erm, mhm.

**VB: Mhm. Actually I remember somebody telling me about films like that, with the sort of American bands.**

**DR:** Yes. Yes.

**VB: And they were saying that it was just totally [laughs]. No one knew when... and as you say, just waiting for it to finish.**

**DR:** Yeah. That's right. And then there was that, that, those, those travel films as well. "And Now We Say Farewell", and this chap always ended up with "And Now We Say Farewell" to somebody. What's his name? Fitz somebody isn't it? Fitzpatrick. I forget the name now. [referring to 'Fitzpatrick's TravelTalks'] But those eh, I found boring. I probably wouldn't today but eh. And the English shorts too had a particular reputation.

**VB: What sort of subjects were they?**

**DR:** Well they were travel things, you know. [laughs] And the eh, other hand, some of the Pathe Gazettes, those general interest magazine sort of thing. Those were quite interesting. And those usually ended up with a soloist at the end, an opera singer. And sometimes they had a record of the artist they've got now and they often bring these out on telly don't they? Pathe Pictorial. Mhm.

**VB: Did you like the gangster films? Cagney and Spencer Tracy?**

**DR:** Eh, yes, early on.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes, I enjoyed those, yes. Erm, they didn't have any, any bad effect on me anyway, I just [laughs].

**VB: 'Cause I was wondering when you said you enjoyed the action ones.**



**DR:** Yes. Yes. Mhm.

**VB:** If you liked that sort of movie.

**DR:** Eh [pause 2 seconds]. But in later years I liked things like Monsieur Hulot, you know. That's after the war of course. But erm, I thought he was great.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** And the Chaplin films. I used to look forward to those. Eh, of course you had to wait a few years between each but eh, I enjoyed all those, certainly.

**VB:** Did you like other comedians like, say, Laurel and Hardy?

**DR:** Oh yes [enthusiastic response]. Laurel and Hardy yes. Of course, we haven't mentioned them have we?

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Oh yes. I enjoyed those. Erm, they've become quite classics now haven't they? Huh! [amused voice].

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** But I don't remember seeing erm, any in the silent days. They made some silent shorts but I don't remember seeing [pause 1 second]. I must've done but I don't remember those. Certainly the sound, sound ones. Used to see a lot of those. They used to show those in the news theatres as well. Lot of two-reel comedies. Apart from the newsreels. Mhm.

**VB:** Mhm. Was there a news cinema round about here? 'Cause I've heard about the one in Manchester and, is it Oxford? Oxford Road?

**DR:** The erm [pause 2 seconds]. The Regal.

**VB: I think that might be it. Yeah.**

**DR:** The twins. [pause 2 seconds] The Regal Twins [also known as the Twin Regal Kinemas].

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Eh that opened in eh, well, before the war. And there were two, there was a projection room in the middle and the cinemas went that way.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Eh and the idea was that one, eh, I don't think they had two different films. They had, one was continuous. And the other was eh, twice nightly or something like that.

**VB: Ah I see.**

**DR:** I'm pretty certain that was the arrangement to start with. Eh, and they had a film society there too I think. At one period. And that survived as far as the war. And then they turned it into five. And eh [sips coffee], I went down on the first week because erm, they were showing Chaplin's *Modern Times*. This would be in the, in the fifties I think--

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** And I hadn't seen it for some time. And they'd erm, there were five of them. This was in Cinema Five. Well I don't know the way out, but Cinema Five, the, the projection room was here sort of thing. And it shone into a mirror like that [up in the mirror and back, like that, you see?].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** And erm, one half of the picture was out of focus and the other sharp.

**VB: Ah.**

**DR:** And erm, I was sitting in the middle of a row. Couldn't do anything about it. And I told them about it afterwards. They were quite surprised about it.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** That's the problem with these. You know you've got probably one projectionist and they can't see what's going on. Leave the projector to it you see what I mean.

**VB:** Right. Yes.

**DR:** I complained several times about eh... On the few times I've been since the war--

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** [There was?] Hale cinema. Several times I'd go and tell them. It's out of focus. And they, you know--

**VB:** Yeah. I hate that myself.

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** It's so irritating [laughs].

**DR:** I got a free ticket once, for the Odeon in Bolton.

**VB:** Oh! [laughs]

**DR:** That was very bad there.

**VB:** Yeah. I don't mind it so much if it's, I mean sometimes you get it right at the beginning and it's almost like the projectionist is fooling around with the film.

**DR:** Well getting it right, yeah.

**VB: Yeah. And that's not so bad.**

**DR: No.**

**VB: But as you say, if it comes in the middle it's, oh.**

**DR: I suppose, in theory, it shouldn't alter but I mean--**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: With the vibration and eh. And of course, with being a photographer, I've got to have everything [amused voice] be clean sharp.**

**VB: Yes [laughs]!**

**DR: [laughs] Mhm.**

**VB: Yeah. [pause 4 seconds] Actually one thing I was meaning to ask you, you mentioned erm, that at the Queen's that you had the 'go as you please' as well. The people doing turns. Was that something that,**

**DR: I'm sorry, the?**

**VB: Erm, the sort of 'go as you please' things. Where--**

**DR: Oh 'go as you please', I'm sorry. Yes. Yes.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Erm, well that was quite common there. To get the time. In cinemas. And in theatres as well. Sort of 'go as you please'. So amateurs could just go up and do a turn. And erm, they tried this, at the end of the silent period [pause 2 seconds] because erm, because the business was going down a bit. So, I don't know whether it helped or not, but I remember that. And the curtain coming down. The roller, with adverts on it. That was quite common.**

**VB: Mhm!**

**DR:** That reminds me. We had a family friend. Who is still alive. Who always fancied himself as a singer. And my mother used to play the piano at home and he used to come occasionally. And he was very good. And he decided to go in one of these competitions. At the old Ardwick Empire. You probably don't know that. But it's a big, great big theatre. Probably like the one you've got in Glasgow.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** [laughs] And eh, I always remember the evening for two reasons. First of all, the film itself [pause 1 second] was one of these wordy ones. It went on and on and on. And we absolutely, all of the family, all of the family went to hear, Charlie was his name, eh, sing. It was a terrible film. Anyway, Charlie boy comes on and starts to sing and we couldn't hear a word. Couldn't hear not a thing. You see, in our lounge at home it was all right. But this [laughs].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** We honestly couldn't hear a thing. And of course he got booed off.

**VB: Aw! [laughs]**

**DR:** So it was very embarrassing. We had to take him home afterwards.

**VB: Aw.**

**DR:** But eh, [laughs]. Oh dear.

**VB: Aw. Were the cinema audiences ever like that. I mean if there was a bit in the film that was a bit, well, say at the matinees. Did the children make their feelings known if they weren't enjoying the film?**

**DR:** Oh the children. Yes. Oh yes. They'd whistle and shout. They'd shout at anything. I don't think I did. I was very subdued. But they certainly kicked up a rumpus.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** But now I don't think erm, in the cheaper seats round here you'd get a few. Love scenes, you'd get a few whistles and that. But nothing eh [pause 2 seconds] nothing bad. I found when I went to London the audience started clapping.

**VB: Ah!**

**DR:** Which I'd never, which I never, experienced that round here. Clapping at the end of a film.

**VB: Mhm!**

**DR:** Mhm. Don't know if they still do, do they? Don't know.

**VB: I don't think I've ever had that experience.**

**DR:** Yes, I did. Yeah. [pause 4 seconds]. Mhm. Yes I remember them doing that at 'Snow White' [referring to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*]. I saw 'Snow White' in London. And I certainly remember hearing the applause there.

**VB: That must've been quite something though. As an early colour film I mean.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Yes. Erm [pause 3 seconds] I can't remember the first colour film I saw but [pause 1 second]. I remember the first sound film. 'Cause I went on my bike to Didsbury which is about five or six miles away. And I think it was erm, I've an idea it was called *Show Boat*. But the sound was on at the end. Just at the beginning of the sound period. I remember that. I've forgotten about colour. But some of the Technicolor films, pre-war on telly seem quite good to me.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Considering the difficulties in the process.

**VB: Oh yes.**

**DR:** Some are faded but eh--

**VB: Yeah. Well things like erm, I mean another one I saw quite recently was Robin Hood with Errol Flynn [referring to *The Adventures of Robin Hood*].**

**DR:** Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah.

**VB: The colours are so sharp.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: It's wonderful.**

**DR:** Yeah.

**VB: Actually they've got quite a lot more sort of interesting effects than some of the more modern films get with colour. I think it's--**

**DR:** Yeah. Mhm.

**VB: Quite imaginative.**

**DR:** Yes, indeed.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Erm, is there anything we haven't covered?

**VB:** Erm [pause 2 seconds]. I'm not sure. Eh, just now. What, what usually happens is that after I've, on the way home or, a couple of days later I'll think oh! I wish I'd said,

**DR:** Well, you can always write, can't you? It'll need editing this [amused voice].

**VB:** Yes. I mean would it be okay if I got in touch again?

**DR:** Oh of course. Any time. Yes. It would be a pleasure. Yes.

**VB:** Yeah. 'Cause I'm meant to be coming back down to Manchester in a few weeks time so--

**DR:** Yeah. Yes, yes.

**VB:** If that's okay.

**DR:** Mhm. Eh, the war years are not interesting. You've only got to thirties are you?

**VB:** Yes. Yeah.

**DR:** Mhm.

**VB:** Although it's interesting to know how, I mean, did you continue to go to--

**DR:** Eh, yes well, eh, the one thing you might think, well why didn't I go into the film business.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** I had intended to actually. Eh, when I left school, I was determined to go into the film industry. Jobs were very short. Even then.



**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** 1936 this was. And I was offered a job, through the headmaster, with Shell. Shell Max.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And they were a bit surprised when I turned it down. I said, "Well I want to go into films," you see. Very surprised.

**VB: [laughs].**

**DR:** But erm, there were no film schools. But there was a film course, which had just started, at the polytechnic in Regent Street, London. Eh, the School of Photography there was quite an old established school. And the British Cinematograph Society had started a course. I think it had only just started that year. But I couldn't get in because it was full. They only took eight.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I had to wait a year. So, during that waiting I went to the Manchester tech. Now they had a, a School of Photography there. It was also well established. I think they were the only two schools, in Manchester and London. As far as I remember.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** So eh, I was very fortunate to sample both really. The Manchester was pretty, you know, very old-fashioned but eh, I learnt a lot there. And they took me on as a special student. For one year. Special being that I had to have some knowledge of certain subjects in science, like sound. Which I haven't done at school. So, one afternoon a week at the Manchester, I went down to eh, in the labs and do sound you see and something else. And the rest I was with the first year students. Eh, one of which was my future wife.

**VB: Ah [laughs].**

**DR:** Although [amused voice] I didn't take any notice of her while I was there.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** [laughs] I was a late developer.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** Erm [pause 3 seconds], so eh, the Manchester tech, I've told you were three, an Indian and a German fellow. I think he was a refugee from Germany. And the four girls. And there was a second, a second, they had a similar number I think. Only a few. Eh, we've not kept in touch unfortunately. You know the war years--

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** Separate it. So I don't know what happened to them all. And then I went to eh, to the polytechnic. This was in the School of Photography. Now the first, it was a rather odd course really because, the first year was mainly still photography. Even to the extent of retouching and glass plates and the Aerograph work you see. We had one lecture a week on form. That was all. And we did architecture. And we did metalwork. Filing away and lots of other things. We did eh bit of radio work.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** The sound side. But the bulk of the practical work was still photography. Which I'd done before. All done at Manchester tech you see and I'd done a lot at home, messing about. So I was pretty well acquainted with that. And the first exam we had, eh, was the same exam as the School of Photography.

**VB:** Mhm.

**DR:** I came out top. [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** It was about the only time I came out top in an exam. Eh, so that carried on for a year. I had an enjoyable time. It was very good. And during the summer holiday, between the two years, we had to make a film. Any film we liked. So erm, I decided on the erm, on the ship canal. I don't know why. I thought about the Manchester-London railway. I often wished I'd done that now. And I thought about Thornton Pickard who were makers of cameras in Broad Heath. But in that case I'd have needed a lot of lights and equipment. I gave that up. I think my father, being an engineer, he knew probably someone in the ship canal company. And eh I got permission to do that. So I did that during the holidays. And I got about from the east and up the locks and travelled the length of the canal one day. And then, another day, went down by car and took shots along the canal you see. Quite interesting. But it was just a plain straightforward eh, well you couldn't call it a documentary. Just a factual thing.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And as I say the canal people never had a copy. They looked at it. And they approved it. But they never, never had a copy. And still a few years ago when I think the canal was selling up. There were a lot of changes. And I think some chap was asked to get in some historical material. He was searching around. He'd heard about this film, quite by chance, that I'd made. And eh he looked at it and they had a copy. And the next thing I heard it was being shown at the canal museum, at Ellesmere Port. Went to have a look at it and there it was on TV and they were running it all day. Erm and they said it was the, they'd seen a lot of them and this was the one that suited them best.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** It's quite compact. About ten minutes, you see. And eh, well that's quite interesting. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] And then after the war [pause 3 seconds]. Well the war years I did a little bit but not very much. You're not interested in that are you, a lot? Erm [pause 2 seconds] before I finished at the polytech--

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I was conscripted. I think it was about 1938. And that was a day one never forgets.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I was on the top of a bus going down New Bond Street and a newspaper placard, you know, conscription. twenty-year-old, whatever it was and that. Tch! Not very good [laughs]! I'm not a warlike person. Anyway, erm, I was due to be called up in May 1939 but with being on the full-time course, we were exempt.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And I was due to be called up in the autumn of 1939. Eh, and in the event, the war started just before I was called up. And eh... for some reason or another I chose the navy.

**VB: [sneezes] Mhm.**

**DR:** We could choose. They didn't say you'd get in but I did settle for the navy. And eh of course I had to sign on and have a medical and everything. So by the time war started I was virtually in it you see. Well, as soon as it started I said, well, normally, the conscription was [only going to be?] for six months you see. So I thought I must get into photography somehow.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** So, I went to the erm, into films really. [buzzer sounds]. I'll just go a minute.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Won't be a sec. [voices in background; pause until 1:26:38; DR comes back into room] It's all right. We got a [bird last week down there?] There's a cat about.

**VB: Oh!**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** Well, where were we? The navy, oh yes. Erm [pause 3 seconds], yes, I went down to the recruiting office. So they said, well, you can't do anything here. Wait until you get in the navy. So I went into a yacht in the Navy which was at Butlins Holiday Camp. Eh, I applied there. Oh we can't do anything here. Have to wait till you get to the naval base you see. Well I ended up in Plymouth. Eh what I didn't know at the time, was the photographic section had only just been started in 1938. And, it was very small. And nobody could do anything about it anyway.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And I didn't get in, then. I got erm, I got sent away to sea. I was very fortunate really because erm, all my colleagues were going out to battleships and cruisers and destroyers. And I got sent to HMS Guardian which eh, curiously, before the war had been the fleet photographic ship. It wasn't doing photography at the time. It was more or less a glorified tugboat.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** It used to tug a target a mile away and a battleship would fire shells at it. And you'd take pictures of the fall of shot. To work out how accurate they were you see. But that was its peace time role. In wartime it became a net layer.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** So, I joined at [Belfast?] and then we had a few glor, I don't say the navy was glorious but we had a few [laughs] glorious, glorious days in your part of the world.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** On the west coast of Scotland. Laying anti torpedo nets. Erm, Oban, we used to collect the gear at Oban. And we did the nets at Lamlash. You know Arran do you?

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** Lamlash. Yes. There's a little island there. Holy Island.

**VB: Yes. Yes.**

**DR:** We got eh [laughs].

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** We got stranded on there once.

**VB: [gasps]**

**DR:** There was a house on Holy Island.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Eh, it was deserted then. And we had to anchor these nets on Holy Island and anchor at the other end. And we went off in a motorboat and eh, the wind blew up. We got thrown onto the rocks. And the officer in charge ordered us all out to push the boat off the rocks. Well it wouldn't go. So we ended up in the house all absolutely soaked through in this middle of winter.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Freezing. In this old deserted house.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Trying to keep warm until we were rescued. [laughs]

**VB: [laughs].**

**DR:** In several hours [amused voice] we were rescued. I always remember that. And then we went up to the Sound of Sleat. And eh [pause 2 seconds], what's the other place? Down on the west coast. Eh, Campbeltown.

**VB: Oh right, right.**

**DR:** Went there. So eh, I used to get out, get away from it all as much as possible. I enjoyed the Scottish, that's the first time I've been up there.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Whereabouts do you come from?

**VB: I'm from Fife actually.**

**DR:** Oh. Yeah.

**VB: On the east coast.**

**DR:** Yeah. I ended up later on in Arbroath.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Yeah. And eh, used to cycle a lot round there. Mhm. Anyway, eventually, in 1941 I kept eh, making, well, you can't make a nuisance of yourself and I did what I could.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And eventually I got into the photographic section which was in Portsmouth. And there was a film unit in Portsmouth which had started. I knew somebody. One of my colleagues at the polytechnic had got in, I don't know how. I tried to get in there but I couldn't so I settled for this. And so I eh, did a training, I was very annoyed once I got in, to find out that all my colleagues didn't know anything about photography at all. They'd just come in you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Furious about this! [laughs] Eighteen months messing about at sea.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And it was a demotion really. I'd risen to able seaman.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** So I got the same pay.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But coming back I started with some new recruits you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** The only advantage was that I was erm, I knew all the ropes and all the eh [laughs]. But erm, so I had to do all the basic photography again. Very crude. And then at the end of the course, it was about three or four months, I got a slight attack of jaundice.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I had to go into hospital for a week. I had a week's leave. And when I got back, instead of joining the old lot who'd gone on to do aerial photography I had to start the course again [amused voice]!

**VB: Oh! No! [laughs]. Oh.**

**DR:** So I had four lots of basic training. Caddying a few more years. And erm, so it went on from there. [pause 3 seconds]. Eh, I won't bore you with the details of the war. But the erm, there was one year which affect, decided me on really setting up on my own afterwards 'cause I got eh, I ended up at Arbroath, which was a, which was a naval air station.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Doing photography there. And I was there, for some reason they kept me on there for quite a bit and the Wrens came in then. Wren photographers. And eh, the men gradually were drafted. And that was almost every day. The Wrens eventually took over.



**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And then eh, they were all going to aircraft carriers and eh, or... bases ashore. Shore bases. And I never forget the day because it was announced over the Tannoy thing that I'd joined the battleship King George the Fifth. [laughs] [Couple of heart sign wheels?] So there was very little chance, I knew there was a possibility of a battleship but there was only a few. And they didn't all carry photographers. So that was the eh, the worst day of my life. Eh I got a few days' leave and that's when we got married.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** But we thought we'd never see each other again.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Tch! But anyway. Huh! So I ended up on the King George the Fifth. Now the reason they had photographers, or what I thought, they carried two aircraft.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** Walrus aircraft. Antiquated things. And there was a small fleet air arm unit of about eh, eight or nine. Apart from the flying crews there was the people who looked after the aircraft. Maintenance side.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And the photography you see. Well strange to say, Erm, they didn't do any aerial photography at all. There was no aerial, aerial pictures at all and my role was ship's photographer. Which I enjoyed you see. And eh, it was good. Looking back it was good. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

**DR:** [starts mid conversation] Job was photography. And in action stations eh, our job was on the bridge, with the camera. So really it was quite unique really. I was my own boss [amused voice] for the first time [laughs].

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** 'Course I got, I lived with the fleet arm mess. And we had cleaning duties you know.

**VB:** Uhuh.

**DR:** But apart from that, it was photography all the time. Eh, there was just one camera. Very small dark room. I got visions of this dark room being right down in the bowels of the ship. Anyway, it was right in the middle actually, the lower deck. Just below the top deck. The main door. Next door the NAAFI canteen. A very busy part of the ship. And it was only tiny. Eh, half the size of this room. Less than half the size of this room. And erm, I'd not been there long. I went down to the store room. And we just discovered there a Kodak, 16 mil magazine Kodak camera. Which had never been drawn out since the ship had been built. So of course I got this out. And this was in the early days of radar. And one of the young officers who strangely enough I knew from school, he was experimenting.

**VB:** Uhuh.

**DR:** So he said "Could you take some cine pictures of this screen?" you see. So we tried that. And eh, out in the passageway, outside the dark room, there was a big wooden thin box about this wide. Which I opened out. There was a drying cabinet. It'd never been used before. It was a drying thing for films.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** It was like a clothes thing you know. Like that. And you wound your film on here you see [laughs].

**VB:** Right [laughs].

**DR:** So eh, how I developed fifty feet of film. I think I must've cut it in half.

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** And magazine Kodacs were fifty feet to sixty mil I think.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** So I took quite a lot of that. Eh, I didn't do anything else. Oh of course you can't do cine and still at the same time really.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** So I didn't really take, I took a few, what they call home movies. Of about a hundred feet of home movies, at one stage, a few of my friends. But erm, and of course we didn't see any action. At least the action we did see was in the dead of night.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** So I couldn't take any pictures anyway.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** So I didn't take any until eh, anyway, to finish that story. Let me see now. I was there just over a year. And we went down to the Mediterranean.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** Pottered about. And then we came back to Liverpool, the refit, so I had to leave the ship. And I went on from there, took a petty officer's course. Went back to basic training again. [laughs]

**VB: Oh [laughs].**

**DR:** Didn't matter. Anything to be on land.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And eh, then later on I got a commission. The last eh twelve months. As a photographic officer I wasn't expected to take photographs at all really. So I did actually 'cause I'd nothing else to do. And I made a bit of a record. When we came home after the war, we erm, I took some shots of the ships--

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** On the ship deck of the Hunter, of an aircraft carrier coming back. And I gave that recently to the Imperial War Museum two or years ago.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** They were pleased to have it.

**VB: I'll bet. Yeah.**

**DR:** I developed it on board.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** As a negative. And it was a bit blotchy and all that. It wasn't very good. But eh, they were quite pleased to have it. I didn't think there was very much, it showed one or two ships I think, that they were interested in. So that was the only wartime bit of film I made. Eh, I did some work with aerial fellows making a film. And they wanted some aerial shots. So I went up in an aircraft one day. Took some shots of that. But apart from that I don't remember doing cine [pause 2 seconds]. Mhm. But that was, that period on the King George the Fifth, and being my own boss, sort of got me thinking about post-war you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And of course after the war the eh, the film industry, as always, was a bit of a mess.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** You couldn't get a job if, unless you were a member of the union.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** And you couldn't join the union [amused voice] unless you had a job.

**VB: Unless you had a job [laughs].**

**DR:** And of course we got married. Now if I hadn't have been married, maybe I'd have gone off and started making the tea for somebody, you know.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** But erm, that tied her down. And of course with Joan having done photography. We got together during the war actually.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And she was a, she'd worked in the studio. And we decided to erm, her parents helped with the house. Same house. And we started off here in the dark room upstairs. Until we got the shop. And eh, we had intended to make, to do commercial work and commercial films.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** But the still photography took over really. Eh, we did a lot of industrial work but most of customers who were more interested in eh, in still than cine.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** And in order to make a living, we had to do other jobs, like portraits of weddings.

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** And so, these other things tended to take over.

**VB:** I'm sure.

**DR:** Huh! [laughs] I had a partner. I started with a partner.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** And then he left a few years after. And eh, kept on on my own. Mhm. [pause 2 seconds]. Well, that's about it I think. Anything else?

**VB:** Erm--

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** I think we've covered an awful lot actually [laughs] right from the early days of the silents to your wartime experience.

**DR:** What? The working experience?

**VB:** I'm saying we've just covered so much. Right from your first times you were going to the cinema, right through. Erm,

**DR:** Yeah. Anything else?

**VB:** The only other thing is, do you go to the cinema much now?

**DR:** No. After the war we regularly went.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** To the Pyramid.

**VB:** [coughs]

**DR:** In fact, it became a routine. After we finished work here, we'd go to the Pyramid cafe. 'Cause a lot of the supercinemas had cafes. And we'd go in and enjoy it. We always used to do that. Regularly. My wife and my partner and his wife. And of course, Hale Cinema. And we'd go to town occasionally. To see films. And of course, they started after the war, foreign films. Eh, at the Market Street cinema. And we went to see a few. I think they showed Brigitte Bardot there for the first time [laughs]. So we did regularly go.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Until we had the erm, the children in 1951. And then we seemed to drop it. It was a matter of sitting in. We weren't the types to get sitters-in really.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** I mean we had family help, but in the main, we liked to be around the children. Rather than leave them with other people. So from that I think although we went quite a lot, it dropped down. Eh, until of course we got to the eh, until TV took over. And the films deteriorated as you know you see. The X certificates and so on. Eh, and Joan wouldn't go and see anything like that. Anything horrid or horror films and things. So we eh, gradually dropped off.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** And now, the last film I saw was *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. [laughs] If I hear of one that everybody's going mad about--

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Then I'll make an effort and get a carer in. And I went with my sister to see that. And we enjoyed that. But eh, very rarely really now. [pause 3 seconds] It's a different experience isn't it? And we usually go, well we have been, into the Salford Quays. In the daytime, to the half past one. And we're usually about the only ones there!

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. there was only myself and my sister and about three other people there.

**VB:** [gasps]

**DR:** [laughs]. So you lose a bit of the atmosphere, don't you?

**VB:** Yes. That's right, yeah.

**DR:** But erm, our daughters go regularly to the [inaudible].

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** But not like, like we did. You know they go, I don't know how often. Perhaps once every few weeks, every so often.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Have an evening out. Go for a meal and go to the cinema.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** But erm, [door closes]. [pause 4 seconds]

**VB:** Yeah, as you say, I think it's completely different for cinema going today.

**DR:** Yes. And our two grandchildren, they're what? Thirteen eh, nearly fourteen and sixteen now, eh, they don't go all that often. They DO go. Particularly some of these children's, attract the children. These scientific things. Space things. Part of the pull.

**VB:** [laughs]

**DR:** Such is their lot. Eh, so they see more than I do these days. Huh! [laughs]



**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Mhm.**

**VB: 'Cause I mean the whole system of picture making is so different as well. When I was looking through this, I mean, seeing stars are in about three or four pictures for that year.**

**DR: Yeah.**

**VB: I mean, the amount of films they were making is--**

**DR: Quite. Yeah.**

**VB: Quite extraordinary.**

**DR: Yeah. Yeah.**

**VB: And you're talking about changing programmes two times a week.**

**DR: Twice a week. Yeah.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: If it was a special one they'd keep it on all week.**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: Sometimes they'd hold it on a second week, probably to attract more attention [laughs] I would think. [laughs]**

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR: And then they started erm [pause 2 seconds]. Early on it was the main feature and shorts.**

**VB: Uhuh.**

**DR:** The Pyramid, it used to be a cartoon, a Disney cartoon which, we all enjoyed those. And one of these eh, travel shorts, things like that. And then the organ would come up you see. Play, there'd be a sing-song and you'd--

**VB: [laughs]**

**DR:** And then the main film [amused voice]. But then of course, they started the double features. Eh, it was a safe bet the second one was a, was a dud.

**VB: Yeah [laughs].**

**DR:** [laughs]. Eh, and then if the timing would fit right, they'd show the main feature first. And the second feature only once. And then the main feature again later on you see.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** Otherwise they'd show both in two halves. Bit too long I suppose.

**VB: Mhm.**

**DR:** They did that quite regularly.

**VB: Did you ever walk out in the middle of a film? If you weren't enjoying it? Or did you always stay to the end?**

**DR:** No. I can't say I did. Should've done [amused voice] on many occasions.

**VB: Yes! [laughs]**

**DR:** [laughs]

**VB:** I mean I've sometimes felt like that myself but I don't, there's something about you've paid [laughs] and you're in.

**DR:** Yes.

**VB:** You might as well stay.

**DR:** Yes. You've paid for it and eh--

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Some of the shows went on a couple of hours of course. The Manchester ones.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Eh at the Paramount, in the late thirties, of course they had these big American bands over.

**VB:** Ah! Didn't realise that.

**DR:** And they had a stage show as well.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** That was quite regular happenings, at the Paramount. [pause 5 seconds] The news theatres, eventually there were two in Manchester. Mhm.

**VB:** Mhm. I didn't realise that they had stage shows at the Paramount as well. That's interesting. That they had the stage shows too.

**DR:** At the Paramount.

**VB:** Yes.

**DR:** Yes. Yes. Erm, [fault on tape; voice suddenly speeds up]. Oh yes that's quite eh, I forget that I'm not into music but some of the famous American names were there.

**VB: Yeah.**

**DR:** And eh, stage shows. And they did that at the Pyramid, when it first opened, the dancing girls.

**VB: Mhm.**

[fault on original tape; audio missing for last few minutes of interview]

**VB: As I say, when I go away and start thinking--**

**DR:** Yes. Probably think of something else.

**VB: Yeah [laughs]**

**DR:** That's the Regal. [looking through postcards or photographs] [inaudible] That was burnt down.

**VB: Oh.**

**DR:** It had an organ as well. But they had a five minute interval. That's the Savoy. It's been knocked down. You've heard of the Apollo in Manchester.

**VB: I have, yes.**

**DR:** That's one in Yorkshire. [inaudible].

**VB: Altrincham Picture Theatre is the best [laughs]. [inaudible]**

**DR:** I was told in the sound days, they had the orchestra up here.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** I think it's been covered in now.

**VB:** Yeah. [inaudible]

**DR:** This is the Pyramid.

**VB:** Right. The columns are lovely.

**DR:** Mhm. [inaudible]

**VB:** And is that marble on the floor or is it a carpet?

**DR:** Carpet.

**VB:** Carpet. Yeah. It's very grand isn't it?

**DR:** Yeah. [inaudible] This is the old Savoy. [inaudible]

**VB:** Is it a mosaic? Or is it printed in?

**DR:** [inaudible; DR leaves room and returns]. I've got to get the lunch.

**VB:** Right.

**DR:** I'm all right for a minute.

**VB:** Yeah.

**DR:** Would you like to have lunch?

**VB:** Erm, it's all right, I'll just make my way back.

**DR:** You sure?

**VB: No problem. Yeah.**

**DR:** Eh, I'm all right for quarter of an hour.

**VB: Right.**

**DR:** [I've got something to put in the oven?]

**VB: Right. Okay.**

**DR:** It's a pity you can't stay.

**VB: Well maybe if I get a chance to come back down again.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB: That would be great. I'd love to.**

**DR:** [inaudible]

**VB: Oh really! I mean I'd love to get some copies of some of the ones of the cinemas.**

**DR:** Yes. [inaudible]

**VB: Ah I see. Right.**

**DR:** [inaudible]

**VB: They're really amazing aren't they?**

**DR:** Have you any copy facilities?

**VB: Erm, yes we can get copies made in Glasgow.**

**DR:** Yes.

**VB:** That would be great.

[End of Interview]