

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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- * Westhoughton, Greater Manchester, 30 May 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Lois Basnett and Bert (Herbert) Partington
- * Transcribed by Joan Simpson/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn
- * LB=Lois Basnett, BP=Bert Partington, VB=Valentina Bold
- * Notes: Second interview with Lois Basnett and Herbert Partington; Lois Basnett and Bert Partington were interviewed on 9 May 1995 with other members of Westhoughton History Society; Sound Quality: Good; 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.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape introduction by Valentina Bold]

[setting up tape]

BP: You're staying in the north of England for a while are you?

VB: Yes. A couple of weeks after this.

BP: And then you go home to Glasgow.

VB: Yes.

BP: Mhm.

VB: Yeah.

BP: Are you away from home a lot then?

VB: Erm, a fair bit at the moment. After I go back to Glasgow I'm going down to north London for a while.

BP: Aye.

VB: So, this is the summer I'm travelling about a bit.

BP: Mhm. Well I suppose you get, it's experience isn't it?

VB: It's, yes it's--

BP: Meeting different people.

VB: That's right. It's quite erm, quite sort of refreshing actually. It's given me a new burst of energy, so--.

BP: Yes.

LB: Yeah. And I suppose you meet a lot of different characters, don't you?

VB: That's right. Yes.

LB: And then I suppose all the information you collect is sort of sifted and collated.

VB: Yes, well we're hoping in November I think to have a secretary and she's going to be transcribing--

BP: Yes.

LB: Yes.

VB: All this sort of material.

BP: You've just got the tapes really.

VB: At the moment. Yes.

BP: Tapes and questionnaires.

VB: Yeah.

BP: Mhm.

VB: Next year'll be when we really go through it in a lot more detail and have a chance to think about--

BP: Mhm.

VB: A bit more too.

LB: I find the thirties very hard to do really.

BP: The difficulty is you know, from our point of view--

LB: [laughs]

BP: Is separating the times--

LB: Yes.

BP: Because it's very easy, I mean I noticed when you were at the Library--

VB: Yes.

BP: There was a bloke there, Harry [referring to earlier interview held in Westhoughton Library].

LB: Mhm.

BP: And he was talking about films. Probably in the fifties even. It's in the past and people think the thirties.

LB: Yes.

BP: But when I came to do a questionnaire--

VB: Yes.

LB: Mhm.

BP: I had to think about which films had impressed me in the thirties.

LB: It's very difficult.

BP: I had to be very careful.

LB: And I tell you something else you see. In the thirties [pause 2 seconds] we weren't the people we are now. [laughs] That's difficult enough!

BP: Your enthusiasm would have been different--

LB: I mean take *Top Hat*, oh I thought *Top Hat* was wonderful. I watched it the other day and I thought, "God! I swooned over this--

VB: [laughs]

LB: Rubbish when I was in my teens!" [laughs]

BP: It is, 'cause I mean I put down the three films that impressed me which was difficult again--

LB: Mhm.

BP: To pick just three.

VB: Mhm.

BP: And one I put is *Dead End* which is erm, very very dramatic and impressive film of the time.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Which is one of the early Humphrey Bogart ones.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And the theme was really the depri, deprived kids turning to crime in New York. Which has now been done so often. And you saw it today, you wouldn't be terribly impressed.

LB: No.

VB: Mhm.

BP: But at the time it was very dramatic.

LB: And you see I thought, oh I used to think Robert Donat was absolutely fantastic. And I can remember not so long ago, going to see *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. And, coming home, coming all the way home in the car, crying at it. Erm, and of course I was going to put that and I thought No! That's what sixties, seventies?

BP: Sixties. Fifties or sixties. I'm not sure.

LB: Well I know Jean [surname redacted] was our cookery teacher at the time because, as we came down one staircase crying our eyes out she came down [laughs] the other, with her husband looking very cross. [laughs]

BP: 'Course there was another reason for that wasn't there? Everybody knew Robert Donat was dying.

LB: He was dying.

VB: Ah.

LB: Yes. I suppose that was it, yes.

VB: Yeah.

LB: Yes, I suppose that was really it.

BP: And he was, he was, well you were off the subject aren't you?

LB: Yes.

BP: We we're talking about the thirties really.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But erm, he impressed people round here a great deal. Because he was, he was Lancashire-born, and yet what was acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful speaking voices in England.

LB: Oh yes. I think he did.

BP: We used to have him at Christmas, to read the Christmas message.

LB: Oh, I think he was lovely. Ooh-h!

VB: [laughs]

LB: You see I didn't, I didn't do a lot of cinemagoing in the thirties because eh, '37, '38 I was in college. '39 the war broke out and you weren't erm encouraged to foregather in great groups.
[laughs]

VB: Mhm.

LB: Grand idea. Saved a lot of 21st birthday parties I can tell you. Erm, and erm--

BP: Mind you there was only, there was only one year of the thirties in the war!

LB: Oh yes, I know.

BP: Really but what erm, sorry I don't know your name.

VB: Erm, Val.

BP: Val.

LB: Yeah.

BP: Well Val's period, the thirties.

LB: Mhm.

BP: It's pretty well over when the war breaks out!

LB: True! True, true. But I mean--

BP: It's really pre-war, it's really pre-war memories you want isn't it?

VB: Mhm.

LB: Yeah. But you see '37 to '38 erm, in college. In Bingley. Miles from civilisation. Erm, there's only one film I remember from that and that was erm, [pause 2 seconds] yeeah, mhm... Ooh that thing that Robert Montgomery was in. You know.

BP: *Night Must Fall*.

LB: *Night Must Fall*.

BP: Yes that was very [inaudible]. Are you recording this by the way?

VB: Yes. **Actually I was just wondering if I could maybe move the mic over so it's between the two of you.**

BP: Where do you want to put it, Val?

VB: **I'll just put it down there and that should pick you up fine.**

LB: Gosh, you think, yes--

BP: You all right there? It's okay?

LB: Yeah.

VB: **That's fine.**

BP: No, *Night Must Fall*. That's quite a funny thing.

VB: **Mhm.**

BP: Erm you mentioned *Night Must Fall*. Now although that isn't in my three--

VB: **Mhm.**

BP: That was a most impressive film. Yes it did. It was very good.

LB: We were in college, right on top of Bingley Hill. We went to Shipley, on the bus. And when we came out, we caught the bus back to Bingley. And I can remember saying, "I'm not walking up that hill." You know twenty minutes up a hill. Lonely. Quiet. So we had a taxi back! [bursts out laughing]

BP: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

LB: I thought, I bet *Night Must Fall* was the best film of that period for taxi firms.

VB: [laughs]

LB: For everybody was terrified when they came.

BP: Yes, it's interesting that because it wasn't, it wasn't like *Psycho*.

LB: Oh no.

BP: But it was written, Welsh writer of course. You yourself Val, are you interested in the films themselves? [pause 2 seconds] Well that, that, I saw it done as a play with erm, Williams, tch, I've just said his name. The author.

LB: Emlyn Williams.

BP: With Emlyn Williams in it! Taking the part of Danny. I saw that in Manchester. And the theatre, the play wasn't half as good as the film. Which was made in America. I think it's remarkable!

LB: Yeah.

BP: And the Welsh villain if you like, the, the, Danny.

LB: Danny.

BP: Was played by Robert Montgomery!

LB: Mhm.

BP: Who was a suave, sophisticated--

LB: American.

BP: Very suave actor. Was noted for his appeal you know.

LB: Mhm. Yes. He was a pin-up. A pin up.

BP: He was a tremendous, and Rosalind Russell was the girl, wasn't she? The sort of slightly impressed by him and almost in love with him. And he has this hat box with the head in it. [laughs] And there's this terrible ending.

LB: Who was, who was the--

BP: Was it Dame May Whitty, the old lady?

LB: Dame May Whitty. Mhm.

BP: Yeah, the terrific thing at the end when the police come. It was blinking well--

LB: Oh it, it really was quite the most impressive, the others were [pause 2 seconds] beautiful and showy. The thirties to me stands out as being erm Broadway melodies and magnificent dancers. Great troops of them on staircases dancing up and down staircases!

BP: Yeah. That's, that's another thing that's talked a lot about on television things. Busby Berkeley. And they rave about him and so on. And when I see these old films I find them excessively boring.

LB: Mhm.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Because the girls are arranged just like dolls. In patterns.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And I can't understand why everybody raved about them. I think it was the novelty.

LB: Yeah, I think it was, probably.

VB: I was interested when you said earlier on about seeing *Top Hat* again and feeling quite different about it. What was it that attracted you about *Top Hat* the first time you saw it?

LB: Oh-h! I think, I think the romantic dancing. I mean it was never soppy. You know. It was always beautiful gowns. Floaty things. And I think most of my generation erm thought that, you know, if we could dance like Ginger, oh-h! Erm and I think that's the point. And the songs were, [pause 2 seconds] were fun. Without, again, without being sloppy sentimental stuff you know.

BP: Oh I don't know, they're a bit sentimental some of them.

LB: Oh well! Yes, but not soggy.

BP: Well that depends, doesn't it?

LB: Well I mean, 'Dancing Cheek to Cheek', for instance. Erm--

BP: 'The Way You Look Tonight'. So on.

LB: Yes. With her head wrapped up in a--

BP: Very, very romantic.

LB: Yes. Didn't they sing that when she got her head wrapped up in the towel? She'd been washing her hair.

BP: I think the way--

LB: 'The Way You Look Tonight' You know. Ooh! [laughs]

BP: The big thing though that Val was saying, why you liked them so much when you were young. They were very romantic. And they were very escapist weren't they?

LB: Yes.

BP: And very nice to watch. Nowadays we're far more sophisticated. All of us.

LB: Yes.

BP: And we've seen it done so often.

LB: Mhm.

BP: I was looking at Fred Astaire.

LB: Yeah.

BP: That one we watched this weekend, *Follow the Fleet*.

LB: Mhm.

BP: I thought what a lousy actor he was. That was what impressed me. With his one-sided twitching and I thought "God! This is pathetic!" He's so mannered.

[knock at the door]

LB: I'll go.

BP: But at each time it was okay!

VB: Yeah.

BP: We've all become far more sophisticated. I mean the amount of entertainment there is on telly.
[pause 2 seconds] Good, bad and indifferent, you know. I mean, and you're so, these days I mean
the close-up, I find now--

LB: 'Scuse me, an emergency. Can we use the telephone? Erm, come on.

BP: Mind you don't fall over the wires.

VB: [coughs]

LB: Oh dear.

BP: Hope nobody's fallen. Somebody hurt themselves?

LB: Somebody ill.

BP: Oh ill. Ah.

[pause 10 seconds; voice in background on telephone; pause 16 seconds; arranging for someone to
come and see sick person]

LB: Is he poorly?

Visitor: Yeah. Too much [inaudible].

VB: Doesn't sound too life-threatening then.

BP: [laughs quietly] I get annoyed with him throwing the fag ends everywhere! [laughs]

LB: Oh don't.

BP: We don't want this on tape though do we?

VB: [laughs]

BP: To be honest. [laughs]

LB: [laughs] Do you know, [pause 2 seconds] it's a hectic life.

BP: Oh yes [laughs] indeed.

LB: It's a hectic [laughing] life.

BP: I was saying that, I was saying to Val about, how nowadays it's much more critical because we're all more sophisticated.

LB: Yes of course.

BP: And we were very young then of course. That's another thing. I mean, God you were saying earlier weren't you--

LB: Mhm. Mhm.

BP: You're not the same person.

LB: No.

BP: That's reporting on the thirties.

LB: And you realise what your standards were not. You know. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: Well the thing I always tell people. My age group, see I was what, twenty-one when the war started. And, at that period, up to then, people like Humphrey Bogart and George Raft were the role

models. And eh, all these people. William Powell. That's the thing that gets forgotten. That the role models then were film stars.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And, fortunately for civilisation, they were pretty civilised role models. Eh, I mean my God today, Mad Max and people like that, make those your role models. No wonder we've got problems!

LB: Mhm.

BP: Whereas we, I mean William Powell, you see. Every bloke used to wish he looked like William Powell and was such a big success with the girls.

LB: Mhm. Who was it who tossed the money?

BP: Oh that was George Raft! Who used to flip the coins [laughing] in his--

LB: And all the boys [inaudible; laughing;] --

BP: No. No [laughs] they didn't. 'Cause it took a lot of skill to do that.

LB: [laughing]

BP: I could do that. It was the only thing I could do. I could flip a coin--

LB: [laughs]

BP: Without looking at it. Like George Raft in *Scarface*. But that was when I was younger.

VB: [laughs]

BP: That was when I was at school.

VB: I was wondering if you could still do that.

BP: [hearty laughter]. Pardon?

VB: I was wondering if you could demonstrate.

BP: [bursts out laughing]! I don't know whether I could do it now! I haven't got, I've no coins anyway.

LB: I bet you could.

BP: Which is a good getout isn't it?

LB: It's a good getout [inaudible].

VB: Was it just--

BP: Well what it was, this was the thing that made George Raft a star! [pause 2 seconds] This is relevant isn't it? To you. Yeah. Right. So George Raft, he made a terrific hit in the film called *Scarface*, which is very loosely based on Al Capone, you see. And he was unknown then. And apparently the truth is [pause 2 seconds] that George Raft himself was eh, [pause 2 seconds] had a sort of criminal past. So he became the archetypal young gangster sort of thing. And he was, he had sort of connections with people in the, the Mafia apparently. But in this scene in *Scarface* when he first appears, he has this mannerism you see. Of erm, give me a coin, I don't think I can do it. Anyway, what he does you see, he's very impassive. He's sort of, in fact he was never a great actor.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And his face, he's quite sort of impassive. And what impressed everybody, he sort of stands about, with a coin, which I presume is a half dollar or something, and he's doing this all the time. [demonstrates] But he's doing it very skilfully. He doesn't look down. And it doesn't move, his hand hardly moves. This is his mannerism you see.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And this became a kind of erm, the visual equivalent of a catchword.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And he looks so sinister you see. Just standing there doing, doing this. [laughs; demonstrates]

LB: Looking at, looking at--

BP: Looking at nothing. [laughs] I mean he was a very handsome man. He was supposed to be a little bit like Rudolph Valentino. So he had this Latino appeal you see. And erm so this thing [laughs] caught on. And the kids at school, you see, we would be, oh I don't know, fourteen--

LB: Fourteen, fifteen.

BP: Fifteen. And we used to practise this [laughs] business you see!

LB: When we should've been doing the Greek homework.

BP: [laughing] To look sinister you know. And he had his hair parted in middle.

LB: [whoops with laughter]

BP: Sounds comical now.

LB: Yes, doesn't it?

BP: But it wasn't all that uncommon then.

LB: Oh no.

BP: And eh, [laughs] a pal of mine, Walter [surname redacted], who had a sort of a, very pale freckled face and glasses. But he had his hair parted in the middle! [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: [laughing] His attempt to look like, you know [laughing].

LB: Mhm.

BP: Like George Raft. And I often think of Walter trying to, and it was a bit like, I dunno, men like me trying to be like Rudolph Valentino! [laughs] Ludicrous! Poor Walter. Thinking he looked like George Raft.

LB: You know, it, it—

BP: But people, we did sort of, we did idolise things. I mean I can remember again, sorry am I hogging the conversation?

LB: No. Carry on.

BP: I can remember the same group at school. We thought Marlene Dietrich was terrific you see. And there was a young woman. We lived in, we were in Bolton then. And we, we had Wednesday afternoon off school. And on Wednesday lunchtime we used to race to the cloakroom. Wash our hands and face. And three of us used to hurtle out to the town centre. Because there was a young woman who worked at the gown shop who we thought was like Marlene Dietrich. And we used to sort of stare at her and follow her. [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

BP: And we were normal! [laughs] There was nothing sinister about it.

LB: No. Just admiring.

BP: I mean, she wouldn't have been frightened of us. I mean it wasn't that kind of following.

LB: Mhm.

BP: We just thought she was wow! She was absolutely marvellous, you know. The girls were as bad.

LB: Oh, this was a revelation to me that erm, that you had your, I suppose you said pin-ups there. But they weren't pin-ups then were they?

BP: Well no. Pin-up hadn't been invented.

LB: No. No. Because we used to moon over some of them but I can't think of anybody I mean. 'Course my pin-up at the time was the Prince of Wales. And I had inside my desk lid a lovely picture of His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales. And the eh, the senior mistress sent for me and erm, "I believe you have a picture of the Prince of Wales inside your desk." So I said, "Yes." She said, "Will you please remove it?" So--

VB: [astonished]

LB: So I had to please remove it.

VB: A-ah.

LB: [laughs]

BP: Does this sound like another world Val?

VB: It does. Very much so, yes.

LB: And when they, when he abdicated, eh, a group, I can see a group of us going up [Sollywell?] Street, crying buckets. And I don't know, one of us, I can't think who it was, said, "If he doesn't want us, we don't want him." [laughs]

BP: Because, because he'd abdicated.

LB: Because he'd abdicated.

VB: Aw-w.

BP: That's interesting. Because, by that time, I was working. I'd left school. So you must've been--

LB: We must've been in the sixth then.

BP: You must've been a senior girl then. So, which means that girls of about eighteen were crying their eyes out!

LB: Seventeen or eighteen. Mhm.

BP: Which is rather surprising isn't it? I mean nowadays they wouldn't, well they might, mightn't they? I don't know.

LB: I don't know. Yes I must've been. If I was in the sixth.

BP: Well you see when you think of it, it's not all that far removed from the film business because he was presented on newsreels such a lot.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Almost like a film star status.

LB: Oh yes. Yes.

VB: I mean did you feel that you got to know the film stars then? Or did they always seem a world apart?

LB: Oh. There was none of this sort of fan club business that there is today for people.

BP: No.

LB: I suppose really it was almost erm, like a dream world.

BP: Yes, I think that's true.

LB: And, I don't know.

BP: See they were all American pretty well.

LB: Yes.

BP: I mean there were English films, sure. But, but I mean people talk about early Laurence Olivier and eh--

LB: Mhm.

BP: What was she called? The woman that was, Flora Robson.

LB: Yeah.

BP: And so on.

LB: *Fire Over England*. That wasn't the first one.

BP: Ralph Richardson and so on. But I don't think, with the exception of Charles Laughton, I don't think they made a tremendous impact on our imaginations.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And even they lived in a different world. I mean you didn't feel... [pause 2 seconds] Although, funnily enough, I have a cousin who's six years older than myself. And we were talking about this the other day, weren't we?

LB: Mhm.

BP: About films. And she used to get a magazine. I forget what it was called. But it was a film magazine and she was more of a, erm, more of a modern fan than eh--

LB: Mhm.

BP: But it wasn't terribly common really. For people to write to film stars and stuff. At least, I don't think so.

LB: No, I've no recollection of anybody,

BP: But you can only speak for yourself can't you really? And your immediate crowd.

VB: Did you go to the pictures with friends or family?

LB: Well, no.

BP: Separate answers for this.

LB: Yes, separate answers. Erm. Quite, quite eh--

BP: [coughs]

LB: [laughs] Quite a few films, latterly after Bert, Bert left in the fifth. And erm, we weren't a very big sixth form. Not like they have now. And the sixth form. We used to meet some Saturdays. Erm and go a walk. Well I never went because I wasn't a walker. But quite a lot of them went for a ramble. Finished up at somebody's house and have tea. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] or go to the pictures. Now that's, that's where I saw *Roberta*. Eh, with the sixth form. That's stands out in my, in my memory! [laughs] Erm, [pause 2 seconds] there'd just be about one row in the Dress Circle, you know. Of the sixth. And that was when everybody knew that we'd got to leave one seat for Ethel, two seats for Ethel and Fergie. Harold [surname redacted]. But apart from that there was no sort of boyfriend, girlfriend thing about it. Except those two. Who were the only two doing geography. They were doing geography. Very strange, 'cause it was a Greek and Latin school. And erm... [pause 2 seconds] All the time they were doing Greek and they were supposed to be doing their geography in the public library, eh, they were taking each other to the pictures.

VB: [laughs]

LB: But this was a Saturday, when I saw *Roberta*. And that made--

VB: [coughs]

BP: [coughs]

LB: A great impression on me. Because of 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes'.

VB: Aye.

LB: Oh-h-h! Hoo-oo-oo! Romance. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: 'Course you've always had a, [pause 2 seconds] you were more strictly, well not strictly brought up but more sheltered childhood than me, hadn't you?

LB: Yes, but you see, there again, and I see people doing this, I see parents doing this and I think it is unforgivable. I was the only girl from Westhoughton who went to a Bolton school. Erm, my mother was a Boltonian. Whereas all the others went to Hindley Grammar or Rivington Grammar. I had to go to Bolton. Therefore, I'm not saying my teenage years were friendless but I'd very little point of contact with the other teenage people in the area. And I wasn't one of the clever ones who could get their homework done by about half past six and go playing tennis. Erm, to me, it seems that my teenage years were just spent doing homework. Ooh, great waste of time.

BP: [laughs] It's funny isn't it? I mean today you spent all that time, you'd know something useful, wouldn't you?

LB: Yes. And all I knew was how to cheat at Greek.

BP: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

LB: I mean, you see, normally we wore gym slips. Well a gym slip, carefully arranged, covered a multitude of cribs. Erm whereas, when you got into the sixth and you were promoted to senior status, you'd a skirt and blouse! [laughs]

VB: Aw dear.

LB: And a skirt doesn't [laughing] cover up! Oh it was, honestly. Education. Shoo!

VB: Ah dear.

BP: See this will turn out to be an in-depth study of the evils [laughs] of pre-war education!

VB: [laughs]

BP: Yes. Yes. I'm sure it, I mean I was going to college to teach erm, eh, top juniors, bottom seniors. Erm and there I was doing the same education as all these unfortunate [fags?] who were going into the church. [laughs] To Oxford, and to the church.

BP: We're a couple of dropouts really.

VB: Ah. [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

BP: Uneducated.

LB: No.

BP: No we're not.

LB: No erm. [pause 2 seconds] No, went to the pictures sometimes in Westhoughton but not often. My, my, [pause 2 seconds] probably not as I got into my top teens but in the early years of the thirties my, erm, my filmgoing was erm with a friend of the family who was an absolute gem. She

was better than any auntie. We went to Manchester and had lunch. Went to a film. Had tea and went to another film at night. But I've no recollection of those. Those are all mixed up with, erm. Can't remember what those were.

VB: Mhm. What were the cinemas you were going to in Manchester? Was it the ones in the centre of the town?

LB: Erm, [pause 2 seconds] always seems to me that there was a cinema somewhere on Piccadilly was there?

BP: Yeah, I'm very foggy now to this distance in time. But there was one called the Gaumont if I remember rightly.

LB: Mhm. And at Oxford Road.

BP: The city cinemas.

LB: Yes. Oxford Road, there were about four before you got to the erm, erm, you know, to the Theatre. Between the Theatre and Peter Square. [pause 2 seconds] There were about four--

VB: Mhm.

LB: There. We went to those sometimes. Erm--

VB: So was that when you were in your later teens or--

LB: No. That was when I was being taken by this friend of the family.

BP: Which would be in the thirties wouldn't it?

LB: Yes it was in the thirties. Yes, yes because, you see I was nine when I left the junior school. No, ten. Just ten, when I left the junior school. And this friend was a head of the junior school. Erm she took, she took two of us to the pantomimes each year. But when I'd left erm, she'd no children. And

my parents were in business so it was very nice for her and super for me, eh to be taken out. I was being entertained while they got on with the shop.

BP: It's perhaps useful to just note, well I would be twelve when the thirties started.

LB: Mhm.

BP: So you'd be eleven wouldn't you?

LB: Mhm.

BP: So you've got twelve to twenty-two sort of thing.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Roughly. It's the, it is the teenage years isn't it, for us?

LB: Yes.

BP: But you, you were thinking about when you were a young teenager, perhaps.

LB: Well I did more filmgoing with Florence than I did latterly. And of course, as I say, the only thing I can remember from my college years was erm *Night Must Fall*. I mean I must've seen something else.

BP: Did you—

LB: We went into Bradford and saw a lot of plays from college. We were very lucky. [laughs] We saw, and I should think it was one of the very early productions of 'When We Are Married'. We were taken to that. Everybody thought, Oh! Tch, tch, tch, tch! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

LB: But it still stands out to me as the eh, that was even better than a film. Because they were, they were actually living, breathing people.

BP: That reminds me J.B. Priestley--

LB: Mhm.

BP: Who wrote the story for a film of the thirties.

LB: Yes.

BP: Called *The Old Dark House*.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Which was a corny thriller--

LB: Mhm.

BP: Starring Charles Laughton, before he went, before he became a really big name.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Charles Laughton you know, his first big hit was as a gangster in 'On the Spot', a stage production.

LB: Was it?

BP: Yeah. Think Edgar Wallace wrote that. 'On the Spot'.

LB: He looked the part too.

VB: [coughs]

LB: Just imagine, I saw him in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at Stratford years later! [laughs]

BP: Mhm.

LB: That'd make you think. But they had a revolving stage. You see him dashing off. All of them. [laughs] Through a door and coming out of the stage! [laughs] That's not the thirties though. What else can I tell --

BP: Well 'Henry the Eighth' is the thirties isn't it? [referring to *The Private Life of Henry VIII*]

VB: Yes.

BP: The thing with Charles Laughton. 'Henry the Eighth'.

LB: Ooh! Well, I saw that.

BP: You see that's it you see. You've got to be reminded really--

VB: Yes.

BP: Then you suddenly think of what you've seen.

VB: Another thing I brought actually was erm, you're obviously familiar with Bolton cinemas as well.

LB: Mhm.

VB: 'Cause I know that you had a background in Bolton. Erm and I found one or two photos of the older cinemas in Bolton.

LB: Oh-h!

VB: Erm--

LB: Hey, look! Gosh that's an old one.

BP: That's the Electric. That's the Imperial.

LB: That's the eh, it was a funny little one.

BP: Yes. In Deansgate.

LB: Yes. Opp—[tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

LB: Oh, how lovely!

BP: I assume it's in the 'Bolton Evening News', this picture.

LB: Yes. The Odeon.

BP: Mhm.

VB: So were these ones that you went to?

LB: Yes. I went there once.

BP: Yes.

LB: The Odeon. Have you got the Lido?

VB: I haven't, no.

LB: Aw.

BP: This was an early cinema.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But it wasn't one one went to very often. Erm, 'cause it wasn't very good. And then I can remember it being refurbished.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Some time in the thirties. And the exceptional thing was, it was the first place that I know of that had double seats, on the back rows.

LB: Really?

BP: For courting couples. So they introduced that.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And when I was a little boy, that was called the Electric.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: Which shows how early it was.

VB: Yes.

BP: And then it became the Imperial.

LB: Mhm.

VB: It's quite a grand front on it.

LB: Ooh-h! Yes. Well Bolton was rather famous for eh, it still is really, for eh, now they're only interested in the sort of first, you know, ground floor. But, if you look up, there's some beautiful architecture, as you get--

VB: Mhm.

LB: That is on the list for eh possible listed buildings.

BP: It's art deco.

LB: For this period.

BP: It's art deco. Like all Odeons.

LB: Yes. Yes.

BP: But that, the last time I went there was during the war! And I took my little brother to see *Pinocchio*.

LB: Did you?

BP: Yeah. Well I remember that very clearly.

LB: Was it still going then?

BP: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. During the war.

LB: I can remember going once there. It, it sort of erm had some unflattering names like... [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: It would be the early forties though, at this time.

LB: Mind you Bolton had a terrific amount of cinemas.

BP: Yes, I think I got about twenty, twenty-one something like that--

VB: Yes.

BP: Cinemas. That I can remember.

VB: Here's a programme from the Odeon. The thirties as well.

BP: Ah! That's interesting.

LB: Ooh! *A Star is Born*! Janet Gaynor. Goodness me!

BP: Mhm.

LB: That's the only one we saw of that lot. [laughs]

BP: Just trying to think how many of those I saw. In actual fact, I don't think I saw any of them!
[laughs]

VB: Aye. [laughs]

BP: I remember them. Funnily enough. I remember this. This eh *A Star is Born*. 'Cause that was made later with erm, Judy Garland.

LB: Mhm.

BP: This I can remember Stella Dallas. Eh, these aren't the thirties are they?

VB: They are, yes.

BP: Are they? So long ago. John Boles. That was my mother-in-law's favourite man.

LB: Oh yes. He was in *The Desert Song*. Oh-h-h!

BP: Yes.

VB: Did you parents go to the cinema much?

BP: Pardon?

VB: Did your parents go to the cinema much?

LB: My mother didn't go much.

BP: [laughs]

LB: My father took me down to the Empire. [laughs]

BP: I'm laughing at this. My, my, my father wouldn't go to the cinema you see. Said it was rubbish.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Utter rubbish.

LB: He took you to all the music halls.

BP: Oh yes! We used to go to music halls a lot, my father and I.

LB: He had a wonderful upbringing.

BP: [laughs] Completely useless!

LB: I mean people who were stars later, he saw them at the Bolton [pause 2 seconds] Grand Theatre.

BP: A lot of them yes.

LB: The Grand. Erm as beginners more or less.

BP: Mhm.

LB: You know. Now--

BP: Max Wall for instance.

LB: I went rarely. I can only think I went once and that was to see St Peter's and Paul's or St Edmunds or somebody like that do 'HMS Pinafore'. Well that'd be the Theatre Royal, would it?

BP: That would be the Theatre Royal.

LB: Mhm.

BP: They were a bit more serious. The Grand was just musical.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: But my father, talking about cinema, erm, my father was a man who drank quite a lot. Erm and every night he went to the pub. You see. No matter, if we had visitors, he would, be about eight o'clock, half past eight he'd say, "I'm going now. Is anybody coming?"

LB: Mhm.

BP: And if anybody went with him that was all right. But he wouldn't stay in you see.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Just wouldn't stay in.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But on New Year's Day, we all, he used to take us to the cinema. Whether we wanted to go or not.

LB: Cinema?

BP: To the cinema.

LB: Mhm.

BP: It was the only time he went to the cinema.

LB: Went, mhm.

BP: And it was hell. It was absolute hell. He used to sit there and sort of, "Who's that? Who's that fella? Has he been on before? Who is he?"

LB: [chuckles]

BP: "Who's that one with the big nose?" Quite loudly you know.

LB: [chuckles]

BP: [inaudible] You used to be dreading--

LB: Yes.

BP: Dying for it to end so you could go. [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

BP: And the funny thing was, nearly every time he took you to the cinema, it was a stinking awful film. You know.

BP: It really was amazing. But I once took, I once took him to the cinema, just he and I. And that was the Majestic on St Helen's Road. And it was *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And he liked that! But he was very strange my father that way. He never read any fiction. He'd read the newspaper. And eh, those were radio days. But I can remember once, there was a radio play, 'Tamburlaine the Great'. With Donald Wolfit. And d'you know, he was absolutely spellbound with it.

LB: Mhm.

BP: He thought that was wonderful.

LB: Mhm.

BP: You see. And I think he would've liked straight plays. On the stage. 'Cause he wouldn't go to plays. We had one of the theatres you see, would present straight plays occasionally. And he'd go to those and enjoy them. But eh a play on the radio. He usually said they were respectable rows.

LB: [amused laugh]

BP: Which, when you think of it, is fairly descriptive of a lot of plays. The tension.

LB: [laughing]

BP: That was just a respectable row. It was rubbish! Wasn't worth listening to.

LB: [laughing]

BP: So my father's not really, he's not a suitable subject [laughing] for you at all! But my mother, she liked films very much. Tell you who her favourites were and that's in the thirties.

LB: Mhm.

BP: 'Cause she tended to like English things.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And she liked Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn.

LB: Oh yes!

BP: The Aldwych farces.

LB: Oh yes, we saw a lot of those.

BP: Yes.

LB: Florence loved those. And we saw a lot of those. Yes. And, and who was the, oh forget. Who, Robertson Hare?

BP: Robertson Hare was the bald man.

LB: "Indubitably!"

BP: That's right. Yes.

LB: [laughs]

BP: Yes.

LB: And everybody practised. "Indubitably!"

BP: They were very, very successful of course, weren't they?

LB: Yes they were.

VB: Mhm.

BP: See Tom Walls was eh--

LB: Yeah. I think I've forgotten a lot of what I saw in the thirties.

BP: He did *Rookery Nook*. I'm trying to think of the names of the films they... [pause 2 seconds]

LB: And they, they were--

BP: You wouldn't like those today.

LB: No. Again, again, again they appealed to the age--

BP: Mhm. They're never repeated. Funnily enough, they're never repeated now are they?

LB: No. No.

VB: Mhm.

LB: No.

BP: Probably quality of the film didn't keep or something. Would that be true do you think?

VB: I think that's right.

BP: The nature of the film--

VB: A lot of them did deteriorate. Yes.

BP: Yes.

VB: I mean I've got also a couple of pages from the 'Bolton Evening News' from '34 with adverts I think from some of the theatres you were talking about there.

BP: Ah.

LB: Ah! *A Cuckoo in the Nest*. There you are.

BP: That's one! Yes.

LB: *A Cuckoo in the Nest*.

BP: That's right.

LB: *Too Much Harmony. I'm No Angel*. My goodness, you can guess who's in that.

BP: Mae West.

LB: Ye-es!

BP: I don't think I've ever seen that. Don't know much about it.

LB: We thought she was very fast.

BP: Well [laughs] she was a bit, wasn't she?

VB: [laughs]

LB: Oh yes, quite indecent. [laughs] Oh I wonder what--

BP: Oh she was! She really was you know.

LB: Yes I know she was but not indecent like--

BP: I read her biography!

LB: Yes I know! But on stage, on scene, on film--

BP: Oh yes. It wasn't permitted.

LB: It wasn't permitted. By golly it was there wasn't it?

BP: Yes the innuendo.

LB: The innuendo was there. And I think sometimes innuendo makes more impression on you than the actual. I mean she was never in the nude or anything like that. But she made more impression than when you see nudes now.

BP: She's a very interesting subject because she--

LB: Mhm.

BP: A lot, it's said that a lot of her appeal was that she appeared like a male drag artist. But that's a very involved--

LB: Yes.

BP: Idea I think.

LB: Mhm. [looking at adverts] *Voltaire*. George Arliss! Do you remember George Arliss?

BP: Yes I do.

LB: My mother did like him.

BP: I don't remember that film though.

LB: No-

BP: I remember that. *Tugboat Annie*.

LB: Yes.

BP: 'Cause that Marie Dressler, she was, this was a very famous partnership, comedy partnership for a time.

LB: Yeah.

BP: S'funny how you forget them though. I could have never, George Arliss, I saw most of his films.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But not that one!

LB: Now you see my mother loved George Arliss.

BP: Yes. So did my mother.

LB: And Conrad Veidt. Conrad Veidt

BP: That's right. He's thirties isn't he?

LB: Is he thirties?

BP: Yes.

LB: [inaudible] and now I'm finding out what I--

VB: [coughs]

LB: 'The Passing', *The Passing of the Third Floor Back--*

BP: That's right.

LB: Made a tremendous impression on me.

BP: That would be thirties.

LB: Because he's, that scene you know.

BP: Yes. Yes.

LB: And my mother went to any of Conrad Veidt because of the Jewishness.

BP: Mhm.

LB: Erm that's interesting. She must've been very pro-Jew at that time. 'Cause we saw *Jew Süss* and *The Wandering Jew* and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*.

BP: *Jew Süss* was a remarkable one.

LB: Yeah.

BP: I've read that too.

LB: Yeah.

BP: I just forget who the author is.

LB: Yeah. Erm, no as I said my mother didn't go often but she went to George Arliss or a Conrad Veidt. She didn't go to the *Top Hats* of this world. Erm. [pause 2 seconds] 'Course she was rather serious, come to think of it.

BP: George Arliss of course was eh, that's an interesting thing.

LB: He always seems to me to have been an old man.

BP: Well he wasn't so young then.

LB: No.

BP: 'Cause I don't know what his earlier, but he's a very famous actor in his own right sort of thing.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Stage actor.

LB: Mhm.

BP: He was very ugly man. But the interesting thing about George Arliss. I remember seeing Bette Davis being interviewed.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Bette Davis!

LB: Mhm.

BP: Who said that she was trained by Mr Arliss. And in the conversation she called him 'Mr Arliss', all the way through.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And he was her absolute idol.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Which I think's rather remarkable.

LB: Mhm.

BP: As she was so American, he was so English.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But apparently he must've appeared in Broadway shows.

LB: Mhm.

BP: So she was very proud of the fact that she'd appeared with 'Mr Arliss.' And she stressed this 'Mr Arliss'.

LB: That's interesting.

BP: Isn't it?

LB: And the rest of us said George Arliss.

BP: 'Course really when you think of it. I mean, [pause 2 seconds] eh people like, well speaking for me and probably the same for the two of you. And my parents. We are all pretty abysmally ignorant of what was going on the straight theatre in London sort of thing.

LB: Mhm.

BP: You know. I for instance saw very few live shows in Manchester. Until you know, until I saw the variety shows in Manchester.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But no, not many straight shows.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But my mother would go to Manchester, to see a show. Probably, I would say on average, probably once every three weeks!

LB: Mhm!

BP: When I think back. See my people were bakers.

VB: Right.

BP: And my mother had Monday as her day off.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And very often she and an aunt, they'd go to Manchester.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: Used to tell a wonderful tale about, [amused laugh] they went into the Opera House, [pause 2 seconds] and not knowing quite what was on. [pause 2 seconds] And it was Wagner's 'Parsifal'. [pause 2 seconds] Can you imagine? Two, two sort of typical Lancashire woman sitting watching 'Parsifal'! [bursts out laughing] And my auntie's saying, "Don't think much of this!" [hearty laugh]

LB: [laughs]

BP: Absolutely no action you know.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Apparently most of the action takes place at a vigil over a dead knight or something. [laughs]

LB: [laughs]

BP: On their day off! On their day off. God. They were used to seeing Cochrane reviews and things like that, you see.

VB: Ah.

BP: They found themselves watching 'Parsifal'!

VB: Just out of interest, what was it that your family did? What did your father work at?

LB: Eh he had a news agency.

VB: Right.

LB: A newsagent, sweets, eh stationery, all that sort of thing.

VB: Yes.

LB: Just opposite, the shop opposite Westhoughton station.

VB: Ah right! Yes.

LB: But it wasn't as big as that then. And funnily enough when we came down here in 1933, '32. Christmas 1932 we came down here. And I can clearly remember breaking my heart and thinking nothing could be as beautiful as where I'd been brought up.

BP: [laughs]

LB: But when I look at it now I thought, ye gods! Because in those days our back yard, which was a big back yard you know. We had a horse and a governess cart you see. [chuckles] Uncle Jack Law who rented a shop nearby had an Austin Seven! There weren't many cars in Westhoughton then. Erm but at the back of that, there was a working colliery. And to me it was beautiful. [laughs] Aw, what good taste I had as a child!

VB: It must've changed quite a lot. I mean from what you're saying.

LB: Oh yes! Yes. And erm, [pause 2 seconds] it was the beginning of North Ward. Where my father was erm--

BP: [yawns]

LB: Like a councillor for North Ward. So everybody knew him. And erm I thought, I thought all that area was very beautiful. And of course it was a case of leaving what friends I'd got there again. You

see in the thirties, the people I'd been brought up with were up there. [pause 2 seconds] Ah. [pause 3 seconds] No, I, I, I can't remember. [pause 2 seconds] I hadn't got any particular teenage friends. [pause 2 seconds] Lots of people that I'd known from junior school. But you see, as I say, I was the only girl going to the Church Institute [school]. Which is now Canon Slade. I was the only girl from Westhoughton, until probably I was in the sixth form and a little girl from Daisy Hill, she started. I think, [pause 2 seconds] I think probably there might've been four of us altogether. But overlapping. We would only be two people overlapping at any one time you know.

VB: I see. Yes.

LB: Erm, [pause 3 seconds] so I didn't go often with eh, with friends. [pause 2 seconds] I think I had a deprived teenage! [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: She did.

LB: I did! I mean, I mean it sounds daft to say it but, there again you see. I went to Sunday School out of the town. So, whereas, if I'd gone to the Bethel at the corner, erm, it was the height of the social life. They had a very good Sunday School. And a very good church. Erm they had a tennis club. But I didn't know anybody who, you know. I think that's wrong. I said before, you see parents doing this now. I think it's very wrong. Very wrong. Eh because all my, all my recollections of Sunday School were tearing back for the tram. You'd no time to talk to anybody. And you weren't allowed to talk in Sunday School. If you did you were reported. I was often reported.

BP: Do you think there was probably quite a lot of girls like that? Do you think at the time?

LB: I think, I think there were. Because when erm when I was teaching across the road, our senior English teacher lived across the road. Now she had a very clever daughter. I mean, okay, I got where I was with working. But Margaret was clever. And erm, across the other side of the you know, the little street, across there. Erm Laura. That was Laura. Erm who also was very bright. And those two seemed to have got their homework done as soon as they'd had their tea and could go off and play tennis! Now I couldn't. Even if there'd been a tennis club that I could join. Erm but spent my time

sitting in that corner swotting my blasted Latin and Greek. Useful you know. Sometimes you get a clue in a crossword.

VB: [coughs; laughs]

BP: Actually we've both got the same moan. See we were both at the same school.

VB: Yes.

BP: And erm--

LB: Classics. Classics. It sounds all right. Sounds very impressive doesn't it?

BP: It's nowt to do with films really but--

LB: It's not is it?

BP: This is the thing. It's interesting. I often think about this. Because both of us, [pause 2 seconds] it was all right for you in a way, because you did go in for teaching. So it was, although the subjects were no use to you whatsoever.

LB: No. None whatsoever.

BP: It did seed you to become a teacher. Whereas for me, a working-class boy if you like. You know my people were small fry. You know.

LB: Well my dad was.

BP: Eh--

LB: Small fry.

BP: Well very similar backgrounds really. Little shops you know. But to make me take Latin and Greek against my will--

LB: And classical history.

BP: Was insane!

LB: And Greek Divinity.

BP: Was absolutely insane! I mean, can you imagine an ordinary kid [pause 2 seconds] that doesn't even want to become a teacher, let alone a parson.

LB: Mhm.

BP: What a waste of effort! But sorry Val, this is not what you want is it?

VB: It's--

LB: This is totally off the point but I must tell you. We listened to erm, was it 'Desert Island Discs'? It was. 'Desert Island Discs'. The Archbishop of Canterbury. A few weeks ago.

BP: Oh yes! Yes. Yes.

LB: And his desert island discs were delightfully ordinary. And Bert began to laugh and I said, "What's the joke?" He said, "This man never went to a grammar school."

BP: That's right.

LB: He could've gone to a grammar school but he was happy at his, his comprehensive. And he stayed there.

BP: Stayed at comprehensive.

LB: Senior school. So eh he took his exams afterwards you see. And we had little laugh. He says, "When I think of all these hmm mhmm mhmm, doing Latin and Greek to go to Oxford and they're only little parsons in small parish churches. And here he is!"

BP: The gaffer! The very boss. [laughs]

LB: [laughing]

BP: The very boss. Hasn't even been to a grammar school.

LB: It really made me think. I mean just imagine kids like Bert and I were, a crowd of us there, doing the Acts of the Apostles. And St John.

BP: In Greek.

LB: In Greek.

BP: Very useful you know!

LB: And I was still doing Greek and Latin at what is now Higher. And I was going to college to teach teenage children.

BP: Do you think that, you know Val should take special knowledge that she's seeing two embittered pensioners--

VB: [laughs]

LB: [titters]

BP: Isn't she?

LB: We-ell. Well.

BP: Embittered.

VB: [laughs]

BP: It's held us back all our lives! This is why we turned to crime!

LB: [laughing] This classical education is--

VB: [laughs]

LB: Not what it's cracked up to be is it?

BP: [laughing]

LB: [laughs] No but when I came to fill that in, and I realised [pause 2 seconds] how inadequate my social life had been, I think--

BP: You see Val, you've upset her you see.

VB: Aw dear.

BP: It's all your fault.

LB: I mourn, I mourn for the fact that I have never whooped it up at all. And when I was in my, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I was stuck on top of a hill! [pause 2 seconds] Mind you that was a bit more fun. [pause 2 seconds] Ooh! [laughs]

BP: But there again you see erm I went to the cinema a lot to the detriment of my education in a way.

LB: Yes but you got there in the end!

BP: Yeah but that's more, that's chance isn't it? It's not--

LB: It's not, it's not really chance. I mean, any more than it was chance me putting one foot on the ladder. And ending up doing administration for a comprehensive school when I wanted to do was teach history! I mean--

BP: What's this got to do with the cinema?

LB: Anyhow, have you anything else to ask us about the cinema?

VB: Well, actually just while we're on the subject of your own background, I was wanting to ask just one or two questions--

LB: Mhm.

VB: If that's okay.

BP: Sure!

LB: Yeah.

VB: Erm, one of them was it the Church of England that you were raised in?

BP: Yes.

LB: It was the Church of England Grammar School that I went to.

VB: Yeah.

LB: But you didn't, nowadays I think the qualification to get into to Canon Slade [referring to the Canon Slade School, Bolton] is that you have been a regular attender at your own, not necessarily the Church of England--

VB: Ah I see.

LB: Which I think is very good of them. They are relaxed there. But in our day it was very... It was only years later that I discovered that they, the school got a grant, one assumes from the Church Commissioners, for the number of people that were going in for the Church or that were doing Classics you see.

VB: Ah I see!

BP: Mhm.

LB: They got their grant on that.

VB: Mhm.

LB: But I only got that from Miss Wood.

BP: Mhm.

LB: Donkeys years later!

BP: Well she was a member of staff so she'd know.

LB: Yes.

VB: Mhm.

BP: But the funny thing is that neither Lois or I were Church of England churchgoers.

LB: No. No.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: Which is curious.

LB: Yeah.

BP: We were both scholarship. That's probably the reason.

LB: Mhm.

VB: Yes.

LB: Whereas my mother, apparently when I got my scholarship and went for the oral. You know you did a written paper and then an oral paper--

VB: Yeah.

LB: And the headmaster attended. My cousin was at Hindley Grammar you see. And eh he said, "What? Are we having another little Basnett?" And my mother took offence [laughs] at this. "Neeoh! She's going to Bolton." Erm so I was allowed to take a County scholarship into the Borough.

VB: Ah I see.

LB: And pay the difference. My parents paid the difference.

VB: Yes.

LB: And then I got the Shepherd's Cross Scholarship.

BP: Mhm.

LB: In the third year.

BP: Mhm.

LB: They must've been hard up for somebody.

BP: It was, it was the only, I understand it was the only secondary school or grammar school in the diocese of Manchester. So I was told, I was under that impression.

LB: Mhm. The only church one.

BP: Yes the only one in the diocese.

LB: Mhm. The diocese.

BP: All the others were elementary schools.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: The church schools.

LB: Yes. I see what you mean. Yes.

BP: There was church you see.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Our principal was a parson.

VB: Right.

BP: And the governors were all parsons.

VB: Yes.

BP: And a lot of my contemporaries, amongst the boys, were parsons' sons.

VB: Ah I see. You say that neither of you were actual Church of England goers.

BP: No.

LB: No. No. No.

BP: My parents would've described themselves as Church of England.

VB: Yes.

BP: But they never went to church.

VB: Ah I see.

LB: My mother was a Christian Scientist. My father would've called himself an, an Independent Methodist but he was on independent of the Methodists as well. [laughing]

VB: I see. [laughs]

BP: My father originally was a Methodist, I presume, but was very--

LB: Mhm.

BP: I mean, my father had been a regular attender at chapel and church.

LB: Mhm.

BP: In his youth.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And so on. But as a mature man. Once he was married and a father you might say, he just never went anywhere near a church.

LB: Mhm. Anyway, any more questions?

VB: Yeah. The only other thing I wanted to ask, just to get a bit more of an idea about your background was erm, if you had any strong political views at all?

BP: What? At present?

VB: At present. Or, you know, if you've been a member of a party or anything. I mean, you were saying your father was a councillor--

LB: Oh no! While all the Basnetts were socialists--

VB: Yeah.

LB: And vegetarians. And erm--

BP: [bursts out laughing]

LB: And Independent Methodists.

BP: They were a New Age lot I think!

LB: Ha! Ha! Ha! I always, and it sounds horrible to say this, but I always think that my grandfather who was, who was born in 1834. So erm--

BP: That's amazing isn't it?

VB: Yes.

LB: You see when, I was six when he died and he was ninety-three. Erm, so really I was brought up on social history, not pictures. Social history. Erm, because we lived through it! Erm, but I always think that the old man must've thought of himself as a Thinker. You know capital T. In fact capital H and I, N, K and E, R. Erm, because the family seemed to have adopted anything, [laughs] anything that came out. I mean great-grandfather must've heard Wesley preach. And they, the whole thing is, is, you know, again, I don't know. Grandfather was an Independent Methodist but a Mormon. And eh, he gave that up [laughs] and tried something else. And a vegetarian but stuck to that. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] and the whole of the aunties eh seemed to have been eh, you know, sort of thought the old man was such a wonderful old man.

VB: Sounds like a remarkable family actually.

LB: Oh! No. Not--

BP: Tell Val about your father.

LB: About my father?

BP: Well he's interesting. I think he's very interesting.

LB: Well he was eh, he was. Eh, the funny thing is you know, I said that this teacher, my headmistress, when she was Miss Simpkinson. And in 1909 my father took North Ward for the Socialists from her father.

VB: Ah!

LB: Conservatives! Mind you he got in, he got in another year for another ward. And we were always best of friends but, but he was a, he was a Socialist. Eh, but not a, not a, you know, not a tub-thumper--

VB: Mhm.

LB: Or a shouter or anything. And if he'd been alive today, he wouldn't have known the party that he, he belonged to. Erm, and neither would grandfather. I mean, as a child erm there was a picture of Keir Hardie on there. You see they had the cottage next to the shop. Which is now part of the shop of course. And with my parents being in business I spent quite a lot of time with grandma and grandpa. And eh I can remember him coming through from the kitchen into the living room. And there was this picture of Keir Hardie. And the old man used to have a tail coat and stand with his hands under the tails and course he'd flap these tails. And commune with this picture. And I thought it was God! And I'm not being frivolous. I think it meant more to grandfather than God. [laughs] It was his God! But my father was on the Council from 1909. He died in nineteen-thirty eh six. Erm and I think he was on all that time except for possibly two years when my mother was ill. Erm... [pause 2 seconds] And he died as Chairman of the Council. We didn't have a town mayor in those days. In the Urban District Council. And I can remember my mother saying, "If he could've chosen, he would've died that way," you know. He died on his last day as Chairman.

VB: Aw, dear.

BP: Mhm. I think he was remarkable. I really do.

VB: Oh yes.

LB: He was the quietest, gentlest erm, he really was. And most indulgent because of course he was well in his fifties when he married. So but erm I was very much indulged by him.

VB: Yes.

LB: And I think my mother leaned the other way purposely.

VB: Yeah. So you were an only child?

LB: Yes. Yes. I was. Very much so. So really--

BP: What was that bit about the Basnett baby? Do you remember? About your father.

LB: Erm, when I started going to the local history lectures. They were done by the WEA man, the librarian, Chief Librarian. And they met at school. And eh, I joined this lot and-- [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

LB: [starts mid-conversation] In a caravan. "Oooh!" I said, "Suzanne [inaudible]." "Yes." I always say grandma asked but she was a cousin of my father's. Eh, and erm we were actually coming out then. At the next meeting he said, "What do you remember about her?" So, I was three when we left that house you see. And he said, "Do you know, I remember you as a baby. On Manchester Road. Because everybody knew when you were born. Baby Basnett has arrived!" [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: With her father being older you see.

LB: Great excitement. And my cousin May, who died la, what, last month?

BP: That's right. Yeah.

LB: Gosh! May, she died in April. She'd have been 91 if she'd lived to, to her next birthday. And eh apparently she and her mother and my mother and I went for a holiday to eh Colwyn Bay, somewhere there. Where they put me in for a baby competition which I won! [laughs] Sent a telegram home to my dad. [laughs; inaudible]

VB: Aw! [laughs]

LB: Oh dear mother! That's the twenties of course.

BP: It's interesting. I think erm, you see your father, the shop was very near this colliery. So her father had a very good relationship with the miners.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And tell Val about that. And about the man who phones,

LB: Oh yes. [pause 2 seconds] It always happens--

BP: That's interesting.

LB: It also has eh rather irked me that if you read a history book, they tend to make mining communities out, and miners, as very hard, tough, spitting, swearing, kicking, and all that. I was brought up with them. And they were the most, they were lovely. When I think of them, the shop was open until dinner time on Sunday. Now my father never smoked. Never drank. But the shop would be, we always had a group that we called his campers, and they all dressed up, smoking cigars you know. And I used to love this because of course my father didn't smoke so Mr Raffner would always buy my mother a quarter pound of the best chocolates instead of ever having a cigar you see.

VB: [laughs]

LB: I used to like Mr Raffner.

VB: [laughs]

LB: And then, on pay day erm which I always seemed to think was a Friday but, it might've been, well, whatever day, it doesn't matter, my father counted out erm a pound's worth of change. And in the shop, the back of the counter was full of these little, stubs of change. And he wouldn't change a pound note for nothing. But he'd change it for a packet of Woodbine which would be tuppence or threepence you see! And erm we, as a child, when we were playing on the end of the shop you know, and they were coming in up they'd say, "Love, go and ask your dad to change this note." And of course I was sent back with the note because he wouldn't change it. But erm it's funny eh Westhoughton was going to be twinned with Chippenham. And erm [background noise]. And erm the man who gardens, his wife's a Guide captain and she told me all about this charming man that they'd met at Chippenham. And erm, so I got in correspondence with him. I sent him a town guide or something like that. And he had written them a letter erm which was, you know, to be published they reckoned. And he said that he worked, he'd come obviously from a big house in the Eccles area wasn't it?

BP: Yeah, somewhere, Cheshire wasn't it?

LB: Yeah.

BP: I think Cheshire.

LB: Yeah. Beside Manchester. You know, Cheshire. And he obviously worked in the, eh this is the twenties again as erm, insurance agent. And erm in this letter he said that he was collecting money for insurance from people who needed it for bread. That he'd never come across anything like the poverty in Westhoughton in the twenties. Eh late twenties. And erm, [pause 2 seconds] he'd never seen children barefoot. And he said what he had seen there had made him a Trade Unionist for life. And eh he phones me up every second Saturday.

BP: Mhm.

LB: Didn't call last Saturday. Erm he, he must be quite an age. But the things that he's written from his memory. He could remember a colliery in Church Street. And he drew Church Street.

BP: It was a crude map.

LB: Erm he wasn't quite accurate. And he could remember a lock-up shop, a lock-up wooden shop and he had been told that the man who had that shop erm when he died was worth thousands! So--

BP: Oh yeah, don't you remember? He belonged to a strange religion.

LB: Oh yes! Yes, he belonged to a strange religion that wouldn't allow him to be operated on when he died because of this. So of course, so I wrote to him and said that that was my father. And the shop was not a wooden hut. It was a, a big erm, brick house! With a shop at the front, living accommodation at the back. And that he was an Independent Methodist. And my mother was a Christian Scientist, but he was operated upon erm to no avail. He died, [laughs] you know.

BP: And that he wasn't a millionaire when [laughs] he died!

LB: He wasn't! And I said, "I wish I knew where those thousands [laughs] were!" Because of course dying in 1936 when a hundred pounds was a lot a money! You know.

BP: Mhm. But it was funny because it had impressed him tremendously this.

LB: Mhm.

BP: He had only been here for, was it a year? No it wasn't much more than a year was it?

LB: It was, I think only something like fifteen months.

BP: Mhm. But he'd be very, when you think of it he must've come at the height of the Depression.

LB: Yes. Yes! Yes, he'd be there during the [General] Strike.

BP: When probably even miners were having a poor time.

LB: Yes. Well I think he was there during the miners' strike.

BP: Oh! I see.

LB: Yes. I think.

VB: Ah I see.

LB: Yes. So that '26--

BP: So that must have been tremendously--

LB: The General Strike.

VB: Yeah.

BP: But it was funny how the story got twisted, wasn't it?

LB: It's typical isn't it? Typical of hearsay and twisting. But erm the funny thing is that [pause 2 seconds] my recollection of bare feet is not as clear as that. I know that the children came into the shop in bare feet. But that was because they came in straight from bed. I mean before they'd had their breakfast many of them came in for a ha'penny worth of something. Ha'p'orth of something.

BP: I don't think, yes I'd been thinking, 'cause really--

LB: And of course you know, it is, they exaggerate it.

BP: Yes.

LB: It was poor. It was poor. But [pause 2 seconds] everybody helped everybody.

BP: But he came from an affluent background.

LB: True. True.

BP: See I was thinking, I can remember when I was very young seeing barefoot children.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But I don't think, again, I don't think they were barefooted from, necessarily from complete necessity.

LB: No.

BP: I don't think they were barefoot all the time.

LB: No.

BP: I think it was just--

LB: They had shoes.

BP: In summer probably.

LB: Yes!

VB: Mhm.

LB: Yeah they had shoes.

BP: Mhm. See we saw a lady this morning before you came we were chatting to--

LB: Yes.

BP: Who was a contemporary of Lois's when we were very young.

LB: Yes. She got a scholarship the year I did.

BP: And eh--

LB: She, she--

BP: And she was saying how she envied you dancing shoes because she had to wear clogs.

LB: Yes that's right. And I envied everybody who had clogs 'cause I couldn't make a racket with them.

BP: That's right.

LB: And I went to a, I went to a [laughs] a dancing class you know! You know Gordon [surname redacted]?

BP: Mhm. Yes. Yes.

LB: Well it was his mother who, who--

BP: Yes, dancing.

LB: Took this dancing class. Erm and I had little golden slippers with elastic round--

VB: Mhm.

BP: [laughs]

LB: You know. And there's Elsie been admiring those.

BP: All these years.

LB: All these years! [And that was my dancing shoes?]

BP: [laughs] But then again--

LB: Ye gods! That must be sixty-odd years she's envied me my dancing shoes!

VB: [laughs]

BP: I think though, these things get exaggerated rather.

LB: Mhm.

BP: I mean there's a lot of talk. The Gracie Fields you know, the, the clatter of clogs and the shawls and all that. Well that was pretty well going on when I was kid.

LB: Oh yes.

BP: You know. I mean old ladies, you see old ladies with a shawl. But they were even my mother's generation. Pretty well. Or later, even earlier.

LB: Earlier. I remember my grandma.

BP: I mean mill girls when I was a boy [pause 1 second] didn't wear clogs and shawls at all.

LB: No. No.

BP: But Gracie Fields was still singing about it!

LB: Yeah.

BP: 'Cause I suppose it was picturesque.

VB: Mhm.

BP: I mean like all Scots can play the bagpipes, you know what I mean?

LB: Mhm.

BP: Billy Connolly has had to sort a few myths out hasn't he?

VB: Yeah.

BP: But erm--

LB: Ooh, social history! Mhm.

BP: [pause 2 seconds] Have you finished telling us about your sordid past now?

VB: [laughs]

LB: My sord--

VB: It's fascinating to get that sort of background of the area as well.

BP: Yes. Yes.

VB: You know it puts everything into context.

LB: You see I remember, I remember the twenties. Much more clearly than I remember the thirties.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Mhm.

LB: Now Ada's, you know the one that you're going to see after lunch [referring to participant Ada Bellis]. Erm her brother was a colliery electrician. And she tells the tale of they couldn't, they worked, well I mean obviously, for safety reasons they would work during the strike. And they couldn't come up at the pit head near us.

VB: [coughs]

LB: They had to go the other way and I'd love to know, and every time she tells the tale I think I'll ask her! Where they came up! They had to go towards Hindley--

BP: Mhm.

LB: And come up, one assumes, near erm, near Borsdane Wood.

BP: Good Lord. Incidentally when you talk to Ada... I mean there's no point in us repeating it.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Really. But I would ask her about the big pit tragedy here.

VB: Right.

BP: There was a very very bad one, wasn't there?

LB: Mhm. That's social history rather than pictures.

BP: But it's interesting about the district.

LB: Three hundred and forty three. Three hundred and forty three--

BP: Mhm.

LB: Men and boys.

BP: It's a helluva lot.

LB: Pretoria.

VB: Ah.

BP: So that makes a big mark on the district.

LB: Yeah.

BP: You see.

LB: Yeah, there weren't many people on our post World War monument. Cenotaph. Because all the young folks, well not all but so many had been killed. Three hundred and forty three, dead.

VB: Mhm. That's really terrible.

LB: Erm and her father had helped to sink the shaft, where that seam went up.

BP: So she'll be interesting on that.

LB: Mind you, that's not pictures is it?

BP: No.

LB: It's not. Be honest.

BP: No but it's local, it's local background isn't it?

VB: [coughs]

LB: Yeah.

BP: I think.

VB: Very much so.

LB: But they, I can only remember going to the rink, once [referring to the Palace, Westhoughton]. Now, [pause 3 seconds] I can remember this lady playing the piano. Erm and I can remember the joy of feeling the floor doing that and the clonk as you walked down. But the Empire was quite a different kettle of fish. It was slightly respectable! [laughs]

BP: 'Cause Harry was talking, when you were doing, Harry [Ackers] was talking a lot about the local cinemas.

LB: Mhm.

BP: But of course his memories are pre-thirties. Or are they later?

LB: Well erm I taught Phyllis when I came here in 1943.

BP: Well there you are.

LB: Phyllis was in our school then.

BP: So his memories definitely, are probably the fifties.

LB: Yes, his memories are forties and fifties.

BP: That's right. They say this is very tricky because you need to check your own thinking often to think just where the thirties ended.

LB: Yes.

VB: Of course.

BP: The war's a jolly good marker.

LB: Well, I mean that does help me. I'd been teaching one week when war broke out. [laughs] Gosh. And I was in, well I was in, yes, South Manchester. I was at... Oh, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle Hulme, I was. And erm of course we got all the children from erm, [pause 2 seconds] [Euston?] Avenue and Prince's Road.

VB: Uhuh.

BP: All evacuated to us. Which always seemed to me rather a silly thing because we were just about where [laughs] the [inaudible] was, you know. Where anybody would coming in, would drop their load. Nobody ever did.

BP: They didn't. There you are you see.

LB: Mhm.

VB: Yeah.

BP: See we're really geographically different backgrounds although we're only a few miles away.

VB: Yes.

LB: Mhm.

BP: 'Cause I was in Bolton.

LB: Well I was living at home.

BP: Yeah but I'm talking about our origins.

LB: Yes. Oh yeah, yeah.

BP: You were brought up almost on top of a pit.

LB: Yes.

BP: Whereas, where I lived, on the Manchester side of Bolton, eh, there was the remains of a colliery. But it had closed long before I was, probably before I was born.

VB: Yeah.

BP: It was all pit land. But it was way back, you know.

VB: Yeah.

BP: So I never saw a miner. When I was a kid.

LB: Oh.

BP: So it was quite different.

LB: And the funny thing was you know, we were straight opposite the station. And if we wanted to telephone we'd use the station telephone. And if they were having boiled eggs they borrowed our eggs cups! [laughs]

VB: Aw dear.

BP: At the station!

LB: [laughs]. Yeah Mr Gibson would come across and say, "Mrs Basnett, can we have two egg cups and two spoons?"

BP: [laughs]

LB: [laughing] And the funny thing was, when I came to teach here, which was not my first school, it was my third school. Erm Mr Gibson was the caretaker. And eh, he was a darling if ever there was one. Couple of jolly good caretakers. Erm Mr Gibson and Mr Morris from down here. And eh, no, it never struck me you see. Erm that Jim had known me from being a baby. And erm my birthday's April the first. And my first birthday here and nobody breathed a word. I'd got away with it [inaudible; whispering]. And everybody knew. And when I opened the cupboard there it was. April Fool! And when I came in after break there it was. Box on my desk. Ooh a present you know. And I went in. Layer after layer. Box after box after box. And then eh a cornet, like an ice-cream cone with marshmallow on and it said 'April Fool!' [laughs]

VB: Aw! [laughs]

LB: And I thought, how did they know? And of course it was Mr Gibson.

BP: Of course Lois taught here for how many years?

LB: From '43 to [pause 2 seconds] '79. So you see when I go along Market Street I've taught everybody!

VB: Yes. I'm sure.

BP: Yes.

VB: Probably a couple of generations as well.

BP: Yes.

LB: Oh yeah.

BP: And it's very odd you see--

LB: And the boys. We amalgamated with the boys in '67.

BP: I was going to say. It's nothing to do with the background. You see Lois and I got together about five years ago, didn't we?

LB: Mhm.

BP: And we've only lived together for a matter of...

LB: December.

BP: Yes. Six months. So of course there's a lot of conjecture about me.

LB: Oh yes!

BP: And I get some very comical looks you know from people.

LB: But this was lovely. This Elsie that erm, got a scholarship. She eh, what was the parting, she'd wondered what Lois's boyfriend was like.

BP: Oh that's right. I'd wonder what your boyfriend was like.

LB: [laughing]

VB: [laughs]

BP: Who he was. But eh--

LB: No erm--

BP: So it's quite set them by the ears a bit you see.

LB: Oh I bet there's an awful lot of talk. But it doesn't matter. I don't mind.

BP: No it's rather funny really.

LB: I don't mind. [chuckles]

BP: But I feel sort of, [pause 2 seconds; laughs] not exactly guilty but, [laughing] you know. Bit sort of Foreign Fred! [laughs] Who's come on the scene! They don't know who I am you see!

LB: Well. I mean, the point is eh everybody who matters is chuffed to bits.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Oh yes. I mean it's nothing to do with what Val wants to know but--

LB: I mean. [laughs] We met one of, Elsie is a friend of erm a Mrs Ramsden. You know, Maggie [surname redacted] that we met.

BP: Oh yes. Yes.

LB: It was Elsie. Kathleen. Maggie [surname redacted]. And the friend she was with. And I. We used to go to Abingdon eh Drama. You know they'd very good amateur dramatic and that. Erm and coming along Market Street a few days ago, there was Mrs [surname redacted], who's always known as Maggie.

VB: Mhm.

LB: Because everybody knew Maggie [surname redacted] and Tommy [surname redacted]. And, talking to this friend. And erm, [pause 3 second] she said "Oh, I've not seen you for a long time." And her friend said, "She thought you were dead!" [bursts out laughing]

BP: [laughs]

VB: Aw dear!

LB: So we had a chat.

BP: Mhm. I like it you know. The thing about this place. And with Lois having got, she's so well dug in you know. 'Cause mother and daughter she's taught you know.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And I find it very nice because pretty well all my life I've had to move around a bit. So I have very few really old contacts. I used to live, I lived in Bolton till the war. I was in the Forces for six years. Then I lived in Bolton again. And then lived in Cheshire. Then came north of Chorley. You know on the way to Preston. Then moved again. So, all my old contacts had pretty well gone. And you don't build them up, the same when you're older. So I find it quite refreshing that everybody knows everybody.

LB: Mhm.

BP: [coughs] 'Cause I've lived in sort of suburbia. Such a lot. Where nobody wants to know anybody.

LB: Everybody wants to know everybody. Well not really now because a lot of the extensive building you see, is commuter--

BP: [coughs over LB speaking; inaudible]

LB: To Manchester. But erm--

BP: But it is different so suburbia. You know.

LB: Ooh! Very different. I mean--

BP: It's a lot pleasanter.

LB: Well I was coming along Market Street, to the corner there. Recently. Only a few weeks ago. And there's a grid in the road. And every car that goes over the grid, the grid goes boom, boom! Boom, boom! And I thought, ooooooh! You know.

VB: [smiles]

LB: If we'd been an Urban District Council that would've been mended. But Bolton don't do it. Erm and there was a man in front me that I didn't know. And as we came round the corner to cross the road, he turned round and he said, "Couldn't live with that thing! Westhoughton Council would've had that mended by now! Just imagine, they do nothing for us!" And I thought, he didn't know me and I didn't know him but we stood there like a couple of old buddies! Grumbling away!

VB: [laughs]

BP: Mhm.

LB: It's very true! He said, "Sam Smith'd have had that done!" And I thought, yes, Sam Smith would.

BP: You see I think this is true, erm the old lady down here. She's, well she's nearly ninety isn't she?
Gwen.

LB: Gwennie? Ooh no! Come come!

BP: Well she looks older than she is, doesn't she?

LB: Probably. She's well in her eighties.

BP: Mhm.

LB: I would say she's about Ada's age.

BP: She's past her first flush of youth.

LB: Yes. She'll be about eighty-five.

BP: And she was taken, week or two ago, it'd be a week or two ago, to Paris. And she'd never flown before you see. So a big thrill. Saw her last week and she was saying how unfriendly they were in Paris!

LB: [bursts out laughing]

VB: Aw! [laughs]

BP: And I said, "Well. Yes," I said. "I tried to do business in Paris once. And I found it very unfriendly." But as somebody had remarked, London is very unfriendly!

VB: Mhm.

BP: And the thing is, is if it's a great big city, you know, if you speak to somebody, they'd think you were accosting them.

LB: Mhm.

BP: You know.

LB: Mhm. But, you know, Disneyland in Paris or Paris Disney, whatever it is. They were very unfriendly. [bursts out laughing]

BP: [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

LB: Mind you, Gwennie is a character. Gwennie is one of the people who played tennis and Kathleen. Kathleen and Gwennie played tennis at the Conserv, the erm Congregational--

VB: Mhm.

LB: Tennis club. And eh, [pause 2 seconds] I can't think. It was, it was something. It might, it might even have been when I retired. And erm Kathleen said to me, "Come and have a cup of coffee," and such and such and that you know. When I got there they'd made a party for me.

VB: Aw! Lovely.

LB: And of course everybody starts talking, like we're talking now. And Gwennie says, "Eh, Kathleen, can you remember the first time when we went playing tennis in shorts?" she said. Gwennie. Think of Gwennie--

BP: In shorts.

LB: In shorts!

VB: [laughs]

LB: Her mack had a vent. You know. And her grandma pinned that vent up. But nobody, going from here to just beyond that chair could see that she was in shorts.

BP: That's funny. Didn't know that. That's funny.

LB: [laughs] Gorgeous thought you know!

VB: [laughs]

LB: And the pair of them were having a good laugh about grandma.

VB: Oh dear.

LB: [titters]

BP: [laughs]

LB: Come to think of it, that would be the thirties. That would be the thirties.

BP: Mhm.

LB: Just imagine. Anyhow I'm going to eh put some lunch on. Now! You talk. Talk quietly amongst yourselves.

BP: Very good.

LB: Erm, I'll take these. Oh look!

VB: I think that's the George Raft coin.

BP: Oh! [bursts out laughing] Oh that's the demo coin!

LB: Oh yes.

BP: I'm sorry I couldn't do it better than that.

LB: Oh I'm sorry! That's yours.

VB: That's okay.

LB: Erm no I thought oh, they've not taken that. Because when I went out I put the eh, window cleaner's--

BP: For a minute I thought the window cleaner had left it for the phone call.

LB: Good. Good. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll put this stuff out and erm I've made some erm, mhm, tomato, onion and egg.

VB: Oh lovely.

LB: And if I put it all out you can all have what you want.

BP: Very good.

LB: I'll put that out on the--

BP: You're coming back though?

LB: What?

BP: You're not going away or anything?

LB: I shall come--

BP: It's the way you sort of said it as though--

LB: No, I'll [inaudible].

BP: [laughs]

VB: Aw dear.

BP: So now is there anything else you want to know from me?

VB: Erm, well one thing I did was, I brought along an annual with erm some of the stars from the thirties. From 1938 that I thought--

BP: Oh!

VB: You might like to have a look at.

BP: Yes!

VB: [coughs] I think it's one of the erm 'Daily Express' ones or--

BP: D'you know, it's a funny thing that. Now you reminded me of something. We had, my mother had a book like this before the war.

VB: Ah.

BP: Very similar to this. And I used to look at it. How did you get hold of this? Second-hand shop.

VB: Second-hand shop in Glasgow.

BP: Yes.

VB: Yes. So did your mother like looking at the film magazines and things then?

BP: Eh, I think she wouldn't have bought them as a rule. But if they'd been there she'd have looked at them. You know.

VB: Yeah.

BP: Erm, [pause 2 seconds] quite different. [looking at book]. Anna Neagle is that? Yes it is. And Robert Donat. Yes, this is the thirties isn't it?

VB: Mhm.

LB: Incidentally, toilet across kitchen. Straight across kitchen.

BP: It's erm. [pause 2 seconds] Yes. Yes it brings things back you know.

VB: Mhm.

BP: There's one I'd forgotten. An English actress. Elizabeth Allan. [pause 3 seconds] Yes this is, this is the... [pause 2 seconds] I can remember that but I didn't see *The Good Earth*. And Paul Muni was the great American star. He was the man in *Scarface* and *The Good Earth*. And Emile Zola [referring to *The Life of Emile Zola*]. I don't think he made many films but he was, mhm, supposed to be a big name. *Lost Horizon* I saw. *Captains Courageous*? I didn't see. Now Emile Zola. There we are. Yes. Charles Boyer. My cousin was saying how much Charles Boyer was her big thing. The man with the gorgeous voice you know. But ah, that's interesting, early Rex Harrison. When he was just another English eh. [pause 3 seconds] And Robert Montgomery. In *Night Must Fall*.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Which wasn't a typical role for him at all. Oh David Selznick. Yes. I've seen him recently on there. Erm. [pause 2 seconds] You know I tend to watch things on telly about eh, about films. Oh there's a scene from *Dead End*. Humphrey Bogart. Yes. In my youth, we never thought much of English films. My particular you know, group if you like. Whatever you call it. Except the comedies. The Ralph Lynn comedies.

VB: Ah I see.

BP: But eh. [pause 3 seconds] They were nearly all... [pause 2 seconds] It was really. Again you see, you forget, or you tend to forget what you were like as a kid. As I say, we were different people.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Than we are now. But of course most of my contemporaries in the thirties, male contemporaries, would tend to go more for the eh, the tough guy films. You know James Cagney, the eh, Edward G. Robinson kind of thing. Which nowadays you'd probably think were over melodramatic, and so on.

VB: Mhm.

BP: In fact I saw one, an old film revised which was William Powell and erm, Clark Gable I think. [pause 2 seconds] And I can remember erm *Manhattan Melodrama* I think it was called. And I can remember seeing it, years and years and years ago, thinking how good it was. So I thought, rubbish. rubbish. Over melodramatic. Silly. Erm. [pause 3 seconds] But I think that's inevitable. Isn't it?

VB: Mhm.

BP: People tend to romanticise the past. Think how great it was. It wasn't necessarily very good. It's just at that time, you were satisfied with it. You see it's true. Lois was saying about how I went to the music hall a lot. Well a lot of the great favourites then, by today's standards, you wouldn't want to watch them. I mean I always think of eh, for instance, some of my pet hates. The great Harry Lauder for instance. To me he's a waste of time! Just used to laugh all the time and sing in a very indifferent voice. I mean nothing to it! Erm and lots of others! There used to be one, oh, what was she called? Eh, Florrie Ford, who was a very famous eh, rather raucous singer of the music halls. She was dead grim! Really horrible, really. Nothing about her at all. But these are the greats of the past. You know I sometimes think if they brought Marie Lloyd back and all those people, nobody would watch them.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Mind you, some of the moderns are pretty grim too! [laughs]

VB: That's true! [laughs]

BP: But the point made simply is one's own tastes alter as well as everybody else's. You know. And eh, you find yourself liking a lot of quite modern stuff. I mean taste in music I think, for instance. Eh, thirties. My, [pause 2 seconds] Bing Crosby was the fellow. Nowadays, I find it very boring. My age,

my, it's funny with music. You tend to have, [pause 2 seconds] eh, I've heard this discussed. You tend to have date turn-offs. The period past which you don't tend to go.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Either in serious music, or light music. And of course my, my musical, light music taste ends with the Sinatra era. Since then it's mostly rubbish. You see. Because that's my, my times. Pop of course I can't tolerate at all. Very little of it anyway. Erm, so there are limits to, I don't know. I find this very interesting,

VB: Mhm.

BP: Erm, entertainment. 'Cause, you know, I'm a frivolous person and most of my time has been spent in amusing myself you know. And I take, I take my entertainment quite seriously really. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

BP: It's very hard to answer. Very hard to answer because my [pause 2 seconds] current taste--

VB: [coughs]

BP: Erm, is different.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Eh, yeah, honestly. I think some of them I did. I can remember rather liking Dick Powell. Who is an interesting, 'cause he, after the war you know, he wouldn't make another musical. He did a lot of erm rather erm sort of detective roles. Apparently he never liked making musicals although he was a singer. Erm I quite liked him. Some of them I liked. Eh, but Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, I think, [pause 2 seconds] the level of toleration I think. Truly. And I wouldn't rave about them. But then again of course, there's another factor comes into it. Erm, during the thirties--

VB: Mhm.

BP: Before the war, I was a shop boy. And my girl, girlfriends, or particularly the woman I married worked with me. So as, what we call courting in those days, you tend to go to the cinema. You see we worked till eight o'clock at night. Nine o'clock on Saturdays. So one went to the cinema probably Mondays and Wednesdays. Eh because you'd go to the second house. Half past eight. You see. And of course, best seats were a shilling, five pee that is. A quarter [pound] box of chocolates was the same. [Came out as?] 5 pee. So was that was it, you see. You'd eh, well, 15 pee [inaudible], wasn't it? Although of course obviously it was more valuable than 15 pee today, clearly. But this was the thing that pretty well everybody did. And I, see Lois talks, she did have a rather different erm atmosphere in those ages, that age period. Erm my life was very limited to, I was a townie. I worked in town. Worked till eight o'clock at night. Eh, we only had one half day a week. Wednesday. Erm, money was a bit tight anyway. So even playing tennis, I remember I'd a second-hand tennis racquet, a very ancient design. Of which I was very ashamed. So, [chuckles] I'm not pretending I was underprivileged. But things weren't so hot. You know. Really. Until just before the war! Eh so, income limited activity. But the cinema was a big thing. The cinema was a big thing. And the music hall. Which I'd go to with my father. So, and I remember my cinema days, probably a lot more clearer than Lois does, because of that. And erm, [pause 3 seconds] [laughs] you could say, you could say it was a wasted youth in a way. Erm the other main interest of course was dance bands on the radio. Which again was a big thing with my age group. Erm oddly enough the music that was in musicals, very often. You know. Erm very clear memories of that. But eh, don't think there's much else I can tell you. See my background was a little bit similar to Lois's in that father came from a shop. But erm, [pause 2 seconds] it was a different part of the area so, there's a slight difference. Can't think of anything else worth telling you! Unless you've something you want to ask.

VB: Erm, I think we've covered quite a lot actually.

BP: Yes. Yes, I think we have. I seem to have talked a lot.

VB: It's been really interesting.

BP: Good.

VB: Erm, I can't think of anything just now that I--

BP: Mhm. There's nothing specifically about the films themselves. [pause 3 seconds] Well it's interesting to eh, here's a funny thing. Just an observation. Female beauty. And that's a thing. You see one's views are very, very influenced by the films. Very much so. Erm, and style and everything else. Erm, and I find now, quite truthfully, I don't see as many. [pause 2 seconds] Admittedly a lot of the beauty in those days was very artificial and over made-up and all the rest of it. But there were more beautiful women on the films then than there are today. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] and this is the thing that bugs me a bit about modern life. There is a cult of ugliness, I think, today. Or [pause 2 seconds] erm a disregard of appearance. You see celebrities on television in old jumpers and things and I honestly find that quite remarkably unattractive. And I think it's retrograde. I really do. Because beauty is a big thing to me. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] and I say that with a great deal of passion really. Erm in everything. and I deplore ugliness. And it's so unnecessary is ugliness. And it grieves me to see people making a fetish of looking frankly bloody horrible. Men with stubble. I mean what's good about stubble? I don't know what the hell's wrong with people. I think it's a sickness. Is that a bit serious? Bit solemn?

VB: I don't know. I mean I take your point about the, obviously style erm the sort of people in that book--

BP: Yeah.

VB: Are so different from the eh--

BP: Oh yes.

VB: Eh modern fashions and standards of appearance.

BP: Possibly. Possibly this was overdone, I don't know.

VB: Mhm.

BP: But when you think of the greats now. Admittedly there still a lot of very attractive women in films.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Obviously. Eh but [pause 2 seconds] I, I, I don't know.

VB: Who were your favourites among the women stars?

BP: What of this period?

VB: Yes.

BP: Well of course again, again one's taste would change. But I considered erm Marlene Dietrich for instance. Erm, oh of course, she'd got that little bit of exotic you see, hadn't she? Which made her very eh, very romantic.

VB: Yeah.

BP: But eh, quite honestly, to put it in rather, in the vernacular, I'd have fancied most of them.

VB: Yes. [laughs]

BP: In those days! [bursts out laughing] Who am I to be choosy, you know. But, no, there were very few that I wouldn't think were, you know, of the leading ladies.

VB: Yeah.

BP: There were very few that I wouldn't think weren't eh. Well of course that was the requirement wasn't it. Similarly with the men. I mean some of these men here are extremely handsome.

VB: Oh, very much so.

BP: Starting off with Clark Gable and eh me laddo there and Rob Montgomery all the rest of them. Robert Taylor was considered to be the handsome man. And of course to be fair I mean he was another fella! You've got to admit he's, he's erm, he's not a bad-looking bloke is he? Erm, but I think

generally possibly it was overdone. Eh possibly there wasn't as much character. Although, [pause 2 seconds] although I'm hanged if I really, really believe that. 'Cause I don't see why good-looking people are necessarily lacking in character. You know. I think, I mean in later films you got more realism coming into it. I can remember an American. I think he was called, no, not Paul Douglas. A rather overweight chap. With a very plain face and he, he had a series of popular roles as sort of middle-aged businessman type of thing. Erm, [pause 2 seconds] just trying to think. He was with erm with Judy Holliday in one or two things I think. But I used to think that he was more like an average Englishman, than average Englishmen in films. 'Cause they used to think, in English films I think the men were not a bit like the men I saw. I mean all the heroes were frightfully posh. Weren't they? If you saw anything about the Army, the hero was always an officer. If there was a sergeant he was dead thick. And there was usually somebody from the north of England who talked like George Formby. You know they were so stereotyped, weren't they? And I think the Americans did bring, they did eventually bring more realism into the things and then we lost a bit of the shine. So possibly in the early thirties everybody was a bit too glossy. But I think you can go to the other extreme! It's far too, I mean these, is it somebody called Tushingham or Tushington or something? She were in *A Taste of Honey* [referring to Rita Tushingham]. How anybody could think that one was attractive, God knows! You probably don't agree.

VB: [coughs] I've not seen it so I'm probably just--

BP: No. No. But you know I think, I think now erm although you see people with character who sort of would, would be eh the sort of people who would contradict what I've said. But eh,,, [pause 3 seconds]

VB: Were there any of the stars that you weren't so keen on?

BP: [pause 3 seconds] Erm well I think like most men, most young men particularly, we wouldn't go much on the, what you could call the women's films. You know. The sort of Joan Crawford melodramas. Usually with an ungrateful daughter or a false lover or something. You know the kind of things which were aimed at the female audience. Well naturally they didn't appeal much to fellas.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Logically. Erm as I say we'd go more for the James Cagney type of thing. Which presumably wouldn't be terribly attractive to girls.

VB: Mhm.

BP: You know. Seemed to be segregated. But erm, [pause 2 seconds] it's funny that we were so interested in, mind you we still are aren't we? Crime produces most of the entertainment, doesn't it? You know even today with 'The Bill' and things like that. Police things are always popular. So I, I don't know quite why it is but. I mean I find them more interesting. 'Cause you got to have a certain amount of villainy.

VB: Mhm. [coughs]

BP: What I do feel, and I probably said this when we were at the, at the, when we met last time. I think generally speaking the pre-war films were a big influence for good. I think they really were. Because, when you think about it, I mean I wasn't unique by any means. I was probably fairly typical. We'd go to the cinema a lot. And the example you saw was pretty good. I mean people laugh at the American censorship. You know where they had to put one foot on the floor where there was a bed scene. And always even married couples slept in separate beds. And so on. Which is laughable. Right. But nevertheless the crime sort of aspect was very moral. I think it was a good thing! 'Cause the baddies never got away with it. And so you were unconsciously, you were indoctrinated with crime does not pay. And I can't think that was bad.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Eh, [pause 2 seconds] you see people of my age are really pretty frightened of today's world. I am myself. I don't take my car into town at night. I wouldn't park it anywhere at night. I'd be afraid of it being, eh, I wouldn't walk about at night. Outside. Erm and I'm reasonably mobile and so on. Eh so this is, I know this isn't, it's not of your remit.

VB: Sure.

BP: Is it? But erm it is true. And we do wonder why this is! What did it? What caused it? Erm 'cause you see I, [pause 2 seconds] if I go back to my teenage days, [pause 2 seconds] I don't know a single

person that was a friend of mine, an acquaintance of mine who was strongly religious. We didn't go to church. Most of us. I think there'd be one or two probably went to church but I didn't really know any churchgoers.

VB: Mhm.

BP: And yet they behaved quite well. What the hell's gone wrong? I mean, what is it that's done it? Erm I'm sorry is this going off the--

VB: No, it's--

BP: Off the topic. And I honestly do think the cinema had a lot to do with the erm relatively good behaviour. Because you know, [pause 2 seconds] all my life since the war, well, even before the war, I've been involved in selling.

VB: Mhm.

BP: And this indirect influence is a very strong thing you know.

VB: Mhm.

BP: Suggestion. If you surround people by suggestion. I mean this is how everything is done. From politics to products. And I think people have been sold the wrong images. [pause 2 seconds] I don't think the films have necessarily become, they haven't become preachers of immorality or violence, necessarily. You poor girl. Is she all right? Can I give you some paracetamol or anything?

VB: Erm actually I've got a Lemsip with me [laughs]

BP: Well take it. For goodness sake!

VB: That'd be good actually.

[LB comes back into room]: Yes. Yes. Yes.

BP: Switch your thing off for a minute or whatever.

VB: Right.

[recording paused] [recording recommences]

BP: William Powell was the same sort of a role model. I can remember the first time I saw him he was one of the villains in *Beau Geste*.

VB: Ah!

BP: He was the man they stick to the table with bayonets. For stealing! Ah yes. Names you've forgotten you see.

VB: Yeah. I was interested there when you were saying that about Carole Lombard being a favourite as well.

BP: Oh yes. Yes. 'Course she got killed during the war didn't she. In an air crash. But, yes she was eh, I suppose it was a fashionable type. For that period. Because when I was a kid he was my hero. John Barrymore. And I remember my cousin used to take me to the pictures you know. And I remember she used to say, "Oh he's old! He's forty-eight!" She bought the fan magazines you see. I said, "He can't be! Nobody could be forty-eight!" You know. [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

BP: [pause 3 seconds] Mind you I suppose it was a much bigger industry wasn't it?

VB: Oh huge I think. Yes.

BP: Than it is now. Fred Astaire as a young man. Mhm. [pause 4 seconds] Lillian Lamonte. Good Lord, yes. Claudette Colbert. She was a woman who kept her appearance. For years. Didn't she?

VB: Mhm.

BP: And eh, that's funny. You were saying who would I think was good-looking. Now, when I was younger I never appreciated. But now, looking back when I see her now, I think what an exceptionally good-looking woman she was.

VB: Ah, that's interesting.

BP: It shows you. Your views change as well, you see.

VB: Yes.

BP: As well as the stars. But people say they tended to be the same type all the time. Well that's not quite true. [microphone being moved] This one I could never stick, Jessie Matthews.

VB: Jessie Matthews. No.

[LB comes into room]

BP: Could never stand her. Her accent. You know.

VB: Thanks a lot.

BP: Poor old Jessie Matthews.

LB: Ooh don't forget these.

VB: Oh right. Yeah. Oh actually that reminds me. The one other thing I was wanting to ask is erm, because I tape recorded our interview, erm I've got these forms that the University asks us to get folk to sign.

LB: Yeah.

VB: Basically so that you can't sue us for--

BP: Yeah. Sure.

VB: You know. [laughs]. Defamation of character or anything!

BP: Right. Right.

LB: Good Heavens!

VB: Eh it's just really to say that because it's all being kept in the University--

LB: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

BP: Is everybody so civil liberties these days?

VB: Yes, this is it. Yeah.

BP: Civil liberties. Civil liberties. [pause 4 seconds; signing forms]

LB: Eh, don't know what date it is.

BP: It's the 30th. Yes the 30th of May. [pause 4 seconds]

VB: Thanks very much.

LB: 1995.

BP: We haven't read it. You do appreciate--

VB: I know. I know.

BP: We've not signed away the mortgage.

VB: [laughs; coughs] Not at all.

LB: [laughs]

VB: She says now before you sign it. [laughs]

LB: I've signed away copyright in my contribution. [chuckles] Oh my goodness. We only just sign that bit don't we? Not this, understood and agreed.

VB: Erm, no I'll sign that.

LB: That's it, yes. Understood and agreed to. Right. Where's my car key? Car key?

BP: Do they make a lot of money out... [tape cuts out]

[End of Interview]