

Disclaimer: This interview was conducted in 1994 and concerns memories of 1930s life; as such there may be opinions expressed or words used that do not meet today's norms and expectations.

* Transcript ID: NM-92-005AT002

* CCINTB Transcript ID: 92-5-20a-s, 92-5-22a-r

* Tapes: NM-92-005OT002, NM-92-005OT003

* CCINTB Tapes ID: T94-2, T94-18

* Length: 01:37:53

* Glasgow, 7 December 1994: Valentina Bold interviews Norman MacDonald

* Transcribed by Valentina Bold/Standardised by Julia McDowell

* NM = Norman MacDonald/VB = Valentina Bold

* Notes: Second of two interviews with Norman MacDonald; Sound Quality: Poor; 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 B; Side A used in first interview conducted 17th November 1994]

[VB tape introduction]

VB: I'll just make sure that's, put that beside you as well. Mhm, I was wanting to ask you a few questions about, em, going to the pictures with your family. 'Cause I remember you saying that your mother took you to your first one. Mhm. I mean, did you go quite a bit with your mother?

NM: It's funny you should mention that, because I have the book here!

VB: Aah!

NM: And I was just looking at it, before you came in, and, eh, one of the references was to going to the pictures with my mother and father, and, it's strange really, I didn't often do that [inaudible] with a girlfriend or it'd be with another pal, [inaudible] still able to find the place, but it was there anyway. [background interference] I did go with my parents occasionally.

VB: I see. Did your parents go on their own? Did your mother go on her own at all?

NM: I don't think so, no. They usually went to a sort of theatre performance, like Christmas pantomimes and to repertory companies, at the Theatre Royal or something like that. But not very often, that was just a very occasional night out.

VB: Aye.

NM: But I don't think the occasional night out was to the pictures.

VB: Because I remember you telling me about going to the circus with your family.

NM: Yes, well let's see now, that was... [pause 2 seconds]

VB: Did your parents, em, go out a lot together, do you know or...?

NM: No. no, not out together, of course there was me to look after but, em, in those days there was quite a big family circle. Families, you know, they visited each other a lot. My mother had five or six sisters, most of whom lived in Glasgow. So, most of the socialising would've been done between houses. You know, they'd gather in a house [inaudible].

VB: I see.

NM: But not as much individual picturegoing.

VB: That's interesting. Because I was interested in your general social life at that time as well.

NM: Yes, well. [pause 2 seconds] [indicates book]

VB: Is that your...?

NM: Yes, em, it's entitled 'My Kind of Thirties'.

VB: That's interesting.

NM: Yes. It's just, em, it's about two years I think.

VB: Ah, I see.

NM: '35, 1935, 1936.

VB: Can I have a look?

NM: Of course. [handing over]

VB: So this is your memories of the thirties?

[following extract from 0:03:53-0:09:54 not transcribed; NM explains contemporary writings.

Rewrote twenty years ago from contemporary diaries, including description of Highland holidays, rare with families, 'a very special occasion, having a long holiday' to Lewis and Harris; didn't often go up there; usually people came down to Glasgow to visit because it was the city, a magnet. Family didn't often go to the Highlands, a lot of travelling and because of the expense involved. NM's mother's sisters, and family, had mostly been born in Glasgow but parents were from the Hebrides and Lewis and came to Glasgow in the 1900s. Not all were Gaelic speakers but one or two were. Father was a fluent Gaelic speaker. Didn't use the Gaelic very much and NM didn't learn it. The sisters were very close, lived in various parts of Glasgow but gathered in one or another house each week, all women gatherings, brothers didn't go. Only one surviving brother, other had been killed in the war. One went to South Africa. Mother was very independent, all sisters were in professions or businesses in their twenties and thirties, were way ahead of modern women, who are kept down and underpaid. These women made their way in a 'male-dominated society'. 'The Maclver clan'.

Exciting trip away from town, aged sixteen/seventeen. First time away. Beautiful journey along the West Highland line, in its heyday in the 1930s. Under threat at time of interview. The dining facilities on the train were 'very impressive'. Long train journey and boat journey, took 'the best part of a day'. A month's holiday. NM offers loan of volume.]

NM: Actually, when I look through it now, I did have a very exciting young life, not exciting in the way of doing wonderful things but being continually occupied with other young people, doing this, that or the other, playing cards or going to clubs or whatnot. My club was in the university, they called it the International Club. I don't know whether it still exists now, I don't think it does now but it was a very excellent student club [cup clanking noises on tape] in the thirties and, em, about half Scottish and half Indian, Burmese, Chinese, Germans, Russians, and it was wonderful, because as a youth I'd never come into contact with such a wide variety of races and people, and they were all there, and everything that was done in the club was a type of adventure. It was absolutely fantastic.

VB: I was meaning to ask you, were you interested in politics at that time in your life as well as now?

NM: Oh yes, I was really, very left-wing, politically. As a student [laughs] and very internationally minded, anti-war, anti-[establishment?] and so on, but not, I never really got involved in a political party. It was all debating and arguing about this, that and the other. And it was a great centre for arguing, the International Club. You got the benefit of the views of the Indian students, at that time you see India was a colony and many of the students of course were nationalists, just waiting for the day to come when Great Britain would be out of India, followers of Gandhi and so on. But it was a hotbed of interesting debate and, eh, quite a lot of discussion about the world in general. Invaluable. [inaudible]

VB: Where did that meet?

NM: Just, it was a house at the corner of University Avenue.

VB: Mmm.

NM: Your place is on University Avenue, isn't it?

VB: Yes, I'm actually, my office is in University Gardens.

NM: Well, it was on the corner of University Gardens and the Avenue.

VB: I know the building, yes.

NM: I don't know what it is now. But I don't think it survived the last war.

VB: No, I think it's actually part of one of the Departments. The History department, or something, now that building.

NM: Yes.

VB: That's interesting, though, must have been, as you say, a very exciting time in your life.

NM: Yes. There's interesting photographic records too. [following extract from 0:13:32 - 0:20:01 not transcribed; NM shows photograph in album. VB comments on photo. NM is in the background. Members of the International Club 'ten year league' in 1935. Explains notion club would all meet in Glasgow in ten years' time at twelve noon, June 1945. People were going back to their countries but, of course, wartime. NM lost touch with members of the club. No particular friends, 'I think they were all particular friends'. One person was from Bombay. 'All very much a circle of friendship', 11 University Gardens was the address of the club. Intended to put an announcement in the London Times for the reunion and to help if 'any difficulties, financial or other' to facilitate the meeting. Everyone had a copy of the photos. NM met one or two of the 'Scottish contingent' after the war, and the Captain from Bombay during the war, a veterinary surgeon in Glasgow, closely connected with the Bombay race-course]

VB: I meant to ask you a bit about your time in India as well. You mentioned going to see *Gone with the Wind* as well. Was that, obviously over here it had enormous publicity and build up to it. Was that quite a...?

NM: Well, I can't remember anything about the publicity, other than possibly it was available where we happened to be and going to see this film and being very impressed with it. I mean the surprise that it should turn up in India! Because at that time it was still a bit, it was pretty new.

VB: Yes.

NM: And was probably not showing in Europe! Because of the war situation, it was doubtful if it was even showing here.

VB: Yes.

NM: I'm talking about 19[45?].

VB: When you put it like that, that must be right.

NM: 'Cause India's got tremendous film background, I mean they made just hundreds of films in India, if not thousands, I mean they just churned them out. And that's been going on a long, long time.

VB: Did you go to see Indian films while you were there?

NM: I think I saw one, yes. But there wasn't much opportunity for going to see films. [inaudible] [often into towns?] [inaudible] Only once I saw a real Indian film.

VB: It's a very different aesthetic, isn't it, I think? I don't know much about Indian films.

NM: Well, it's all singing and dancing, and very stereotyped films, based on [pause 2 seconds] traditional stories, myths and legends and so on, the roles are all pretty static [inaudible] but, you know, that's their style.

VB: Yes.

NM: They like it that way, and they're very keen on music in films. They always have their music and songs. [laughs]

VB: Yes. [pause 2 seconds] I wonder if we could go back a little and if I could ask you a few more questions about your childhood experiences again in the cinema. Em, you mentioned being, when you went to see that Charlie Chaplin film with your mother you were told to...

NM: Shut up or get out!

[both laugh]

VB: Em, I mean that led me to thinking about how the [clinking of cup noises] staff behaved, were they quite strict?

NM: They were very pro-active, the cinema staff, they were in complete control, and obviously present and there were plenty of them. I don't know what they're like nowadays, of course, but I suppose they couldn't afford anything like the staff they had then. But there was always a manager who was well dressed, well presented and, eh, saw to it that everything was done [laughs] in good order, decently, and, I mean, any disturbances were quickly sat upon, you know, and suppressed, except in the case of children. Eh, there were shows which were designed to attract lots of children and you couldn't expect them to be quiet [inaudible].

VB: How about the usherettes, were they...?

NM: Yes, they were always there, I mean you always got shown to your seats, you know, with a torch. [pause 2 seconds] And I don't know if they still do that?

VB: In some of the bigger cinemas, yes. Not so much though.

NM: No.

VB: I mean, you said that it was quite noisy in the children's matinees as well.

NM: Mhm. Yes.

VB: Mmm, I wondered if you could expand a little bit on that.

NM: Well there was no sound to compete with, you see, this was the silent screen, em, [pause 2 seconds] children would, [sighs] interpret what was going on to one another. I mean, they would comment to their brothers and sisters, the older ones [noise of cups clinking] would speak to the younger and tell them what was happening. And the younger ones would ask what was happening. There would be an element of an exchange of conversation and expressions of surprise, or regret, or horror, or disgust, or anger would very often break out, depending on what was happening on the

screen. And they would boo the villain and cheer the hero quite readily and that was not regarded as out of order.

VB: I'm interested when you say they'd explain the films to the younger children. I mean was that, did older children take, were they sort of minding the...?

NM: Oh well, probably several in a family would be there, and the younger ones would probably be [laughs] told by the older ones what not to do, or what to do, or what was happening or so on and, eh, I mean silence was no, there was no big deal at all. You know, to keep quiet was not necessary or required, and it didn't [hurt anything?] because you weren't disturbing anybody else, with noise, or scream loud, if you wanted to make a noise, then you weren't, you weren't distracting anybody's attention.

VB: Yes.

NM: But it varied, some, depending on the number of children in the place, and normally, I suppose, children in the matinee [is a place?] where you might expect to kind of, to be normal and to enjoy themselves, and that was what they came for, the film [laughs] [inaudible] along with the heroes and villains. The cowboy and Indian cult of course, was so widespread that not all, but most of the films, many of the films [of the?] 1920s were based on this never-ending American fixation. The cowboy and Indian [inaudible]. So children took sides and then the villains and heroes were always, widely appreciated [laughs] by those present.

VB: Did you, I mean did you really dislike the villains or was it more...?

NM: I think there was a cult sort of thing, that em, you would, you would at an early stage, distinguish who was doing good things, who was doing bad things and make your feelings known.

VB: It's interesting, I'm thinking of some of the baddies in, em, movies, and some of them are actually quite. I mean, I, I would feel towards them not, revulsion, you know, they can be quite interesting characters. I don't know...

NM: Yes.

VB: If you felt that when you were a child or if it was straight... [pause 3 seconds]

NM: I think you were, you were really concerned about, eh, reacting to a story and the story would reveal events which appeared to you as good events or, or, or bad ones which somebody was doing something [laughs] of an unacceptable character to somebody else, they were either stealing their property, or attacking them or, eh, laying hands on their womenfolk.

VB: Yes.

NM: Or, dragging off their cattle or something like that. And this was regarded as a thoroughly bad thing what these people were doing, you see.

VB: It's interesting, it sounds like you were taking quite a moral position on films.

NM: Yes, I would think so, yes.

VB: Do you think children learnt about morality from watching films or...?

NM: In a crude way, I suppose you did. It was always a presentation between good and evil, or what the filmmaker wanted to represent as good and evil. Unfortunately it was wrapped up in this situation as to: white man good, red man evil. And of course there was always the white man who was evil but he was easily distinguished by his bad looks [both laugh] and behaviour and so on. And eh, so you could make out the good and evil pretty readily because the way they were presented.

VB: I mean, was that something you were aware of increasingly do you think in the films, that sort of stereotyping, well I suppose it is stereotyping that you're suggesting?

NM: Yes, I think I was quite aware of it, children carried it outside the cinema, with them, boys playing at cowboys and Indians. [pause 2 seconds] That was simply a repetition of the qualities, that there was a good and a bad category of people, and the bad ones were readily equated with the Indian race, the coloured people. Non-white.

VB: Yes.

NM: And it didn't do them a lot of good [inaudible] [good entertainment?] It was very bad for the general attitude children for other peoples. I mean racism, it was just naked racism. Of course I'm perhaps exaggerating, I mean this was not all that the films were about. There were quite a lot of films to be seen and there were always other types, but the most popular type of films were of that category, racist and good against evil.

VB: Did you talk about things like that with your friends in the International group?

NM: Oh, in the International?

VB: I'd be interested, you know, in the sort of opinions.

NM: Well no, as far as we were concerned there was no racists inside the club.

VB: No, I'm sure that's not the case.

NM: Yes.

VB: I meant did you ever talk about the way, say, people of other races were represented in, in the cinema?

NM: I don't remember that. I don't remember that. The only, eh, the only thing I do remember, of course, was the political attitude to political racism, that's to say, imperialism. The Indians, particularly, the Indians were very politically minded. And, eh, I wouldn't really call it racism so much as imperialism in those days, they did resent the fact they were being governed by the British Raj. I was astonished that during the war, there was the Indian army, of course, and the British army...

[NM discusses Indian nationalists in International Club, and wanting to help the Japanese to get the British out of India, British authority's lack of acceptance. A symptom of general point of view. Indian organising. And talking about this as well as with people from other countries, Nigeria and Burma. Extract ends 35:50]

VB: I was just wondering if anyone commented, they must have been going to the cinema as well, or...?

NM: Yes.

VB: Or did they go to the cinema very much?

NM: I don't know, honestly.

VB: I mean, I'd be very interested, you know, to know if they did or if they didn't, you know if there was something, em?

NM: If they...

VB: If they would enjoy films, or here or...

NM: Yes, I think, I don't remember going, except on odd occasions.

VB: Yes.

NM: Going in the company with any of the International Club people. We more or less all sort of confined our activities to the Club. And meeting in the Club, and talking and all the rest of it but, for going out on the odd occasions, it was only our friends outside that we went with. We didn't go out, because we were Club members [inaudible].

VB: I see.

NM: I don't [know what their?] reaction to the films would be, but, erm, they would still, it wouldn't alter their outlook, as regards to their own countries, [inaudible] independence, [inaudible] I'm sure it wouldn't alter that.

VB: No, sure. And, I mean it would just be interesting to know, erm, how they perceived, erm, some of the films, but...

NM: You see, very very few of the films of Hollywood, which were naturally American, dealt with foreign countries or foreign people. You know, they were extremely narrow minded from that point

of view, they were all about America and American people and so on. Internal affairs and so on, they didn't get involved in [laughs] international comment and international problems [inaudible].

VB: I mean, you mentioned enjoying Grierson films in the thirties. I was wanting to ask you a bit more about that, I mean, if you enjoyed documentaries.

NM: Well, I did very much indeed, the documentaries were, a man called Flaherty made some excellent films.

VB: Was he the one who made *Man of Aran*?

NM: That's right, yes.

VB: It's a wonderful film that, I saw that quite recently. [pause 2 seconds]

NM: Yes, well, because they were really trying to say something serious about situations and problems, [pause] which I very much appreciated and liked very much. Apart from which, they were very good filmmakers and knew what they were doing.

VB: Did they show that sort of picture at the Cosmo, or...?

NM: [pause 2 seconds] It must have been. I don't think the ordinary film screens would show much in the way of a documentary, yet they were very popular and well-known. I don't know [where they would be shown?] - I can't remember whether they would be shown...

VB: It's quite, I mean, to take that example, *Man of Aran*, it's quite a long film, isn't it. I mean, it's not something that would be shown, whereas some of the Grierson films are quite short, aren't they?

NM: Yes. Well, they were made for [pause 2 seconds] for [different?] departments, the fishing industry, the railway, *The Night Mail* [inaudible], but nowadays the documentaries don't lend themselves to [inaudible] treatment where [inaudible] as far as I can tell, you can make them as long as you like, in fact now we're getting films three or four hours long. There's no limit but [inaudible] extra hour....

VB: I, I mean that, *Night Mail*, I mean, I'm aware of your literary interests as well, from what you were saying last time. Did you enjoy that sort of film, where you had or suppose it's...? [laughs]

NM: Oh yes, [inaudible] [it was an interesting film?] To actually see things [sigh] happening which you knew about, I mean it was part of your sort of life, [going in a train?] It wasn't, it was no longer cowboys and Indians on the far horizon, you're actually seeing something about your own country, in terms which you could understand, because there wasn't much of those, outside of Grierson, documentaries [very few films treated themes set?] [inaudible] in Scotland, and I never remembered seeing a film which had Glasgow as a background, never, never, or anywhere. There were one or two, of course, that had Highland glens and tartan, but then, if there was a city, it was London or New York or Chicago or something like that. You were very familiar with these places, you could practically [laughs] practically tell what street it was in New York or Chicago or London but never Glasgow, never [inaudible]...

VB: That's interesting. I mean, when you're saying that, that you felt like you knew some of the American cities.

NM: Mmm. Oh yes. [inaudible], you'd recognise they were showing you Fifth Avenue in New York, or Broadway, the Bowery and so on but, eh, you felt that you were very much at home there!
[laughs]

VB: Did you feel that you got to know the stars as well? I mean, were they?

NM: Yes, oh yes, they were really, eh, you could identify with their characters and their [feelings?] of course were familiar, and voices, accents and so on, very much, and I think everybody wouldn't have been surprised really if you had run into them somewhere in town, if you'd thought twice that they would they ever come here!

[both laugh]

NM: They would never come to Glasgow! [laughs] Or Scotland - these were people who inhabited the far horizons of Hollywood, New York and Chicago, San Francisco and all [inaudible] places.
[laughs]

VB: Actually, that reminds me, I brought, since I saw you last, I found a couple of second hand books in the shop of thirties stars which I thought you might like to see. [laughs] So I just brought these along to let you have a look [passes over to NM]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape 1]

[Start of Tape 2]

[Start of Side A]

[general conversation re. adjusting]

NM: Jessie Matthews. I saw her, she came to Glasgow.

VB: Did she?

NM: 1938, 1938 I think. She came as a guest of some film club or film business, film industry, the Scottish film people invited her to Glasgow and she came up and she appeared in the Charing Cross, what was it, big dance hall there was in Charing Cross, and I went accompanied by my girlfriend, eh, and she sang, she was a marvellous singer, and made herself very [laughs], acceptable to the audience and danced around, and the band played on, they were [inaudible]. I was given tickets for this show, by a gentleman in the town, an accountant who had something to do with it, with the organisation of this particular event and we had tickets, my girlfriend and myself, and we danced away and [pause 2 seconds] and was duly impressed by Jessie Matthews, although she wasn't one of my favourites because I couldn't stand her appalling English accent, she had a terribly wawwy [imitates, making appropriate sound] [laughs] but it wasn't so bad when she sang because you really couldn't get the accent then. But she was a very good singer.

VB: Did she have a band with her then, when she was...?

NM: Oh, there was a big band there, of course, it was a dance you see, and it was a [low complex?], a kind of [low?], I don't know if you'd know the place nowadays, it's now a nightclub or a [inaudible], it's just up from Charing Cross on the left.

VB: Aah, I think I know the place.

NM: It used to be called, I think it was the Locarno, Locarno Ballroom.

VB: Yes.

NM: It was a nice place and clean dancehall but [inaudible].

VB: And was that quite a grand place in the thirties then or...?

NM: Yes, it was something like the Plaza, you know? It was the same status as the Plaza, oh there were several others in the town [inaudible] quite high status....

VB: I see. Did you get quite dressed up to go to see Jessie Matthews?

NM: Oh yes, oh yes yes, you had to put on your best. [pause 2 seconds] I don't think I had to put on evening dress for that, I can't remember that. I don't think so. Just [laughs] [inaudible] my collection.

VB: That's interesting, I didn't realise she'd been to Glasgow.

NM: You'd didn't realise that I'd been to Glasgow?

VB: [laughs] No, that Jessie Matthews had been to Glasgow!

NM: Oh! Jessie Matthews, ah. Well, but I think that was maybe her one and only visit. So, as I say, she was invited up by this cinema organisation who, I don't know who it was, I can't remember, [pause 2 seconds] but she was there. [pause 3 seconds] [inaudible] [looks at photograph in book]

VB: Ah!

NM: A big occasion. I can't remember whether this was a big occasion or not [inaudible], it probably was. It probably was, yes. Because I remember my girlfriend was wearing an evening gown, sort of,

[possibly?] a white tie and [pause 2 seconds] dinner jacket, and so on. And then, of course, there was a lot of dancing at the university, at the union, student's union, there were dances. [inaudible]

VB: I see.

NM: [inaudible] Do they still have Daft Friday?

VB: Yes, they do. Yes. [laughs]

NM: [laughs] They do. That was going in the thirties.

VB: Mmm.

NM: So, [inaudible].

VB: Was that something you enjoyed? The Friday night dance?

NM: We didn't go very often on a Friday night. But eh, on some occasions, and sometimes also on a Daft Friday event. I liked dancing [pause 2 seconds] but, em, yes, I didn't go every week, but if there was other special occasions, it was more of an occasion which you'd be involved in dancing because, it was more of a special occasion and an event than a dance. [pause 2 seconds] And of course, there were family occasions, weddings and so on, [inaudible], [venues, restaurant floor?] dance the night away.

NM: But dressing, of course, was very important. [pause 2 seconds] People did take more care with their dress than I think, I can't say for people who turned up casual, I dare say they've got their own way of dressing up, but personally, but, I should say, normally it's a very casual, but in those days [going to dances?] more or less inferred that you would put on a show clothes-wise. [inaudible] [looking at book] Charles Boyer! He was a young fellow there!

VB: So was that someone that you liked or...?

NM: Yes. I liked his way of acting, that lovely French accent, Charles Boyer. [pause 3 seconds] [looking through book] [1938?] *Tovarich* - I saw that, *Tovarich* - Claudette Colbert with Charles

Boyer. The big Russian films, of course, we thought were tremendously [pause 2 seconds], *Battleship Potemkin*, [inaudible] that was [pause] [facial expressing showing appreciation] the big long and dramatic Russian films, because they were so, so impressive, really, sort of put this [straight?] on the screen, and [inaudible] went right into the sort of events which had shaped Russia, Russian history. [pause 2 seconds] The revolution and so on. [pause 2 seconds] Quite impressive.

VB: Did you feel that they were, when you're saying that you learnt about Russian history, I mean, in a sense it sounds like they were almost educational as well as enjoyable.

NM: Oh they were, because the [pause 2 seconds] sort of. There was one in particular which dealt with the [pause 2 seconds], see if I can remember the names of the film [inaudible] [[possibly referring to *Alexander Nevsky*], well it dealt with the medieval history of Russia and the invasion of the Tartars, and the resistance of the Russian people to the invading hordes, and the Mongol eh, tremendous scenes, really quite exceptional. Anyway, other films about the Tsars, Tsar, there were one or two Tsars in Russian history who were particularly cruel and, em, caused it distress and the [inaudible] country's, the Empress, Catherine [inaudible], Catherine [of Russia?]. [To be honest?] they brought in, I, I suppose in a way they were all propaganda films, which we didn't know because they were painting a picture of Russia which basically, at the time, the film producers had to make anti-Tsarist eh, pro-revolutionary sort of Russian history. Perhaps, the truth as they saw it meant that anything to do with the aristocracy and the Tsar bad, anything to do with the peasants and the workers was good. But eh, [laughs] they certainly knew how to use the screen to get their message across. They were great films.

VB: I was thinking about that one about the icon painter that you were mentioning.

NM: Oh yes [I've seen that, there's one in the living room?] [inaudible]

VB: [inaudible] thinking that it's, I'm not sure if it's thirties or forties, *Alexander Nevsky*?

NM: *Alexander Nevsky*? Aw no, he was one of the heroes of Russian history. I saw that, Nevsky. He was a Russian painter who [inaudible], at the time, [inaudible] he was a big Russian hero [inaudible]. Nevsky. In the 1970s I went several times to have a look at the place.

[discussion of visit to Russia in the 70s, 'things were quite good', Cold War on, and attitude to the West had undergone a change, led to great interest; tourism being encouraged "an impressive show"; marvellous place; visited Moscow: the Kremlin; wonderful sights and very welcoming to visitors; many opportunities to see the sights; great atmosphere, very friendly people and tourist guides; very safe, you could walk about "and there was never any fear", no matter how late; "things have changed now"]

NM: I remember going to the cinema there, once, I went to the cinema there, once in Moscow, I can't remember what I saw, it was quite a modern cinema. There were always queues there, yes, I think cinemas - there were not nearly enough cinemas of course - although there were a few cinemas in Moscow and so on, but they, people used to get tickets to the cinema from the union, workers, were our people, and then you got them dished out to the [blue workers?] but you could pay to go, but I think normally they probably had to ration entry to the cinema, and they had them through the workplace.

VB: Mhm.

NM: And they'd get their tickets for the cinema and, so that they'd have a chance of getting to see whatever was on then. Well, they were very cinema-minded people, the Russians, very cinema-minded. [pause 2 seconds] I don't know if they saw many Western films, not at that time probably [laughs]. But, I mean, naturally, of course, they did regard them with grave suspicion... [laughs]

VB: Mmm.

NM: ...Western films.

VB: I'm sure, coming from such a different tradition, as you've been telling me, you know, in the past.

NM: Yes, well I think the trouble was they didn't want people to see just how big the contrast was between living conditions in Russia, the Soviet Union, as compared with some of the Western cities, places [inaudible] [pause 2 seconds]. There were just as many social problems in the West and...

VB: Yes.

NM: But whether they were reflected in films, of course, I don't know.

NM: The Russians wouldn't accept films really if they suggested that things were much better in the West than they were [inaudible].

VB: Yes. [pause 2 seconds] I mean, that reminds me - I'm not quite sure why - but, eh, one thing that you mentioned in your list of films that you've seen was 'Art School Films', and you mentioned *Hell Unltd* one of them was and the other one was *Colour Cocktail*. Was that films that were shown at the Art School?

NM: That was films at the Cosmo, I think.

VB: Ah, I see. Films that were made in the...

NM: I think so. They were the local Art School Films.

VB: I understand, yes.

NM: Local films, that were screened.

VB: I wasn't sure quite what...

NM: No, it was at the Cosmo that they were shown, among other things!

[both laugh]

VB: Were they shorts then?

NM: Yes.

VB: Ah, I see. [pause] I mean, you mentioned them, we've been talking about international cinemas as well. You mentioned quite a number of cinemas in the town that we didn't really talk about before. Places like the Regal.

NM: The Regal, yes.

VB: What, what was that like?

NM: The Regal was a big cinema, which one was it? I can't remember [inaudible] All the names have been changed now. I think the Regal would be in Sauchiehall Street.

VB: Right.

NM: Its name has changed several times in the last ten or twenty years, but it was near the Art School, anyway. Down from the Art School, Regal. That would have been a big cinema.

VB: Yes.

NM: One of the more recently built, well it must have been built in the thirties. They were all built round about the thirties, Picture House, Green's Playhouse, La Scala, Cranston's, the Regal, the Picture House along Sauchiehall Street, and they were all 1930s places.

VB: Is it the Green's Playhouse, was that the one that had a, a dancehall as well?

NM: Yes, on the top floor, I think.

VB: Was that one that, that you went to a lot or occasionally?

NM: Not very well, not a great deal, I'd not go there often but sometimes, I think [inaudible] the main Playhouse for years [inaudible] several times.

VB: Yes.

NM: It was reputedly the biggest in Europe!

VB: Really?

NM: Yes. It had four thousand odd seats. An immense place!

VB: It's amazing.

NM: Yes.

VB: It's hard to, hard to imagine.

NM: Over four thousand, I think it was one of the latest and one of the greatest in the day, to be opened in Glasgow, and it was the biggest at the time, not only in [inaudible] but the whole of Europe. I've heard it said, or seen it said, in many places.

VB: Mmm.

NM: Four thousand, two hundred or something like that. But that's big, that's a cavernous place [pause 2 seconds] and it was just off the Pavilion, the Pavilion Theatre. [inaudible]

VB: And then another one you mentioned was the King's cinema.

NM: Yes, the King's cinema. [pause 2 seconds] I can't remember. One of the [inaudible] it's very familiar and I've been there often but somehow or other it's slipped out of memory. [laughs]

VB: Sure. I mean, was that quite a large one, one of the ones in town?

NM: Yes, it was quite big, it was central, when you came along from Sauchiehall Street, it was very central indeed.

VB: I mean was there any difference in the sorts of films which were shown in the cinemas which you...

NM: [shakes head to indicate not]

VB: No.

NM: No, the Cosmo on many occasions was the only one which you could call a specialist cinema, one which eh, chose its [laughs] films rather than [inaudible].

VB: Yes. I was wondering about that, if you went to a particular cinema for a reason or, if it was just the films...

NM: No, I can't really, I don't think there was any distinction in regard to the kind of films that were shown, and whether, I think it would be all independent cinemas those days anyway [pause 2 seconds] but they would all have to take their turn with films coming [to get them?].

VB: I mean how did you actually pick what films you went to? Was there...?

NM: [pause 2 seconds] I'm not sure, there was a lot of free choice. So you could walk down Sauchiehall Street er, in the course of five, seven or eight minutes, and see half a dozen big cinemas and you could say to yourself, "That looks interesting," [laughs] you know, or "That doesn't look interesting," and [inaudible].

VB: So as simple as that, just sort of taking your choice?

NM: As simple as that, yes, take your choice, yes. Or somebody'd say, "There's a good film showing at this, that or the other cinema", so you'd have a look. But as for, I can't remember looking up the newspapers or that sort of thing. It was just, eh, looking to see what was there, or listening just to people talking about it and then going.

VB: Did you talk about films a lot though?

NM: [sighs] [pause 2 seconds] I don't think so, I don't think so, I think films were just more the thing in the sense that you saw them, you enjoyed them, or didn't enjoy them but when you went to see them [laughs] what was coming up next, it wasn't a subject of much conversation or discussion. And there were so many really so accessible, it was really just a question of, perhaps, someone saying, "That's a good film, so and so."

VB: I mean, did you ever sit through a film more than once, or...?

NM: No, I don't think so! [laughs] I don't think I did, no. I can't remember, you could have done if you'd wanted to, because nobody asked you to leave, you'd just sit and [no one?] [inaudible] [laughs]

VB: I mean, the other thing we didn't really talk about was, em, musicals. 'Cause you mentioned that you liked Deanna Durbin, for instance.

NM: Mhm.

VB: I mean, did you enjoy musicals and dancing in films or...?

NM: [sighs] [pause 2 seconds] I suppose it, perhaps it changed, your attitude to these things perhaps changes from youth, from childhood to youth, to early manhood, later manhood. Ah, I think originally it wouldn't have interested me, dancing and singing sort of thing. What you wanted was action, and scenic [laughs] interest but, eh, females dancing and singing were an acquired taste at a later age, you see. But most of the films which included dancing were very spectacular in those days. They had tremendous choreography, extraordinary film sets you know, and they were sparkling things, oh just Fred Astaire and, the, they had a fascination, they were wonderful pieces of cinema craft, and of course dancing, that's another [inaudible] and I would say that I accepted them but I didn't particularly go to see them, but I'd go if they put them on the show. [pause 2 seconds] Deanna Durbin, did I tell you I saw her in India?

VB: No, you didn't!

NM: In Calcutta [that was in a?] cinema, it was Deanna Durbin, what was the film she was in? [pause 2 seconds] Anyway, I remember at the time she was singing this song, "Don't tell me that the sun is shining, de de de", and that was in a large cinema in the centre of Calcutta and, a beautiful place, air conditioned, nice and cold.

VB: And when they were showing these films in English, surely a lot of people were... You were talking about the political situation then and yet English must have been quite widely spoken? Was it?

NM: In India, English's always been quite widely spoken.

VB: No, I was wondering about if they had any subtitles or, attempt to translate, or...? Or just shown as straight English films?

NM: Oh no, no no, no, they'd never translate them into Urdu or Hindustani.

VB: I'm sure that must have influenced who went to the pictures in India, then?

NM: Nobody could afford to go to the pictures in India. I'm saying nobody could afford it, but the vast majority of people in India were too poor, in those days, in those days, and I'm talking about fifty years ago now, the vast majority of people couldn't afford to buy a ticket for the cinema.

NM: And there was a big sort of upper class in India, [inaudible] and people in business and so on, who had connections with the government and its embassy, who all spoke good English, and had been for a long time.

VB: Mmm.

NM: And so the clientele for the films were amongst the people who could speak English, who in those days were the special classes, not the ordinary man in the street.

VB: That's what I was wondering.

NM: Whereas now, since independence of course, all the films are produced in the language, and whether they have English subtitles or not, I don't know, I doubt it! [laughs] [inaudible]

VB: Yes.

NM: Although it is a country where English has almost the status of an official language. It had at the beginning of independence, English was an official language in India, only recently has it become displaced from that position. [pause 3 seconds] St Louis. Durbin, was it? [quotes from song] "Meet Me in St. Louis, Louis, Meet me at the [inaudible], Don't tell me the sun [sic] is shining, Anywhere but there [sic], Meet me at the something, Don't tell me the sun [sic] is shining..." [inaudible] [laughs]

VB: It was amazing when you were saying that, feeling you knew these cities, and knowing London through the pictures.

NM: Yes, I knew these places a long, long time [inaudible]

VB: I mean the other thing I was just wanting to ask about was you were saying you lived in Ayrshire for quite some time.

NM: Yes.

VB: What were the cinemas like there compared to ones here in Glasgow, and internationally?

NM: I can't remember, [sigh] really, but that stage of life, I was in business and so on, didn't go to the pictures so freely. I'd ceased to be a picturegoer by now, you know....

VB: Yes.

NM: [inaudible] [place name?] There's nothing there and, eh, it was only on the odd occasions, [inaudible] living in the country we'd go, not as much as in Glasgow. I'd lost touch with the films by the time I was middle-aged. [laughs] Lost touch with modern [inaudible]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

NM: ...about twenty years or so, the last ten or fifteen years or so I took it up again when I came back to live in Glasgow, ten or fifteen years ago. I'd never really been able to re-establish a great deal of contact with films for a variety of reasons, for what particular reasons I can't imagine but [pause 2 seconds] I think possibly the television had a [laughs] an effect on it. When you get older I mean, the question of going to the cinema, into town, going to a film and so on, no longer sort of attracts you, there's no other way to describe it.

VB: Did you go, did you take your own children to the cinema?

NM: No, no, I can't remember ever going with them to the cinema. In fact, [pause] they didn't, I think, go out very much in Ayrshire, perhaps, it wasn't a city so it, it hadn't got the sort of [pause 2 seconds] cinema orientation that you get in big towns. It was more, um it was more a, it had more competition from outdoor pursuits I think. Games, golf and [laughs] tennis and dances and whatnot, but actually cinemagoing I think in my experience with family, was [bang on tape], a very secondary even less, consideration.

VB: Mmm.

NM: In the last twenty or thirty years than it was at one time.

VB: Have you always enjoyed sporting activities as well then?

NM: I've always been interested in sport, yes, always. Tennis, [inaudible] continually going to play tennis, not in the winter but, em, the weather seemed to be much better in those days. In the summer, you could go and play tennis without getting rained off.

[both laugh]

NM: I, I, I really, I told you in one of the [letters?], I am eighty years of age and for the last ten years, just going to the cinema has been an effort. [sighs]

VB: Mhm.

NM: And on the rare occasions [I did go?] I very often found that the pictures were becoming far too long. And possibly I'm getting a bit too old! [laughs] And, eh, don't relish sitting through three hours films, and I might have done without thinking twice about it when I was young, but when I was young, a picture never lasted more than an hour, I can't honestly, I can't honestly say that I can remember a film that lasted [longer?], no recollection at all, but I do think nowadays you've got too much emphasis on the length of films.

VB: Mhm.

NM: That suits some people [inaudible]. I really don't want to sit through any longer, three hours is too much. As I say my daughters, one of them, she's an editor in the film business and [I've a card here?] I don't know whether you've heard of them.

[Shows daughter's business card to illustrate her work. Featuring the Marx brothers with cutting to show editing. NM appreciates film books VB brought and discussion of finding them in shop off Byres Road. NM continues to leaf through books]

VB: I like the coloured pictures as well, I mean that must have been quite something when colour came, the first few times?

NM: I remember when sound, sound came in. My mother took me to the first sound film.

VB: Really.

NM: That would be, about 1929 or so, and I remember going with her by tram car from the West End to Eglinton Street. It was the Coliseum [inaudible] and it was Al Jolson, *The Jazz Singer*. And that was really something because it was the first time I'd ever heard a voice on the screen. And of course they, it was the first film that had, em, been put on in Glasgow, talking film, and [there was?] quite a sensation in town. This film had [inaudible] in town, I think, [laughs] everybody was trying to get there to see it but we got there, my mother and I. [Duly impressed?]

VB: How did you feel, em, hearing that for the first time?

NM: Well, no lasting impression, you would go with the expectation of hearing someone singing and you're not surprised in a way when you hear what you went there to hear! [laughs]

VB: Right. I suppose when you're quite young you must have, it maybe wasn't so [laughs] astonishing, I suppose, accepting it.

NM: 'Cause you had things like gramophones and other means of recording voice, they were very popular, gramophones, recordings so that to hear it on the screen, it wasn't all that wonderful. I think colour was perhaps, had more impression than sound. When colour came, you had no conception of what you were going to be met with, when you saw coloured films [you'd never seen

anything like that before?] but there again, I mean, I think we still photography, was it colour processing, still photography at that stage, it only came later that colour film was introduced to the ordinary crowd. Before that, people used to colour their own photographs. You could get, adopt a method of colouring a negative which you [inaudible] a lot of photography, black-and-white photography and previously-coloured film, photograph by means of colouring a negative.

VB: Really?

NM: Yes, that's how they did it, pretty much. [inaudible] colour photographs produced, in his workshop, in his own backyard. People been up to all sorts of ingenious [inaudible] [laughs] since the invention of the telephone and things like that. [laughs]

VB: It's amazing.

[NM offers his diary for VB to borrow and VB thanks NM for trusting her to look after this; NM finds a bag for VB to put his book in; one of the International Club members are still in Glasgow; noise of bag rattling loudly]

NM: I just wished I could remember more.

VB: Oh, I think you've got a wonderful memory actually.

NM: But, em, it's too difficult to separate out detail from general impressions.

VB: Of course.

NM: I mean, I can, I can see in my mind's eye all the things that I'm telling you.

VB: Yes.

NM: But when it comes to separating them out into particulars, particular events and times and places, I find it difficult.

VB: It is a long time ago.

NM: To be precise, over sixty years.

VB: Yes. It's hard to believe when you're talking about it though, when it's so vivid. You know, listening to you.

NM: Yes.

VB: It's hard to imagine it is sixty years ago.

NM: It's difficult for me! [pause 2 seconds] I really love Glasgow. It's such a beautiful city, were you born in Glasgow?

VB: No, no. I was born in Edinburgh but, em, raised in Fife mainly, so...

NM: Oh.

VB: Yes.

NM: Glasgow is such a, a homely city, for me, because I was born in the town, and went to the school and the University and all were within walking distance. All these cinemas that we're referring to were all within walking distance. You did walk to the [inaudible], the Locarno, the, [laughs] most places you could go to. It was so easy to get around. And they were so, what can I say, it was so economical. We were getting value for money all the time in the old days, as it seems to me to [what you get now?] So that's part of the appeal [pause 2 seconds].

VB: Absolutely. It's still the case, I think. Very welcoming, it's a very welcoming city, Glasgow I think, people are...

NM: Yes, yes.

VB: That's what makes it, I think.

[following extract from 1:29:04 - 1:37:53 not transcribed; VB and NM walk around the kitchen and discuss of NM's painting collection: including pieces by his daughter, a Japanese print; Italian landscapes; NM's Ayrshire scene; NM's travels in Australia; NM invites VB to stay for lunch and she accepts]

[End of Interview]