

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 Library, Greater Manchester, Manchester, 9 May 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Ada Bellis, Bert Partington, Lois Basnett, and other members of Westhoughton History Society

* Transcribed by Valentina Bold / Standardised by Annette Kuhn

* AB=Ada Bellis, BP=Bert Partington, LB=Lois Basnett, HA=Harry Ackers (Male Non-Core Respondent), FNC= Female Non-Core Respondent, VB=Valentina Bold

* Notes: Group interview with Ada Bellis, Bert Partington, Lois Basnett and other members of Westhoughton History Society; Sound Quality: Fair; this interview was originally transcribed in a phonetic manner; the original phonetic version can be accessed through our physical collection - please contact Lancaster University Library for details.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[tape starts mid-conversation]

HA: [inaudible; voice in background]

VB: That's right, that's the next thing.

LB: We can have home rule for Scotland if we can have home rule for the north.

VB: Well, I think that's a fair view. [laughs]

HA: In Westhoughton there, there was two cinemas. One was called the Empire, and the other one, its Sunday name was, it was called the Palace but it had a local name that it was called, the bug house!

[all laugh]

AB: The bughouse!

HA: The bughouse!

[inaudible; overtalking]

AB: [quietly] The rink.

HA: The rink, the bug house—

AB: It used to be a skating rink.

HA: Yeah.

VB: Ah, really?

LB: It had a hard floor, it was lovely when anybody came in late, you know! [laughs]

HA: Yes.

[all laugh]

HA: But it had a corrugated roof, you see.

[all laugh]

LB: [inaudible; laugh; overtalking]

FNC: Was it a roller skating rink, do you know?

VB: Did they actually have, did they have skating at the same time?

HA: No!

[general dissent]

HA: No, it had seats in there.

VB: Right, so it was before it was...?

HA: Before, yeah. And when it rained--

BP: [about to speak] Sorry.

HA: When it rained, you couldn't hear.

[general laughter]

HA: A hailstorm in there, you know!

[general laughter]

HA: But also when it did rain--

LB: [laughing] You sat with your brolly.

HA: You had to bring your brolly along, because you got wet, you know!

[general laughter]

HA: We have a lady member of the class whose, whose mother had something to do with it, hadn't she, Pam's--

FNC: Mhm.

HA: Relations.

LB: Pam's, Pam's grandfather owned it.

AB: And her grandmother—

LB: Played the piano in the days of silent films.

AB: Yes.

LB: She was a, she was a super pianist.

AB: Yes.

LB: You know. And she [imitating playing a piano] "Mhm, mhm, mhm, mhm, mhm!"

[general laughter]

HA: But those were, those were our two main cinemas, I think. I don't know of any more.

BP: And this point about skating rinks that's interesting because Bolton has, had two.

HA: Yes and--

BP: So there was, there was apparently a craze for roller-skating before there'd be a craze for cinema.

LB: Mhm.

BP: There was the Rumworth, on St Helen's road. And the Regal which, erm, was the Spa road.

HA: Yeah.

BP: And that reverted to a skating rink in more modern times.

LB: Mhm.

BP: That was a skating rink in the, in the seventies.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Skating rink, cinema, skating rink. That was strange.

HA: But the cinemas played all the way through, through the war anyway.

VB: Yeah.

HA: It was non-stop. And as we said there was basically two shows a week.

LB: Mhm.

FNC: You used to get in Manchester, where we had a lot of, you know, quite a lot of air raids, we used to get a little sign came on, the erm, the erm, during the, eh, 'The alert has been sounded'--

LB: Mhm, ooh dear.

FNC: Used to come up to tell you that 'Air raid was in progress' you know, so, I mean, we were only at school so we had to get up and go out, 'cause it was black out, pitch black. They were all walking round the streets in the middle of the air raid! [laughs] We would have been better off [in the pictures?]-

[general laughter]

HA: There was wooden seats at the one at, at [Fletcher?] Street [possibly referring to the Ritz], wasn't there?

FNC: Ah, was it?

AB: There was at, yes! [laughs]

BP: Were they bench seats, weren't they, at the front.

AB: Yes they were bench seats, yes.

HA: Fixed, fixed wooden bench seats, you know.

AB: They were wooden. [Well you sat two?].

HA: You sat up against the screen, well you were as near as this! [puts hand to face]

[all laugh]

FNC: For goodness sake!

BP: And when you sat at the side everybody's face was... [turns face so neck twisted]

VB: Right!

HA: If you could just switch off for a second. Just hold on.

[inaudible; overtalking and laughter]

HA: Basically, well, I think in most of the local cinemas here. There was basically two programmes, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

LB: Yeah.

AB: And Thursday, Friday.

HA: Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And I think that was common all the way.

[general assent]

BP: Yes, there is a big point though, eh, erm, in Bolton, which would be typical of most towns, there's like a, sort of a class distinction, there's the, the fleapits, the bughouses, outside and then in the town centre, of course, we're posher.

FNC: Oh yes.

BP: And have a full week, and we have dearer seats, and, eh earlier programmes, erm, some of the films would only appear, they would appear in the sort of slightly out of town, perhaps a year later.

LB: Mhm.

HA: Yeah.

BP: 'Cause I can remember as a lad the sort of catching up on--

LB: Mhm.

BP: Something I'd missed. At one of the--

LB: Mhm.

BP: You know, the local picture [inaudible].

LB: [inaudible; overtalking]

HA: There were two shows a night!

VB: Yeah.

HA: You know, one would start at--

BP: That's right.

HA: One about, one about.

LB: One started about six.

HA: Six, and the other started about eight.

LB: About eight, Yes.

HA: Eight o'clock.

BP: And then, and then came in continuous.

LB: Yes.

HA: You could walk in and out whenever you wanted.

BP: They, they, they changed, first there were two separate houses, one after, when I was very young.

LB: Yes.

BP: And then I don't know what year it would be, we got continuous showing.

FNC: Yeah.

BP: So you could go in early and stay till, whenever you want.

FNC: Oh yes, you used to sit through till--

HA: Yes.

FNC: If you went in half way through you sat in through till you got to the bit where you came in.

LB: And then you rushed--

FNC: Went out! [laughs]

[general laughter]

FNC: You weren't thrown out.

HA: If you were to go now and people went in early and stopped till closing time--

FNC: Yeah, and there were matinees in the afternoons as well, Wednesdays.

HA: And Saturdays.

FNC: Saturdays.

HA: On Saturday. And then... [pause 2 seconds]

LB: Well, the continuous was--

HA: The Saturdays were--

LB: About the beginning of the war.

BP: Oh yes, before the war.

HA: You dropped in upon Saturdays. Saturdays, Saturdays in the local cinemas were, sort of, on a good week you had to go for second house, hadn't you.

BP: I don't know, I, I don't know.

HA: You had to go for second house.

VB: Yeah, it's, it's interesting.

AB: I don't know because I never went to second house.

VB: Yeah, one of the things I was wanting to ask before we actually all sat down, you were saying about going to this particular cinema that had Sunday opening.

BP: That's right.

VB: Where was that again?

BP: That was Chorley, [inaudible; overtalking].

FNC: It didn't start till late though did it, Sunday opening.

VB: Oh, I see.

[inaudible; overtalking]

BP: Chorley, before the war, believe it or not, at least I don't know how they did it, but it was quite a big thing. I, I worked in the town centre in Bolton, and it became quite the, quite the smart thing for, for youngsters to go to Chorley on Sunday to the cinema.

FNC: Ah.

BP: Probably not long before the war.

FNC: Mhm.

BP: But even after the war Sunday cinema wasn't on in Bolton. But it was in Bury.

LB: No.

FNC: Ah! We had Sunday cinema in Flixton where I lived.

VB: Yeah.

FNC: Because I remember once Deanna Durbin being on, and my father was very strict, and my mother hid the tea in the wardrobe so I could have my tea.

VB: Mhm.

FNC: On the QT! And then go and watch Deanna Durbin, and [laughing] he didn't know anything about it! [laughs]

HA: The whole of Bolton was [watching?]. [laughter]

BP: I fancy it would be the local council having different views, wouldn't it?

HA: Of course, the opening times of the cinemas were all governed by the... Was it part of the Watch Committee?

BP: I imagine it would be.

HA: They also licensed certain sort of dodgy films.

BP: Mhm, mhm.

HA: If they were rated, and then if Watch Committee said--

FNC: Oh yes.

HA: It had to be, such a, a classification.

VB: Right, I see.

HA: That, that was, that was how that came.

FNC: Yeah.

HA: [inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: Most of them were U weren't they.

BP: Yeah.

FNC: Universal.

BP: But they came out with an X rating--

FNC: Oh yes, yes.

BP: They were very much, very much.

FNC: And was there A as well?

HA: That's right.

FNC: And those were the only ones you could get in with a grownup.

HA: That's right.

VB: [inaudible; overtalking]

BP: I don't know what year that came in but I remember that.

FNC: Well, I only remember it for being a child.

VB: **Were, were you ever?**

[inaudible; overtalking]

LB: It was before the war anyway.

VB: Were there any stars that were particularly popular?

FNC: Well, there was.

VB: I mean, you mentioned Deanna Durbin.

FNC: Oh yes. Yes well. Different age groups.

LB: Fred and Ginger!

VB: Ah!

LB: Fred and Ginger!

FNC: And erm.

BP: Marlene Dietrich. Charles Boyer.

LB: Yeah!

BP: Joan Crawford! Greta Garbo! My goodness! Well I think it was very wide.

FNC: Yes.

BP: Very very wide.

FNC: Well when you were young then, Clark Gable.

BP: Gary Cooper.

FNC: Clark Gable was.

BP: Yes! Clark Gable, and that goes back to the mid-thirties.

LB: Yes.

FNC: Well I was only a child you see so Deanna Durbin, you know! And Mickey Rooney, and Judy Garland.

AB: Judy Garland [inaudible; overtalking].

BP: That was late thirties--

FNC: Mickey Rooney was my heartthrob when I was a child.

BP: That was just before the war.

[phone starts ringing]

FNC: Yes! That's right.

BP: And then Mickey Rooney sort of hit it during the war didn't he. The, eh, *Andy Hardy* series.

[phone still ringing]

FNC: Was it?

BP: It was wartime. Yes, I remember seeing those ones in the forties.

VB: Right.

FNC: Mhm.

HA: But that was that sort, there was always two films on.

FNC: Yes.

HA: You had the main film.

BP: And the B film.

HA: And the B film. And you got the Three Stooges or--

FNC: And you'd get eh, a cartoon.

LB: And the newsreel.

AB: The newsreel, yeah.

HA: The news! Oh!

FNC: It was always on.

HA: Always the newsreel.

BP: The *Pathe Gazette* sometimes.

FNC: And then all the adverts as well.

LB: Mhm.

FNC: And you sat through all the local adverts--

LB: Mhm.

FNC: Of all the shops and people round about the dry cleaners and--

HA: You didn't get things like that [when you went to?]

BP: [inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: No, they were local.

HA: You might get the local electrician or the local undertaker or whatever was advertised.

LB: Well we had a shop then, erm, this was before '32, and, erm, we advertised both the Palace and the Empire [laughs] so we got free tickets you see!

AB: Yes, that's right!

FNC: You did!

LB: I was never allowed to go. The only time I ever went that I can remember, on the free ticket, was, erm, I think, and I may be wrong here, erm, I, I know that I went with my father, and, eh, I beg your pardon, yes, erm, and, erm, I feel that it was *Top Hat*. Which was, eh, I was probably seeing it for the second time.

AB: Mhm.

BP: You went a lot, no--

LB: No.

BP: [laughing] Sorry at that time. I thought it would have been a [biblical one?] perhaps.

LB: Oh no, not with my father, no, I liked to go with my mother but not with my father, I preferred--

HA: That Errol Flynn came, I don't remember that being here in Westhoughton.

BP: Mhm.

HA: That was during, that was made in the, the first one was made in the mid thirties, wasn't it?

BP: [inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: Robin Hood. I've written on there, 'cause I went with school.

BP: That was a bit later though.

FNC: '37.

BP: Yes, yes.

VB: What was that?

FNC: Robin Hood. Errol Flynn.

[inaudible; overtalking]

HA: That took a while. I remember you saying that the Odeon in Bolton showed *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

LB: Oh yes.

BP: Well it was a, it was a coloured picture which was very unusual--

FNC: It was.

BP: It was a long time before--

LB: Mhm.

BP: It came here.

FNC: Oh yes.

HA: Eighteen months before it came here.

BP: I think there were the big circuit people and then there were the smaller, these smaller fry.

HA: Right.

FNC: Yes.

BP: Because some of those on that list that, that I gave you, were owned by small individuals.

FNC: Yes.

BP: Whereas things like the Odeon and, and, I mean for instance the Capitol was ABC.

FNC: That's right, ABC.

BP: The other one, I think, the Odeon would be the Rank.

HA: Yes, that's right.

FNC: Yes.

BP: These big groups, and of course they got, first showings too.

VB: Yeah.

BP: First showings.

HA: Of course, what was connected with the big cinemas wasn't just films. They all had an organ, I mean--

FNC: Yes.

[inaudible; overtalking]

HA: The lad I went to, the lad I went to school with, Ian Liversidge, his father was the organist at the Lido.

FNC: Really!

[inaudible; overtalking]

HA: His father was the organist, it was all part of the show to go to the Odeon.

BP: Yes.

HA: And see the organ come up all lit up from the floor.

LB: That's right.

FNC: I went to the Gaumont Manchester.

BP: I hated that, I hated that.

VB: I've got a thing about that, actually the opening of the Gaumont in Manchester.

FNC: Oh.

VB: 'Cause I, it was, I think it was Robert Donat that opened that.

FNC: Oh was it?

VB: Yeah.

FNC: 'Cause he was a Mancunian.

BP: Yes.

LB: Mhm. Oh gosh yes.

VB: [laughing]

BP: Now he was a real heartthrob!

LB: I saw him, I've seen him on the stage Robert Donat.

BP: [inaudible; overtalking]

LB: Yeah.

BP: And erm... [it wasn't very well done?]

FNC: Robert Donat was, eh, Renee Asherson or someone or other's [special friend] at the Opera House.

LB: Was this the Trafford Park one?

[inaudible; overtalking]

LB: Now for some reason or other, now I can't remember the film.

AB: Mhm?

[inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: Mhm.

LB: A doctor's wife from Westhoughton.

[something is dropped and FNC apologises]

LB: This is Dr Ainslie.

AB: Oh yes.

LB: When the organ come up, she leaned forward and tapped my mother and she said, "Mrs Basnett, that blasted organist again!"

[all laugh resoundingly and at length]

AB: Ooh!

LB: I couldn't imagine her saying "Blasted", but having been to the pictures so many times she was tired of being there.

AB: Yes.

[general laughter]

HA: They always had, here in Westhoughton the attendants walked about all the time the show was on.

AB: Mhm.

FNC: Mhm.

HA: And especially if it was a cowboy picture.

AB: Oh, mhm.

HA: If it was a cowboy picture the attendant would walk about--

VB: Yeah.

HA: All through this, to keep them all in order, with the children.

AB: Mhm.

HA: At the front.

AB: Yes.

FNC: Mhm.

HA: And that's when I said that, eh, it was quite common for someone to get a [milk?] bottle, fill it full of stones and roll it down the aisle, you see! [laughs]

FNC: [laughs]

HA: It was something dramatic! [laughing]

[all laugh]

FNC: Did you have galleries in, eh, these cinemas?

[general dissent]

HA: It was all, the, the Empire.

FNC: In our cinema it was.

HA: It was all, one, solid rail, wasn't it?

BP: You used to take your girl in the Circle in a decent cinema.

FNC: That's [what they said?] [inaudible; overtalking]

BP: It was a shilling there, you see.

HA: But at Westhoughton--

BP: A shilling, a shilling, a shilling was, you bought a quarter [pound] box of chocolates, Terry's All Gold for a shilling, and you, you spent a shilling taking, on her. So the night out used to cost you three bob, but you [won't tell?] her of course.

AB: At the Empress in Urmston there were double seats.

HA: Yes, and at the Empire.

FNC: Had they?

[general assent] [inaudible; overtalking]

AB: A double seat!

LB: Oh yes.

AB: Double seat, for two people to sit on.

BP: The back rows, that's right.

HA: Oh yeah.

BP: Selected cinemas had them.

FNC: Yes, they had them at the Empress cinema.

BP: There was one, one on Bradshawgate, Bolton had them [possibly referring to the Queen's].

AB: I used to go on the back row up the Empire.

FNC: Oh yes.

AB: When my brother hadn't got a girlfriend to take out, I used to--

FNC: 'Cause that was the place--

AB: He'd take me out—

FNC: All the courting couples went to, all around.

VB: Yeah.

LB: Oh, I can remember the time when I went with my father, we sat on the back row. Only, he was very fond of pears, and I can see him now, he's sitting there, peeling this pear with his little--

FNC: Yes! [laughing]

LB: Fruit knife, the juice dripping off. [laughs]

[general laughter]

BP: My father, as you know, hated the cinema.

LB: Mhm.

BP: He loathed it, he thought it was ridiculous and, he was a man who liked a drink, as well. And, but on New Year's Day, every New Year for years, when I was married and so on, he would insist on taking the family to the cinema. It was a big deal, you know.

VB: [chuckles]

BP: And it was hell! It was absolute hell! He used to sit there, in the cinema, a crowded cinema, and he'd sit and say, "Who's that fella! Has he been on before?"

LB: [laughs]

[general laughter]

BP: And we used to go, "Shh, Shh!" Because, we all, [imitates father groaning] "Ohh. Ohh. Oh dear me! He's wooden that chap isn't he?" And you'd get comments like this, you know! Wonder we didn't get thrown out!

[general laughter]

BP: Still that's, that's--

HA: I tell you what I always thought was very funny. When the film broke.

FNC: Oh yes.

AB: Yes.

LB: [inaudible; overtalking]

HA: That was, that was trouble, that was when the attendant was busy then.

LB: Yes.

HA: Everybody banging.

LB: Stamp your feet, yeah.

HA: On the floor, "Hoo, Hooray!" [laughs]

BP: [inaudible joke; overtalking and laughter]

AB: And in the interval, Ted Clegg, he was the manager at the Empire.

HA: Yep.

AB: I can't tell you what he talked about, and he always used to say, "And I might tell you, I might tell you," and I thought, "Well I wish you would tell us!"

[general laughter]

HA: 'Cause they did, they did try to sell ice cream or toffees, didn't they.

LB: Pardon?

HA: They tried, they tried to sell ice--

FNC: Yes.

HA: Cream and toffees [pause 2 seconds] and it was certainly popular. Well there was no, there was no other--

BP: Entertainment, no.

[general assent]

HA: There was no other entertainment.

BP: I think I used to go, just [before the war?], twice a week, if I remember rightly.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Well, I was, I used to work till 8 o'clock at night, in a shop, and we used to go to the cinema second house, virtually, but eh, eh, twice a week seemed more than enough. It was more the radio really for entertainment, wasn't it.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And the variety theatre in Bolton.

HA: And it was [warm?].

BP: Yes, yes.

AB: And I had a cousin who lived in St Helen's Road and he used to go to a cinema further down.

HA: That's right, the Majestic.

AB: And they used to sit behind the screen, and they got it cheaper.

LB: Oh yes, that's a thing.

BP: That's where the original skating rink was.

AB: Yes.

BP: That was Woolworth's wasn't it.

AB: Well my [cousin?] used to say, we used to pay, if it was tuppence to go in, they used to pay a penny. Sit on their own, sat behind the screen.

HA: 'Course a lot, a lot of these cinemas now are--

LB: They're bingo.

HA: They've all gone to bingo halls, haven't they?

[general assent] [inaudible; overtalking]

BP: Yes, nearly all.

HA: They've all been converted back to bingo halls.

FNC: Well the big ones in the towns were--

HA: Yes.

FNC: Beautiful places to go.

HA: The Odeon was fabulous--

FNC: Beautiful plush carpets and the red, red rope hand thing.

AB: Yes, yes.

FNC: To go up.

BP: Well Odeons of course are perfect art deco, aren't they?

FNC: Oh yes.

BP: Well they're now preserved buildings, some of them.

FNC: They're beautiful.

HA: I have a friend who I went to school with, in Yorkshire, he, he became a manager of the Odeon in London.

LB: Mhm.

VB: Oh.

[pause 1 second]

FNC: Have you been to Granada? [referring to the old Granada Studios]

VB: I haven't no.

FNC: 'Cause they've got a cinema [overtalking] that they brought from London--

VB: Oh right.

FNC: Yes, and you go in, you go up the st, you know, it's a proper approach like the old cinemas. Then you go into it, it's like an old newsreel cinema, the newsreel cinemas were just one long straight, erm, you know, rake of seats and it went on all the time in these, there were loads and loads of short pictures in newsreel cinemas—

VB: Yeah, yeah.

FNC: You go in, and then you watch it and then they take you into a 'Cinema of the Future'. Have you been? It's wonderful. You sit in these seats and they're like air force, airplane seats, and you're strapped in, and it sets off, the screen's like that, and the seats move, you're on a rollercoaster when you start, and you bump over all the--

LB: I've heard about that.

FNC: Over the things in the rollercoaster, and it goes faster and faster and you're swerving around like this, and then it shoots out like that, into space and you're in one of these Star Wars things, and you're zooming around. Oh, it's absolutely fabulous. They are some seats on the front row that are static, and it's, that's supposed to be the cinema of the future, but why I'm telling you is there is this old erm rebuilt cinema that they brought up from London, which is like the Gaumont, you know, with beautiful plush carpets and everything.

BP: You mentioned newsreel cinemas, now, I don't think we ever had one in Bolton.

HA: No, no, they were in Manchester.

FNC: They had them in Manchester. There were two in Manchester.

BP: Very sophisticated idea, yes.

FNC: There was one in...

HA: But they never came here.

BP: No.

FNC: There was one by Oxford Road Station and then there was the other one, a bit further up, as you're coming up towards, erm, St Peter's Square, that's where they. But they were handy because you could go in there and just stay in for a short time--

HA: Yeah.

FNC: And then come out again.

VB: Right, yeah.

FNC: Didn't go in there till I was in my teens of course, didn't go in there as a child, but--

LB: Mhm.

FNC: But, you know, we used to go in if we'd been shopping or anything.

VB: Yeah.

BP: That's right, I'd forgotten them completely but when you said it I remembered.

FNC: [inaudible; overtalking]

BP: I remembered the one in Manchester.

FNC: And they were just... straight, you know, there were no galleries and, no curvy bits round the side, it was just a straight rake [sic] of seats.

VB: That's interesting.

BP: I'd forgotten, I'd forgotten.

HA: Hadn't they used to move safety curtains as well.

AB: Mhm.

BP: No, I don't think they did.

[inaudible; overtalking]

HA: That was in variety, wasn't it?

FNC: That was on the stage.

HA: What happened on the cinemas?

BP: Nothing, as far as I can remember.

LB: They just had curtains.

HA: There was always curtains, the screen, the screen was always covered up.

FNC: Oh yes, the screen was always covered up.

BP: [inaudible; overtalking] thing, wasn't it.

LB: [They were beautiful, like that, the curtains?].

BP: Just copied from the live theatre.

LB: Yeah.

BP: The live theatre, I always remember the Theatre Royal at Bolton had a wonderful, eh, screen, which came down, showing a chariot race.

LB: Mhm.

BP: Coliseum chariot race and, as curtains as well.

LB: Mhm.

BP: And in fact, it was illustrated in the Bolton Evening news, that. And the Grand had erm, a street scene with lots of bill posters advertising local trades--

FNC: Oh yes.

BP: Which used to just drop for int, for the, presumably for customers' interest.

FNC: I think it dropped in front of the safety screen--

BP: Yes.

FNC: 'Course that was for fire.

HA: But the, the sound was always reasonable at the Empire, wasn't it.

LB: Oh yeah.

BP: I, I don't know about that.

HA: The sound was quite reasonable. But up at the rink [referring to the Palace]—

FNC: [laughs]

HA: It did vary, didn't it?

[general laughter]

HA: 'Cause I think, I think it was always, I think at the Empire the, the speakers were at each side, I think. [laughter; inaudible]. I think there was something in the middle, [inaudible; overtalking]. If

you saw it one way, the sound was coming the other way [laughs], you know. You didn't always hear the siren properly on that.

LB: Come to think of it, you know, Pam was probably too young to have gone to the rink.

HA: Mhm.

FNC: Of course everybody smoked like mad, and when the, eh, projectionist--

HA: Oh yes.

FNC: Was projecting, you could see all the smoke going up in the air--

HA: The smoke, oh yes, that was--

FNC: [inaudible; laughter; overtalking] couldn't you?

HA: [inaudible] smokers. That was--

[inaudible; laughter; overtalking]

FNC: Oh yeah.

BP: Can you remember the sprayer that used to come round?

HA: Oh yes! That was it, used to walk down the aisle, didn't he?

BP: You were [saying?] it was influenza, 'cause they used to come round with a--

LB: Mhm.

BP: Wretched spray, and, and in some of the rougher cinemas, I used to go to one at--

HA: [inaudible; overtalking]

BP: [inaudible; overtalking; wife?] when we were very young, and it was a real rough one called the Palace, near where she we lived, and the, the pong with this stuff!

AB: [chuckles]

BP: I think they had it extra strength!

FNC: Yes, I remember those.

BP: Because [chuckles; inaudible] if you were on the end row, you'd get wet through!

[general laughter]

HA: Tell you what some of them were like, every seat [drowned out by laughter]. It's going back a bit, but in ambulances and vehicles, you had a Pyrene fire extinguisher, the type you'd take chloride in, [inaudible] blasting it out about this size, and that is what it looked like. [inaudible]. If you did that today, you'd be done, you know!

BP: It was supposed to safeguard you from germs!

[general laughter]

HA: And fleas!

[general laughter]

AB: If you survived it!

HA: Fleas.

BP: Tell you a funny thing. The cinema to go to during the war was a garrison cinema. I remember at RAF Cranwell, there was a, it had been a cinema for years, you know, on the camp. And to go there,

presumably this was only for love scenes, oh my God, talking about the behaviour of the audience, the roaring and the encouragement they gave, [shouts] "Go on!" This kind of thing. Terrific.

HA: Another thing to note was, was with, with the papers. [pause 2 seconds] The, the, the actual adverts, they--

FNC: Oh yes--

HA: They, they covered about two pages didn't they.

FNC: In the evening papers--

HA: The evening papers--

FNC: They used to look in the papers--

HA: [inaudible; overtalking] ['Course you had columns?]-

FNC: To see what was on.

HA: They had columns upon columns upon columns about.

BP: Well just think, twenty-one cinemas in Bolton alone!

FNC: Yes.

BP: And you've got a couple here.

FNC: And also in those days you could get on a bus and go into town if you thought the picture was--

HA: [inaudible; overtalking] And also you would have cinemas at Horwich.

LB: You could catch a bus--

HA: Farnworth.

BP: Farnworth.

FNC: We used to go to Eccles—

AB: [inaudible; overtalking] everything was advertised.

FNC: Sale and into Manchester and Stretford. We used to go all around.

[coughing]

FNC: And Chorlton if the picture was on somewhere else that we'd not seen we used to get up, 'cause there were loads of buses everywhere.

LB: It depended on the film really.

AB: As was my wont, when I'd finished here at half-past eight.

[overtalking; inaudible]

VB: In the project we've been asking people to complete questionnaires and I was wondering if anyone might be interested in filling one of these in.

[general assent]

VB: So I've got some copies of these with me just now--

HA: And then send them to you.

VB: And then send them to me. And the other thing I was wanting to ask, erm, obviously because of the time of the project, we're particularly interested in talking to people born before 1925. So I don't know if people here fit into that category.

[inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: My cousin, she was born in 1924.

[inaudible; overtalking]

VB: Erm, I mean, [laughing] are people born before 1925?

FNC: I wasn't. [laughter]

VB: Right. Would the three of you maybe be interested in participating a bit further in the project?

LB: Yes, if we can, yes.

VB: Could I maybe take a note of your names and a contact number then?

LB: Yeah.

VB: That would be great.

BP: You could do it for both of us then.

LB: Lois Basnett, erm.

VB: Could you spell—

LB: L, O, I, S—

VB: Yes.

LB: B, A, S, N, E, double T.

VB: Yep.

LB: Do you want my telephone number?

VB: That would be great, yeah.

LB: Westhoughton, and that'll be [number redacted].

VB: [writing down; number redacted]. Yeah.

LB: Sorry [number redacted].

BP: Three.

FNC: That's a new one.

VB: Can I ask what year you were born in?

LB: 1919. April first.

VB: Really?

LB: Yes, it's [common?]-

VB: You surprise me. Erm, and can I ask how old you were, roughly, when you first went to the cinema?

LB: Erm, [pause 5 seconds] I'd probably be about [pause 3 seconds] nine or ten.

VB: About nine or ten. And did you go quite regularly?

LB: No, no, no. [knocking noise on tape] I used to go [and play?] [inaudible].

VB: [laughs]

LB: When my cousin was doing a [course?; inaudible].

VB: Right.

LB: Erm, no, not regularly then. But in my early teens, I would say when I was twelve or thirteen—

VB: Ah.

LB: I used to go with Florence.

VB: That's great. And was it Westhoughton that you were going to?

LB: No, Bolton.

VB: Right, Bolton. That's great.

HA: [Better class of cinemas in Bolton?] [whispering]

[general laughter]

VB: The other thing I'd like to ask is how old you were when you left school?

LB: Me?

VB: Just so I can get a bit of background.

LB: Well, I left school in '39—

VB: Yep.

LB: And went to college until, [pause 2 seconds] sorry I left school in '37 and went to college until '39.

VB: Yep. And—

LB: [inaudible] doing the arithmetic.

VB: That's great.

LB: I'd be eighteen, and twenty when I came out of college.

VB: And what sort of work have you done?

LB: Teaching.

VB: Right.

LB: [inaudible]. Was, were, did.

VB: That's great. Erm, and I've got your phone number so that's great.

LB: And this is Mr Herbert Partington. [laughs]

BP: You don't [laughs], it's Bert.

VB: Right.

BP: You don't need to tell people that.

LB: With a 'huh'. [laughing]

VB: Right.

LB: So, and the same telephone number etcetera—

VB: Okay.

AB: And what does this all entail?

BP: [inaudible; overtalking] You have to go to Hollywood.

VB: Right.

BP: You have to go to Hollywood.

AB: Do you want all these details?

VB: Yes. That would be great.

BP: Where do you start then?

VB: Erm—

BP: 1918.

VB: Right.

FNC: [inaudible; overtalking] a project on cinema—

AB: Oh yes.

VB: When did you first go to the cinema?

FNC: [separate conversation with AB] [Did you see it last winter?]

AB: Yes.

BP: I should think about seven or eight. Something like that.

FNC: [inaudible; overtalking]

VB: What time of your life did you go most to the cinema? How old were you? Were you a teenager or--

BP: Yes. From, from, I would say from teenage onwards. Probably.

VB: And that was in Bolton?

BP: Yes. Yes.

VB: Erm, and can I ask how old you were when you left school?

BP: Erm, sixteen and a half.

VB: Right. And what sort of work is it that you've done yourself?

BP: Ooh, erm, [pause 2 seconds] shop assistant at [Tilbury Wharf?]-

VB: Yeah.

BP: Technical instructor in the RAF during the war.

VB: Uhuh.

BP: Erm, erm, sales representative for some years and then company director.

VB: That's great. Erm. And I can ask you the same—

AB: Now then. [inaudible] Ada, Ada Bellis.

VB: Right.

AB: B, E, double L, I, S.

VB: Right. And can I ask what year you were born in? The year you were born in.

AB: Erm, in Westhoughton.

HA: [said loudly] Year.

AB: Oh, what year. I'm sorry. 1909.

VB: 1909. Really?

AB: Don't tell anyone.

LB: [laughs]

AB: I feel it!

VB: [laughs]

LB: You don't look it.

AB: No, I don't. But I feel it at the moment.

LB: I know you do.

VB: And how old were you when you first went to the cinema? When you first went to the cinema, how old would you have been?

AB: Oh—

BP: It's not easy that—

AB: I mustn't have been very old. I mustn't have been very old. Only, because, penny rush, they called it.

VB: So quite a small child, really.

FNC: Maybe five. Ten?

AB: I was allowed to go to the second house at the Empire only because I worked here till half-past eight every Saturday night.

FNC: That was [inaudible].

AB: That was the only time I was allowed to go because it was late when I worked on Saturday night.

VB: Right. And can I ask how old you were when you left school? How old you were—

AB: Fourteen.

VB: Fourteen. And—

AB: Worked in a mill for twelve months and it almost killed me. [laughs]

VB: And what sort of work did you do after--

AB: And then I came here.

HA: [inaudible; overtalking]

VB: That's great. And erm—

BP: Ssh, be quiet. [general laughter]

VB: [laughs] And can I, can I ask what your address or phone number is?

AB: Yes, my phone number is [telephone number redacted].

VB: [telephone number redacted] Right.

AB: Yes.

LB: The point is, if you need, if you need any, we can collaborate.

VB: That would be great, that would be great. Erm, I mean, I should say it's possible that I won't be in touch, so just, just to let you know, but I may give you a call at some stage over the next few weeks.

LB: Yes. Okay.

VB: If I'm not in touch, it's not because I'm not interested—

AB: No.

VB: I'm the only person doing the interviewing on this project so we've got kind of limited resources. Erm, sometimes it's not possible to follow up everybody.

AB: No.

VB: But thanks very much for erm, erm, telling me a bit about your cinema memories. Erm, I'm wondering if you're, if I could give you some information, if your cousin might be interested. If I could—

AB: [coughs]

FNC: [inaudible].

VB: Should I maybe give you one of these questionnaires for her and then--

FNC: Yes, yes.

[inaudible; overtalking]

FNC: She lives in Manchester area.

VB: I'd be very interested in hearing her memories.

LB: [inaudible].

VB: I should take a copy as well of that—

BP: Oh, you'd like a copy of that?

VB: I would.

BP: I wondered if this wasn't quite the subject, you know—

VB: I'd be interested if I could get a bit of the background.

[inaudible] [overtalking]

VB: I wish I had more time... [tape cuts out]

[End of Interview]