

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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* Harrow, Middlesex, 4 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews May Godden and Celia Piggott

* Transcribed by Joan Simpson/Standardised by Richard Rushton

* MG=May Godden, CP=Celia Piggott, NO=Norma, JO=John, LI=Lillian, CA=Carer, VB=Valentina Bold

* Notes: First interview of two with May Godden, Celia Piggott and other residents of Westminster House Nursing Home; Sound Quality: Fair

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

MG: [tape starts mid-conversation] I lived near Kensington. I used to go to the Odeon, at Kensington. Do you know it?

VB: I don't. I've heard of it actually but I've not, I've not seen it myself. [pause 4 seconds]

CA: There we are. Now don't be giving any of my secrets away.

[general laughter]

VB: Well, I was just, I've been asking anyone if they would mind me putting a tape recorder on so. Any, [laughs] any secrets'll be down here.

CA: [inaudible]. Where've you been? [To CP]. Stay there my precious. I'll get you. Here you are, Celia. I've got a chair for you. Look!

CP: I can park in this!

CA: I've got. I'm going to put you next to your friends. Now, Celia, you've got the Queen's chair.
[laughs] Where have you been?

CP: Only up the corridor.

CA: In the corridor? We couldn't find you. We thought you'd gone away.

CP: No, just sitting in the corridor.

CA: All right. Button off.

CP: Button off. Right. [laughs]

CA: There we are. There's Val. Now this lady, I'll introduce you. Celia.

VB: Hallo.

CA: You've got it on there.

VB: Pleased to meet you.

CA: This young lady. I won't tell you her age. She's fantastic. That's May.

MG: Yes.

CA: That's Norma. The only gentleman so you behave yourself. John. And another lovely lady, Lillian.

VB: That's great.

CA: Okay? So, I'll keep popping in. I've got [inaudible], but--

VB: Yeah. Sure.

CA: I'll come back. 'Cause if they do get a bit... [pause 2 seconds]

VB: Well, please say if you're finding it a bit [laughs] hard going or anything. Erm. I was saying to the others just now, erm, I'm here today to find out a bit about your memories of going to the cinema. And I'm particularly interested in the 1930s. So erm, the first thing I should maybe ask is erm, would you mind if I asked one or two questions about yourself?

CP: No.

VB: Just so that I can get an idea. Nothing too gruelling.

[general assent]

VB: The first thing I wanted to make sure I had right was everyone's year of birth. So I knew how old everyone was. Can I ask you, Celia. How old are you?

CP: I'm in my eighties.

VB: Yes. What year were you born in?

CP: Pardon?

VB: What year were you born in?

CP: Eight-, 1910.

VB: 1910. That's great. And, were you born locally?

CP: Yes.

VB: Yeah.

CP: Well, locally, in North London anyway.

VB: That's great. So was it Harrow you were from?

CP: No. In London.

VB: Yeah. That's great. Erm--

CP: Near King's Cross. Do you know it at all?

VB: I don't know London very well I'm afraid. That's great. And can I ask the same question of you, May? What year were you born in?

MG: 1897.

VB: 1897! [laughs].

[general laughter]

MG: I'm a Diamond Jubilee baby.

VB: I'm amazed! I really am amazed to hear you say that.

MG: It was a special year.

VB: And where were you born?

MG: Fulham.

VB: Fulham. That's great.

MG: Fulham Palace Road.

VB: That's great.

MG: Fulham Palace Road. [overtalking; inaudible].

VB: And can I ask the same from you?

NO: Yes. I was 1904.

VB: 1904.

NO: Yes.

VB: And, you were saying you were born --

NO: I was, I was born in erm, Wandsworth.

VB: Wandsworth.

NO: And I stayed there till I was five. And then I went down to Eastleigh, near Southampton. My father's works was moved. So, I spent, I went there. So I didn't stay in London till after I was five.

VB: That's great. Erm. And can I ask you, John? What --

JO: 1914.

VB: 1914. And where were you born? Where were you born?

JO: Where?

VB: Yeah.

JO: Kentish Town.

VB: That's great.

JO: In the market. There's a picture there.

[laughter]

JO: Taken in 1918.

VB: That's a beauty!

JO: My father come over from the war.

VB: Which one are you?

JO: That's me. The smallish one.

VB: The small one. With the cheeky smile. [laughs]

[general laughter]

JO: Plenty of bread pudding in them days.

VB: That's lovely.

JO: Great big bread puddings. And brawn.

CP: Yeah, lovely, they were.

VB: That's lovely. Can I? I don't know if you've seen this before.

CP: No.

JO: [My?] father went back and he got gassed.

VB: Ah.

JO: [In '18?], the last gas attack in '18, in France.

VB: It's a beautiful photo. It's lovely.

CP: Very nice.

NO: That was the First World War, was it?

JO: He got gassed. He went [inaudible]. In 1918, had a photograph taken, and he went back, and he got gassed. Mustard gas.

NO: Oh. Yeah.

VB: And Can I ask --?

LI: I was born in 1912.

VB: That's great.

JO: That was my father. [inaudible; conversation going on in background]

LI: King's Cross.

VB: King's Cross.

NO: Is this your whole family. That's lovely.

VB: That's great. Erm.

NO: This is you. And that's your father. What regiment was he in? What regiment was your father in?

JO: Eh, the Sussex.

NO: Oh Was he?

JO: Yeah, Royal Sussex

NO: Ahh, Royal Sussex. Lovely. And you said he got gassed in the war did he?

JO: Yes. The last gas attack in 1918.

NO: Oh did he?

JO: Went back, it was early 1918. And he went back. Was about the middle of 1918 and the Germans sent the last of the gas attacks, he got caught. He come home. But he died soon after.

NO: Yes. That's sad, isn't it?

JO: When the war came, I joined the same regiment.

NO: Oh did you? Yeah. My husband was in the Royal Artillery.

VB: I see.

[general conversation; inaudible; multiple voices at once]

VB: That reminds me, the other thing I wanted to ask was erm, could I ask everyone how old you were when you left school?

CP: Fourteen.

VB: Fourteen. And, did you go straight into work?

CP: No. I stayed at home for about a year, I think. I started about fifteen or sixteen.

VB: Can I ask what jobs you did?

CP: I was in the fur trade.

VB: That's great. Erm, and have you lived most of your life in North London, or?

CP: Well, yes, I have really.

VB: Yeah.

CP: I moved around a bit. But not very far away. [laughs]

VB: That's great. And, were you married?

CP: I married in 1926, 1928, or something like that.

VB: That's great. And do you have a family yourself? Do you have children?

CP: Yes. I've got three children.

VB: That's great. And can I ask you the same questions, May? How old were you when you left school?

MG: I haven't a clue.

VB: Roughly.

MG: I think I must've been somewhere about thirteen, fourteen.

VB: About thirteen --

MG: Fourteen, something like that.

VB: That's great. And did you go straight into work when you left school?

MG: No. Well, soon after, I went, helping somebody with their children.

VB: That's great.

MG: For a time. Then the war came along and we all, we all began, wanted to go on munitions and I went to S. G. Brown's doing, erm, what do they call it now? Scientific instrument making.

VB: Ah. That must've been very skilled work.

MG: Pardon?

VB: It must've been very skilled work, that.

MG: Well it was, I think, yes. Not a lot of us there but, we were doing it for submarines.

VB: That's interesting. Sounds like something to ask about another time. That sounds very interesting. Erm. And have you always lived in London?

MG: More or less. Various places. Erm, well, Surrey, I think, part of the time. When we lived in, in Fullwell. Which is between Twickenham and Teddington.

VB: That's great. And, were you married, yourself?

MG: I married in 1921, on the [date redacted].

VB: That's great.

MG: 74 years ago. Last month.

VB: That's amazing. That's amazing.

MG: [laughs].

VB: And do you have a family yourself?

MG: I have one son.

VB: That's great.

MG: He was a regular officer in the army. In the war. He was with the British Military Mission to Ethiopia. He was sent out there. He was trained at Sandhurst. And he was commissioned into the Prince of Wales's Own, at, stationed at Richmond in York. And he went out to Ethiopia with the British Military Mission. And he stayed out there. He was there, with the commission that welcomed Haile Selassie when he came back to his, to Ethiopia.

VB: That's amazing.

MG: I've got a picture of him in his officer's uniform. He was a major when he came home.

VB: Uhuh.

MG: He had to revert to his substantive rank of captain, because he was twenty-nine. And they couldn't hold a majority until they were thirty-five.

VB: They must've thought very highly of him then in that case.

MG: Well. His picture's on my table in the room.

VB: Yeah.

MG: I didn't think about it. I might have brought it down with me.

VB: Yeah. I'd like to see that some time. It sounds, it's an interesting story.

MG: Unfortunately, he died in '51.

VB: Mhm.

MG: As the result of an accident.

VB: Mhm.

NO: It's sad, isn't it?

VB: Yes. It is. Yeah. Erm, can I ask you, Norma, the same questions?

NO: Yeah. I can't remember the year erm, dates and things like that.

VB: Sure.

NO: As I've got older. Eh, the names. But erm, I got married. I went, I left school when I was fourteen.

VB: Uhuh.

NO: And I left school, I lived down there, Southampton then, and erm, my mother heard of a little job in a private hotel in Winchester. And it, the family owned the hotel.

VB: Uhuh.

NO: And they wanted somebody to go and help them. In their own home part. And I went there and worked with them. And during the evenings, when the waiters and waitresses used to do the dinners, waiting on the people, they used to let me go in and trail round with the vegetables.
[laughs]

VB: [laughs]

NO: So I learnt to work in a hotel.

VB: I see.

NO: And I worked in several hotels after. When I got older.

VB: That's great. And do you have a family yourself? Do you have children?

NO: Yes. I have two, two sons and a daughter.

VB: That's great. Erm, John.

JO: Sorry?

VB: John. How old were you when you left school?

JO: Pardon?

VB: Hold old were you when you left school?

JO: Fourteen.

VB: Fourteen. And did you go straight into work then?

JO: Pardon?

VB: Did you go --

JO: Oh straight to work. Yes.

VB: Yeah. What was your first job?

JO: Erm, ornamentation and craftsmanship. On royal properties. Buckingham Palace and all them places.

VB: Mhm!

JO: House of Parliament, House of Commons. Downing Street.

VB: Interesting.

JO: Windsor Castle. All them sort of places, Kensington House.

VB: Yeah.

JO: All the royal properties. We used to do all the images on the ceilings.

VB: Mhm!

JO: Cornices and all that sort a thing. All round the fireplaces. My grandfather, my father, my elder brother and myself.

VB: I'll need to --

JO: All died.

NO: [laughs]

JO: When I was about sixty they had all died.

VB: Mhm.

JO: When I was sixty-five I packed up.

VB: Mhm.

JO: I don't know if anybody's doing it now.

VB: No. I was thinking, the next time I go to one of these places--

JO: Pardon?

VB: The next time I get a chance to go to one of these places, I'll look out for your work.

JO: [laughs]

VB: I think, if I go to one of these places you've mentioned, one of these Royal palaces --

JO: Yes.

VB: I'll know to look out for your work.

JO: Some of them will be done by us.

VB: Yeah, That's interesting.

JO: We were the only four people that used to do it.

VB: Yeah.

JO: Plenty of money in it. We earned plenty of money.

VB: I'll bet.

MG: Interesting work.

VB: Mhm.

JO: Job took a lot a patience 'cause it was all done by hand. Everything is carved by hand and then stuck up there.

VB: Goodness me.

JO: These cornices, they're [inaudible; up there?]. But the egg and dart in between, that's stuck. You make that on the ground and you stick it onto the cornice afterwards. The main cornice is run solid, moulds.

VB: Ah, I see.

CP: I always loved those cornices.

JO: The other pieces are stuck on afterwards. You make them on a bench.

VB: I see.

JO: And then you stick them on. With [inaudible].

VB: Very unusual line of work.

JO: Pardon?

VB: It's a very unusual line of work that.

JO: Well. I suppose it was really.

MG: A craft, isn't it?

VB: Yeah.

JO: I suppose I walked past the Queen about a thousand times. Prince Philip. You never knew as I walked by. In the corridors. Just, "Hallo, ma'am." Just, just like that. I've used the toilets that they used to use. Old-fashioned toilets they are too.

[laughter in background]

VB: Yeah.

JO: Nobody'd normally want to live in Buckingham Palace. [laughs] It's twenty-two foot high. Well they're as high as these things, if not more, higher.

VB: Yeah.

JO: That place is not lived in. It's not like an ordinary house really where it's been lived in. You know, people have had a smoke and drink.

VB: Yeah.

JO: It's not like that. It's erm, it's all foreign to the ordinary person really. It's not so very nice.

VB: I'll bet.

JO: The Queen's got her bedroom. Philip's got his.

NO: Which Queen was it?

JO: Pardon?

NO: Was it our present Queen? Was it our present Queen that you used to see?

JO: Yes. Yes, yes.

VB: Mhm. So, have you always lived in --

JO: Pardon?

VB: Have you always lived in London then?

JO: Yes. Always.

VB: Yeah. Yeah.

JO: Always.

VB: That's great. And, were you married, yourself?

JO: Yes. I was married in 1938.

VB: That's great.

JO: I went away to war. Came back and we had a son.

VB: Yeah.

JO: And the wife, she had a cancer on her kidney. So, they operated and took it out. And after they'd operated, they had to take her fallopian tubes out as well. So she couldn't have no more children but she had a good life after that.

VB: Mhm.

JO: And we had the one boy. We wanted a family. See, [we wanted?] three or four children.

VB: Yeah.

JO: So we was unlucky. But still, we had everything else. We had a car, house, garden, everything like that. And then erm, 19-. Well she's been dead six years now. Just over six years. She got another cancer. On the other kidney and they couldn't operate you see, so, that's how it was.

VB: Uhuh.

JO: The boy now, he's eh, he's erm, computer. Marvellous job. He wouldn't come into the trade. He wouldn't come into the craftsmen trade, wouldn't have it at all.

VB: Mhm.

JO: So he wanted, erm, he went to college till he was twenty-six. He come out. He's been a computer expert ever since. Which is a lovely job.

VB: Yes. Certainly is.

JO: Plenty of money. He's got a nice car [inaudible].

VB: That sounds great.

JO: [inaudible; hands?].

VB: You must be proud of him.

JO: Yes.

VB: Yeah. Lilian, can I ask you the same questions? Erm, how old were you when you left school?

LI: I left school in the July and I was seventeen in the December.

VB: That's great.

LI: And I went to be a GPO telephonist. [pause 4 seconds]

VB: And did you continue to work as a telephonist?

LI: Yes. Yes. Yes. Until I was married in [date redacted] 1939. The day before war broke out.

VB: Goodness me.

LI: I went to live in Woking in Surrey. [pause 4 seconds]

LI: And we lived there till my husband retired in 1969.

VB: That's great.

LI: We went to live in Minehead in Somerset.

VB: Ah! And do you have children yourself?

LI: No.

VB: No. That's great.

LI: And I came up here, four years, in 19-, yes, four years ago.

VB: That's great. Well, thanks for bearing with me while I ask these questions. 'Cause I know it takes a while.

MG: What are you asking these questions for, may I ask?

VB: Well, it's really erm, because we're talking to quite a lot of people about going to the cinema, it's quite interesting to get an idea about things like say, erm, people that were in their thirties in the thirties, versus people that were in their teens, and what sort of films they liked, that sort of thing.

MG: Well I'd been married a month an the first time I went to a cinema, that was in 19-, 1921.

VB: 1921.

MG: And I didn't like them and I haven't been many times since.

VB: Right.

[general laughter]

MG: Didn't like sitting in the dark.

NO: No.

MG: Didn't know who was sitting on the other side of us. And I didn't like them and so I wouldn't go.

VB: Mhm. 'Cause I was interested, everyone seems to come from quite different areas.

MG: Yeah. A lot of us do.

VB: And I know you were saying, erm, before you both came in, that you used to go to the cinema about once a week.

LI: Yes, I did. We always queued up. Saturday mornings. We had to queue up.

NO: We used to line up and it used to be about tuppence, didn't it? 10 o'clock Saturday morning, you used to go in for a penny. In old money.

JO: Yes. Yeah.

NO: Saturday morning. But when I [inaudible], we used to go to the cinema every week. But, you had to queue up outside, for ages.

LI: And in those days, the music was supplied by a pianist.

NO: Yes. That's right.

LI: And she used to have to drum it away, when someone was running from a train, or some other fine thing. And she would play harder and harder. In fact my husband's cousin was a pianist.

VB: Ah!

LI: In the cinema.

MG: And they had [smart?] organs, didn't they?

LI: Pardon?

MG: Didn't they have organs?

[general assent]

LI: They used to have the organ. It used to come up.

[general assent]

LI: That was after of course, after they had, when the talkies started.

VB: Yes. Yeah.

LI: Of course, of course, it wasn't talkies to start with.

MG: I remember once or twice going to see war films with my husband and the organ used to come up from down below.

LI: Yeah, yeah.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause I brought along some photographs of cinemas in Harrow. I'm not sure if they'll be ones that you, erm, remember. But, certainly there are things like, there's the Wealdstone Odeon. And I know there were Odeons all over.

NO: Yeah. There were several Odeons.

VB: Yeah.

NO: Yeah.

VB: I don't know if that--

MG: It was our favourite [inaudible], the Odeon.

LI: Yeah. Odeon.

MG: Our favourite name for them.

VB: I mean whe --

MG: There were two in Uxbridge. I remember. We used to have two in Ruislip at one time. The Astoria and the Rivoli. The Rivoli was closed down and Sainsbury's built there. And the Astoria's closed now.

VB: Mhm. I think it's the same for a lot of the cinemas round about here.

NO: Well television did that.

VB: Mhm.

LI: They turned a lot of them into bingo halls.

VB: Yeah.

NO: That's right. They did.

CP: That's where I used to live.

VB: Is it?

CP: At one time. In Wealdstone.

VB: Ah, really? When was that? When were you living in Wealdstone?

CP: I used to go there.

MG: Are you Scotch?

VB: Yes, I am. Yes.

MG: I thought you were.

VB: Yeah. I'm interested when you say that, you remember the Wealdstone Odeon. What was that like? Inside.

CP: It was quite nice. I used to love it there, the cinema.

MG: Was it on the corner?

CP: Spend my life there.

MG: Was it on the corner, opposite St John's Church? In Harrow?

CP: Yes, I think it was. Yeah.

MG: Yes. I think I remember it.

VB: Yeah. There's a picture of it here. Actually I think that might, is that the inside of it there? Or is that --

CP: I don't know about that.

VB: No.

CP: But I remember that one.

VB: Yes.

MG: Yes, that's right. And across on that other corner, Debenham's is now. But it used to be Sopers. Was it Sopers? No Sopers was --

CP: Sopers, yes. And Debenhams.

MG: Was it Sopers? Yes. Yeah.

CP: They were there together

MG: Yes. That's right.

VB: Was that quite a popular cinema then? That Odeon [referring to Odeon Wealdstone].

CP: Yeah, it was quite a popular one. They were all popular really. [laughs]

VB: Yeah.

MG: Yes, I remember [inaudible]. Used to go to the lunchtime concerts, St John's Hall.

VB: Ah!

MG: On alternate Fridays.

VB: 'Cause that was something I wanted to ask about as well. I'd heard that there were sometimes tea dances, or, erm, things in some of the cinemas, round here. I don't know if that's something you ever came across.

MG: What did you say?

VB: Em, tea dances. In some of the bigger cinemas.

CP: Oh, yes.

MG: They used to have them in Harrow, in Sopers, didn't they? Upstairs you used to have a cup of tea and they had a three or four orchestra. Used to play a couple of fiddles, probably and a piano.

VB: That's interesting.

MG: Used, used to be played sometimes from about half-past three till five.

CP: That's right.

MG: Yes. Used to be quite a thing to do, to go to the --

CP: Yes.

MG: Tea, to orchestras like that.

VB: So there were other things happening.

CP: Yeah.

VB: Erm, locally.

[inaudible; multiple voices at once]

CP: There was Finsbury Park Empire

VB: Right.

CP: And we lived near Finsbury Park too.

VB: Yeah. So were there, were there differences between the cinemas where you lived? Were there some that were more up-market say, than others?

NO: Yes, a lot of difference.

MG: There was another big cinema on the left-hand side in Harrow. But now I think there's a market place just below. You made me think of it when you said market. It's now a market I believe. And I think they have it open on Thursdays.

VB: Yeah. So a lot these cinemas really, really have gone. Erm, I mean I've got another one here as well. The Dominion in Harrow. I don't know if --

CP: Yeah.

MG: Dominion, that's right.

VB: Is that the one you were --

MG: That's right. I think the Dominion, in Oxford Street--

NO: Yes, there is one there.

CP: Yes. That one I remember very well.

[inaudible; overtalking]

MG: I remember, yes, yes.

VB: It's difficult for me to imagine what these cinemas were like. You were saying that there were queues outside.

NO: They were lovely cinemas. But after a little while they divided them up, and you could go to two cinemas, in one, from one. It used to be allowed in the same entrance, but when you got inside --

CP: I think that's still there.

NO: You would be in different cinemas. I didn't like it so much.

VB: That's one you remember [to CP] as well.

NO: No I never went there much, then.

LI: I think at one time they started having erm, you know, what they call turns, you know they used to have someone to sing. Used to do that, didn't they? They used to have someone, like a concert in the middle of the cinema.

NO: Yeah.

LI: You'd have someone singing or reciting or --

VB: Ah!

LI: A comic or something. I guess, more like a stage show.

VB: That's interesting.

NO: [inaudible]. I know that they divided them up. And they'd be two cinemas in the same old, in the same building. Yes. And I didn't think it was quite the same. Erm, I think we stopped going. I suppose because there was something at home too. Television probably.

VB: Do you think then, I'm interested in what you said just now. Do you think that the atmosphere in the cinemas in the thirties was different?

NO: Yes.

VB: Was there something--

MG: I don't know. I haven't been to the cinema for years and years.

NO: No, neither have I.

VB: I mean, what--

NO: Of course, as your children grow up it's them that's going to the cinema. Not you.

VB: So did you go to the cinema more at certain times of your life, do you think?

NO: Yes, I think so.

CP: Maybe, I don't know.

LI: I think when you first started courting you went to the cinema.

NO: Yes, that's right. You used to go with your boyfriend, didn't you?

VB: Yeah.

NO: Well then when you got married and had children, you had to stay home.

VB: Yeah.

NO: Well, I had Christopher, one of my sons, and my eldest daughter was working. My first daughter. And she used to say to me, she'd come home and she'd say, "You can go to the cinema if you like tonight. I'll look after Christopher. I'll put him to bed." [laughs]

VB: It's interesting. So it was something to do with people going to the cinema. Is that right? I mean, would you go with a friend, or--

NO: Yes.

VB: Boyfriend, or--

NO: Yeah. Not alone. No fear!

LI: 'Course, when you went to the children's cinema, we used to get excited if anything happened and say, "Look behind you! Look behind you!" [laughs] "He's coming! He's coming!"

NO: Yeah.

VB: What sort of stars did you like? Did you have any favourites among the film stars?

NO: Oh yes. I think we had.

CP: Oh yes, we had lots.

NO: Oh, I can't remember names now. On the, on the erm, television the other night there was, it... is it Lana Turner?

[general assent]

NO: She died, didn't she?

[general assent]

NO: And it gave a little clip of her, one of her films. But she died. She was seventy-something.

[inaudible; overtalking].

LI: I can remember the early ones, with Charlie Chaplin--

VB: Ah.

NO: Yes, yeah.

LI: Was it, Charlie, what was the boy called, was it, Charlie Chaplin and Jackie, was it Jackie--

CP: Jackie Coogan.

LI: There was always a little boy working with him.

VB: Did you like the comedies then?

[general assent]

NO: And there was romances too. Very nice romances.

VB: I brought some stills from some of the thirties films. I wondered if they were some of the ones that, that you liked. I mean, when you mentioned romances, I've got erm, Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

LI: And the dancing; inaudible; multiple voices at once].

VB: Did you like--

NO: Who was the lady he danced with?

CP: Ginger Rogers.

VB: Ginger Rogers. John, did you like films like that? [pause 4 seconds]

JO: Well, this is in the 1920s, 1930s.

VB: 1930s, yes.

JO: [inaudible]. First talkie was Al Jolson, was it?

[general assent]

JO: Yeah, Al Jolson, *The Singing Fool*.

NO: That's right.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

JO: [recording starts mid-conversation] I mean there was no cars in them days.

[general assent]

JO: One of the first cars I had was in 1931 [inaudible; overtalking].

NO: You had to go by bus, didn't you?

JO: But erm, there was no trouble in parking in them days, when I, in 1931 I had a little Austin 7. That was... I had a car all my life until last year.

VB: Right.

JO: I had to give it away. My legs went. But, erm.

NO: And that coloured chap. Sonny [Samuels?] Sonny, 'Sonny Boy' [referring to the song from *The Singing Fool*]. Used to sit with him on his knee.

MG: That's what you're doing, isn't it?

VB: Sorry?

MG: Recording, their conversation.

VB: That's right. Yes. I was --

MG: I thought that's what you were doing.

NO: She did ask us if we minded. Wasn't you here?

MG: No.

VB: Yeah.

CP: And then there was the first talkies weren't there?

[general assent]

CP: Yeah. Talking cinema.

JO: There used to be a little cinema they used to call the fleapit.

[general laughter]

JO: Near where I lived in Kentish Town, and you could go in there for fish supper. For tuppence.

CP: That's right.

JO: And it was all old... you know, it was erm, no talkies. It was all silent films. And 'course as you went in you'd buy, Saturday night had perhaps, two or three coppers, so you'd buy a bag of peanuts. Orange or something. All the time the film's on, there's everybody crunching peanuts.

[general laughter and assent]

JO: Throwing apple cores about. [inaudible; overtalking].

NO: I did go to see that. Ginger Rogers and--

VB: Ah!

JO: They used to walk about with a spray. A little disinfectant spray.

NO: To a little place, I think they called it the Playhouse in Greenford.

VB: Right, yeah.

NO: Well, eh, after that eh, when I didn't used to go to the [inaudible], we used to go to Shepherd's Bush Empire. You could go up in the gods for sixpence.

VB: Really?

NO: Yes.

VB: Yeah.

NO: And it was quite a popular place for people to go. Shepherd's Bush Empire. And I think it's being used for some of the television programmes. Being erm, either recorded out there or it goes out from the Shepherd's Bush Empire.

VB: Ah, I see.

NO: I'm not quite sure.

VB: Yeah. It is interesting to think, 'cause I mean, looking at the clothes and everything in these films. I've got one of Joan Crawford there.

NO: Yes.

VB: I don't know if she was one that you liked or. Erm, I mean we were talking a bit about musicals there. Did you have any other favourites in the musicals?

CP: Oh, we used to have the old, erm, music hall.

VB: Mhm.

CP: That was in Euston Road. Called 'The Euston' it was. This place we went to. I was only young then. Quite young. But mum used to take me.

VB: Oh lovely. So there was quite a lot of entertainments available.

CP: Yes.

MG: We used to go to the Chiswick Empire.

NO: Yes, that was a well-known place.

MG: Yes. Used to have some very good --

NO: Yeah, shows on there.

MG: Shows on there. They did.

NO: Yes. Yeah. And like the--

MG: Sometimes to the 'Hammersmith Palace' [referring to the 'Palace of Varieties'].

NO: Yeah. Yes, the 'Hammersmith Palace'.

MG: Chiswick Empire was the nearest to us.

VB: Right.

NO: There was usually a musical somewhere, locally, that people could go to then.

VB: Mhm.

MG: 'Course, we hadn't got radio then, had we?

[general assent]

VB: Is that right? I mean did people tend to go out on a very local, was there enough to do, that you didn't really need to have to go very far, say, to go to the cinema?

[general assent]

NO: Well, we used to have a piano and get round the piano and make our own music, when we didn't have--

MG: We did a lot of that at home, didn't we?

NO: Yes. That's right. We used to have a good old singalong of our own.

MG: That's right.

NO: We're having a singalong here tomorrow, aren't we?

MG: Yes. But, in a different way.

[general laughter]

MG: They try to be old-fashioned, but they're not.

[general assent]

MG: Doesn't sound the same.

VB: Yeah. I suppose it's different when you say doing that with your, your own family. And it must be a different sort of thing.

MG: Used to go to my grandfather's a lot. He had an American organ. And he used to play that. And on Sunday evenings it was always the hymn singing, we used to have Sunday evenings. All sat round in a room with him--

NO: Lovely.

MG: He was awfully like King Edward to look at. Very like him.

LI: Other comics I liked was erm, Laurel and Hardy.

VB: Ah. I think I've got one of them.

LI: Oh yes, yes. Ah. They were lovely.

VB: What was it about Laurel and Hardy that --

LI: Pardon?

VB: What was it about Laurel and Hardy that made you laugh?

LI: Well erm, Hardy, Laurel was, erm, so simple! And erm, he used to do all silly things. And of course, Hardy used to try and straighten him up and, and, erm, his face, facial expressions.

MG: One was big and one was short, wasn't he?

[general assent]

LI: There's a picture of him. Have a look. And, erm, you know, he used to do such silly things. And Hardy used to get so mad with him!

[general assent; inaudible; multiple voices at once]

MG: Yeah, I do remember them like that.

CP: Yeah, he did knock him about! [laughs]

NO: I can't pass it to Celia. Unless I move this. And then I'm...

VB: Here, let me. Erm, what about --

CP: Yes, that's them. [laughs]

VB: Did you like the gangster films? The Edward G. Robinsons?

LI: I wasn't so keen on gangster films.

CP: Joan Crawford.

NO: Who was that?

CP: Joan Crawford.

NO: Oh-h yes!

CP: Do you remember?

MG: Yes, rather.

VB: Was she well liked, Joan Crawford?

CP: Oh yes. Very. Yes.

MG: We didn't see short skirts to that extent, did we? There were no short skirts [inaudible], long skirts.

NO: Not at that time but we've had the, erm, short skirts before.

MG: Ah yes.

[inaudible; multiple voices at once]

MG: That was due to rationing, wasn't it?

NO: Yeah, that's right.

MG: A shortage.

NO: Yeah.

VB: Some of the other ones I brought just now, people like Shirley Temple.

LI: Shirley Temple. Yes.

NO: Shirley Temple. Yeah.

LI: Erm, she was a great favourite.

NO: Yes, that's her.

JO: She was in all the talkies.

CP: Bette Davis.

VB: That's right. Yes.

JO: Thirties, these pictures. They're not all that old, really.

LI: Yes.

MG: She was all curvy wasn't she?

CP: Do you remember Bette Davis?

MG: Who?

LI: Bette Davis.

MG: Yes.

CP: She was one of my favourites.

NO: Was she?

CP: Shirley Temple.

VB: What was it about Bette Davis that appealed to you?

CP: Oh, she was so dramatic, you know. [laughs]

VB: Ahh.

CP: Shirley Temple in there.

VB: Erm, who else have I got? Erm, Robert Montgomery.

MG: I don't [inaudible; overtalking].

CP: I don't remember him very much.

NO: Oh yes. He was a very erm--

MG: Oh yes, he was, wasn't he?

NO: He was very, erm—

MG: I'm trying to remember--

JO: They're showing some a these on the telly, aren't they?

[general assent]

JO: And the old ones was the Keystone Cops and Harold Lloyd and Tom Mix.

LI: Oh yes, Harold Lloyd.

JO: And all them they were the silent pictures. [inaudible]

MG: Do you remember the husband and wife team? She was a beautiful singer. I believe they, I think there was something about them a little while ago. Having died, at least one of them.

JO: Break down every ten minutes. Playing away on the piano down the pit, everybody chucking apple cores at you.

VB: Yeah.

[laughter]

NO: Who's the lady on the back?

VB: Eh, it's Janet Gaynor.

NO: Who?

LI: Janet Gaynor.

VB: Janet Gaynor.

NO: Ah, Janet Gaynor.

MG: Oh yes. I remember the name.

VB: Yeah.

MG: What's the name of the husband and wife team that used to sing? He had a very beautiful voice.

NO: Oh yes, yes. I can't remember names.

MG: I can't think of the name of them. Used to love to go and hear them.

NO: Oh yes. So did I. They were lovely. I can't remember names now.

VB: The only one I can think of, I don't think they were married, is Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald.

MG: Oh this was a husband and wife team.

NO: Yes, they were. And they used to sing beautifully.

MG: He had a wonderful voice.

NO: Yes, yes. They were lovely.

MG: Oh gosh! What is the name of them?

NO: I can't remember names now.

VB: Yeah.

MG: It'll come to me in a minute I think.

NO: Yeah.

VB: Yeah. Well I've got some others here. People like George Formby. From the comedian side...

[general recognition]

VB: Did you like George Formby?

CP: No, I didn't care for him very much.

LI: Strumming on his banjo.

VB: Yeah. What was it that put you off George Formby?

CP: I thought he was a bit... [laughs] silly, you know.

VB: Bit silly. Yeah. [pause 4 seconds] It's interesting, 'cause when I've talked to people before, I think people either really like George Formby or don't like him at all. He seems to get strong reactions I think.

MG: That's not Norman Wisdom, is it?

CP: Who?

MG: Norman Wisdom.

NO: Is that Norman Wisdom?

VB: George, George Formby.

NO: George Formby. George Formby.

MG: George Formby.

NO: Oh yes. "I'm leaning on the lamppost at the corner of the street" [referring to song].

[general recognition]

MG: I used to like that song...

NO: Yes,[inaudible], he was great fun, wasn't he? I didn't know he looked like that. Well, I suppose we would if we saw him with a...

VB: That's right. If you see him with a ukulele. [laughs] Another one I've got here is Gracie Fields.

LI: Gracie Fields. Oh yes! [pause 2 seconds] You'd have a job to recognise her there I think.

VB: Mhm. Yeah. Did you think there was any difference between the films that were being made in England and films that were being made in America? In the thirties. Were you aware of any--

CP: Who's this then?

VB: Erm, Gracie Fields.

LI: Gracie Felds, you'd have a job to recognise her, wouldn't you?

CP: No, I didn't like Gracie Fields.

VB: Yeah.

CP: I don't know why. Just didn't.

MG: Jessie Matthews.

VB: Jessie Matthews.

MG: She lived in Ruislip.

VB: And Sonny Hale.

MG: Cremated in Ruislip churchyard. She...

CP: That's right.

MG: And, I remember, one of the rose growers, she was seventy-four when she died. And one of the rose growers gave seventy-four rose bushes and they got planted all round the paths that was reserved for cremation.

NO: Yeah.

MG: And they were planted all round there. And there's a, just a little plaque, oh, no size at all.

NO: Yeah.

MG: In the ground. To Jessie Matthews.

VB: Ah.

MG: Yes. In Ruislip churchyard. I remember she died, I believe, in Hatch End. And she did live at Ruislip at one time.

NO: Yes.

MG: And I can remember once, walking along the High Street. She was walking along on the other side of the road. Just in an ordinary skirt and white blouse. And somebody said to me, "You know who that is? That's Jessie Matthews." And I said, "Well I'm blowed. You wouldn't know her outdoors, would you?" She just went along as any ordinary person.

VB: Yeah.

MG: With her shopping bag.

CP: She did.

MG: She lived up in Bury Street. In Ruislip. Yes. I believe she lived with her sister. I'm not sure. But I think so.

VB: That's interesting.

MG: Do you remember her?

CP: Yes. Yes.

MG: Yes.

VB: Just by coincidence, I've got, 'cause she opened the Granada in Harrow. Jessie Matthews. With Sonny Hale. So I've got a thing from the paper.

NO: Oh, I'll have a look at that.

VB: I think it was about '36, something like that.

LI: And Sonny Hale.

NO: Yes. Yeah.

VB: Of course, how could we forget Jessie Matthews? When you said that.

MG: [inaudible; overtalking].

NO: Yeah, yeah.

VB: So, was she very popular, Jessie Matthews?

[general assent]

MG: Oh she was. Now, this must've been in the late thirties. Because we went to Ruislip in 1937. I lived there for fifty-five years.

VB: Mhm.

MG: And eh, she was there around then.

NO: [reading] "The wonder theatre of 1938. The Grand Opening. Granada, Harrow."

MG: Harrow, God bless. Yes.

NO: [reading] "Grand Opening by Jessie Matthews and Sonnie Hale in person." It said, "Doors open at 7." Down here it says, "Gracie Fields, John Stuart, Owen Nares, the show goes on. Ruby Keeler, Allen Jenkins, ready, willing and able." It's lovely, isn't it, that?

MG: Lovely to see.

NO: That first opening thing. 'Specially for anybody that lived, lives in Harrow.

MG: Yes.

NO: Who knows Harrow really well.

VB: Yes.

NO: I don't, because eh, would you like to see it, dear?

MG: I'm sure she would.

NO: Because, as I say, I was born in London but was taken down to Eastleigh when I was five.

VB: Yeah.

NO: Yeah, so that area round Eastleigh and Southampton, Winchester and that, is much more --

MG: Home to you.

VB: Yeah, of course.

NO: Yeah. I know that area, a lot better.

MG: There used to be a Coliseum in Harrow. For variety shows.

VB: Ah!

MG: And it was over on the left hand side, as you come down, erm, erm, Station Road, it was over on the left. It's all now shops and, you know. And, do you know, there was lovely shows they had there. I actually saw... now, what's his name? The man who, who sings 'You Are My Heart's Delight.'

NO: Oh!

MG: He was actually on, actually down there. And I know we had an awful job to get the tickets to go. But we did get two to go.

VB: Yeah.

MG: And it was a musical. Yes. But they used to have straight plays.

NO: Erm, erm, I used to love that thing that he sung.

MG: 'You Are My Heart's Delight.'

NO: Yes.

MG: And I think it was 'Bless the Bride', was it? That, that show? I believe it was. It was on in London for a long time.

NO: Yeah. Yeah.

MG: And they took it off in London. And it toured round. And it came to the Coliseum in Harrow.

VB: Right.

MG: And it was a lovely little theatre.

NO: Yes. Yes, they did that a lot in those days. They --

VB: Mhm.

NO: They toured them round, after they'd been up the West End.

VB: Ah, I see.

NO: Yes.

VB: Yeah.

MG: Yes, we often used to go to the shows there.

NO: This is a picture from one of the films, I should imagine.

VB: Yes, it's erm, I think it's 'Sing As You Go' [referring to *Sing As We Go!*].

NO: Which is it?

VB: 'Sing As You Go'.

NO: Oh.

MG: *Wizard of Oz?*

NO: And gold.

MG: Oh.

VB: No, 'Sing As You Go'.

CP: *Sing As We Go.*

VB: *Sing As We Go.*

CP: I remember the title.

VB: Yeah. It's one where she's, I think it's set in Bolton or one of the towns in the north of England.

NO: Yeah.

VB: And she leads lots of mill girls. A sort of typical Gracie Fields film. Yeah.

CP: I don't remember these two. Don't remember them.

VB: Yeah.

NO: Don't you?

CP: No.

NO: No. Don't remember them. They must've been in a film.

VB: Mhm.

NO: I should imagine.

[general assent; photos handed back]

VB: Thanks very much.

CP: Interesting, aren't they?

VB: They are. The other thing maybe I should is, did you, were you outside a lot, when, say when you were children? Did you play a lot outdoors?

LI: Oh, always.

VB: Yeah.

LI: I mean, particularly, you know, if you lived in London, the gardens were very small and most people had, had children, had families, and erm...

[inaudible; multiple voices at once]

VB: Yeah.

CA: I bet you've got some stories to tell.

NO: Well that's the thing. We all come from such different areas.

VB: Yes.

CA: All different backgrounds. All different areas.

NO: Yes.

CA: Isn't it? Some from the East End, some from here.

NO: Yes.

CA: Some from there.

NO: Yes.

CA: All over the country.

NO: Yes. We are, aren't we?

VB: Well, it's been very interesting for me. Thanks very much for talking to me. I really appreciated that.

LI: It's nice for us to remember too.

CA: Yes, it's nice. But, sometimes, as I say to Val, it's very difficult when you've got certain people in the lounge. You can't sit with them as well because, to get through to them, it's very difficult. So that's why we have our afternoon tea in here. And our film, we have a film. I do have a man that goes all over the country and he brings slides and he talks on Wales and Scotland.

VB: Yeah.

CA: And there's certain people come in here. Like most of these ladies in here, and this gentleman. Sit here, listen to them, because they can all talk together.

VB: Yeah.

CA: Some of them, I mean it's lovely in the lounge at the moment. There's a lady in there, never comes out of her room. She's in there and she's singing for all she's worth!

[general laughter]

CA: Yes! Milly. She's singing for all she's worth and she can't, won't come out of her room. So I've got her down in the lounge and she's singing. And it's lovely. But she won't go in the lounge with other people.

VB: Mhm.

CA: But she's gone in there today. She's on wing three. She's right at the very end of your wing. No your wing, no my wing. Milly. She's in there singing a wonderful song. Now, hang on.

MG: And you know what she shouts out all the time!

CA: No. She's been in there since half- past two and hasn't opened her... Having a lovely time. Okay, so I can take them back now, because they're due for their tea in a minute.

VB: That's great.

CA: Okay?

MG: Lord, that's gone quick.

CA: Three o'clock.

MG: Yes.

CA: So you're all right, Val, you've got everything you need?

VB: It's been great. Erm, I mean I was wondering if maybe, what usually happens is, I'll go back, I'll listen to my tape and I'll think, I wish I'd asked this or that. And I was wondering if you would have any objections to me maybe coming another time.

CA: No. I'm sure you ladies would be only too pleased, wouldn't you?

[general assent]

VB: It might be a wee while. It depends really. Erm.

CA: Maybe a few months you see.

VB: It could be a few months or a few weeks. But if I called ahead and--

CA: Yeah. Okay.

VB: Would that be all right?

CA: Lovely.

VB: Great. That would be lovely.

CA: Okay. Fine. If you phone and you speak to either Helen --

VB: Yeah.

CA: Who you spoke to before. I think you spoke to me first.

VB: That's right.

CA: But also, that day I was up to my eyes. I had another entertainer. And today, Helen's not in.

VB: Yeah.

CA: So I thought, oh, how am I going to cope with everything? But it's done. Okay.

VB: Ah, that's great.

CA: But please, by all means, come back. And I'll always bring them out to you.

VB: That would be lovely.

CA: But I think it's nice to stick to the same people if you can.

VB: Yes. Absolutely.

CA: Yeah. I mean I can always find you some more but--

VB: Yeah.

CA: Okay. I'm going to take you now into the lounge.

[people start to move to the lounge]

VB: Thanks very much.

CA: [inaudible]. Don't be so independent. [joking with resident]

[End of Interview]