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, 25 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews May Godden and Celia Piggott

* Transcribed by Joan Simpson/Standardised by Richard Rushton

*MG=May Godden, CP=Celia Piggott, HE=Helen (carer), OP=Other person, VB=Valentina Bold

* Notes: Second interview of two with May Godden and Celia Piggott at Westminster House Nursing

Home; Sound Quality: Fair

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

[conversation in background between VB and carer about arrangements for interview]

VB: I was wondering if I could ask you a few more questions about going to the cinema. Your memories of cinemas. I'll come over here maybe. Erm, I was wondering if I could ask you a few more questions. Remember we were talking about, erm, going to the cinema. In the thirties.

MG: I didn't go to the cinemas much.

VB: No.

MG: Didn't fancy them. I don't like them particularly now.

VB: Right.

MG: It's years since I went to one. [inaudible; May?].



MG: More real. Weren't they, somehow?

VB: That's interesting. When you say they were more real. Were they more believable?

MG: The one I used to like very much indeed was Doctor Finlay's Casebook [referring to a television

series from the 1960s].

CP: Yes.

MG: Do you remember?

CP: Yes, yes.

MG: I used to like that very much. Especially Dr Cameron. He was awfully good. And Janet.

VB: Mhm.

MG: And one day, some years ago, I went on a holiday coach tour to Scotland. We went through the town where Arden House was. And I bought a picture of Arden House, with Doctor Finlay and Doctor

Cameron.

VB: Ah.

MG: A picture postcard.

VB: I'm interested you say that because erm, one of the things I brought with me was a couple of

erm, film books.

MG: They've put it on again, I believe.

VB: Yeah.

MG: A little while ago. Some years ago probably.

VB: Yeah.

MG: And it wasn't the same. It wasn't half as nice. And so I didn't bother to look at it after the first

time.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause, erm, I brought along a couple of books of some of the stars of the thirties that

we were talking about. I thought you might be interested to have a look. I don't know if you'd like

to see this one. Would you mind if I turned the TV down a wee bit?

CP: No, I don't mind.

VB: It's just cause of the tape.

CP: Yes.

VB: If I can figure out [laughs] how to do it. That's great. That's it.

MG: [If you press the brown part?], that stops it.

VB: Right. This bit here?

MG: That's it.

VB: That's great. These are quite heavy actually. [inaudible]. 'Cause you were telling me a bit

about stars like Jessie Matthews.

MG: No. She was talking, I told you, yes I told you about, she lived in Ruislip.

VB: That's right. Yes.

MG: That's right. And her ashes are in Ruislip churchyard.

VB: Ah!



MG: I think she went into the hospital. Erm, over. [inaudible], actor's, actor's hospital. It's still there. On the left hand side as you come round the corner. And she was ill in there. But I think she died in

hospital. I'm not sure about that but...

VB: 'Cause I mean, some of the stars we were talking about obviously come up in these books. I

mean here, I think it's Greta Garbo.

CP: Oh yes.

VB: Did you like her?

CP: She's all right. She was all right. Wasn't my favourite, she wasn't.

MG: Who was that?

VB: Greta Garbo.

MG: No, I didn't, I only saw her once.

CP: Yeah.

MG: She wanted to be alone, didn't she?

CP: Yes. [laughs]

VB: Yeah.

MG: So I didn't bother with her then.

VB: [laughs] Did you not make much of her?

MG: No, I didn't bother too much of her.

VB: Erm, there's a bit here about the making of the pictures. Were you interested in the technical side of things or was it more the films?

MG: Oh no. No. My husband wanted to see something so we went and saw it. We didn't go very often. He wasn't all that keen. Mostly he liked the war films.

VB: Mhm. What about stars like Jeanette MacDonald? Was she someone you-

MG: I used to like her. Who did she used to sing with?

CP: Nelson Eddy. Nelson Eddy.

MG: Nelson Eddy. They used to sing the most beautiful songs, didn't they?

CP: That's right. Yes.

MG: Beautiful. Lovely.

CP: Yes. She had a lovely voice, didn't she?

MG: Both of them had.

VB: So there's a rather, you're just looking at a picture of her here. With Maurice Chevalier.

CP: Oh yes. Yes, she was lovely. She was lovely. [pause 3 seconds]

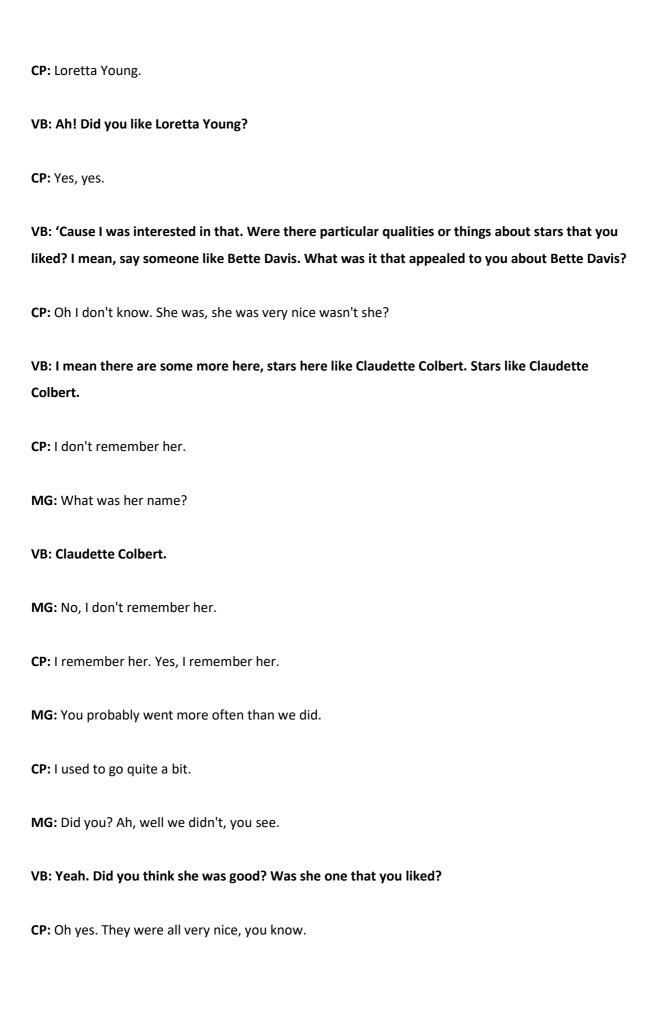
VB: Did you like the singing films? The--

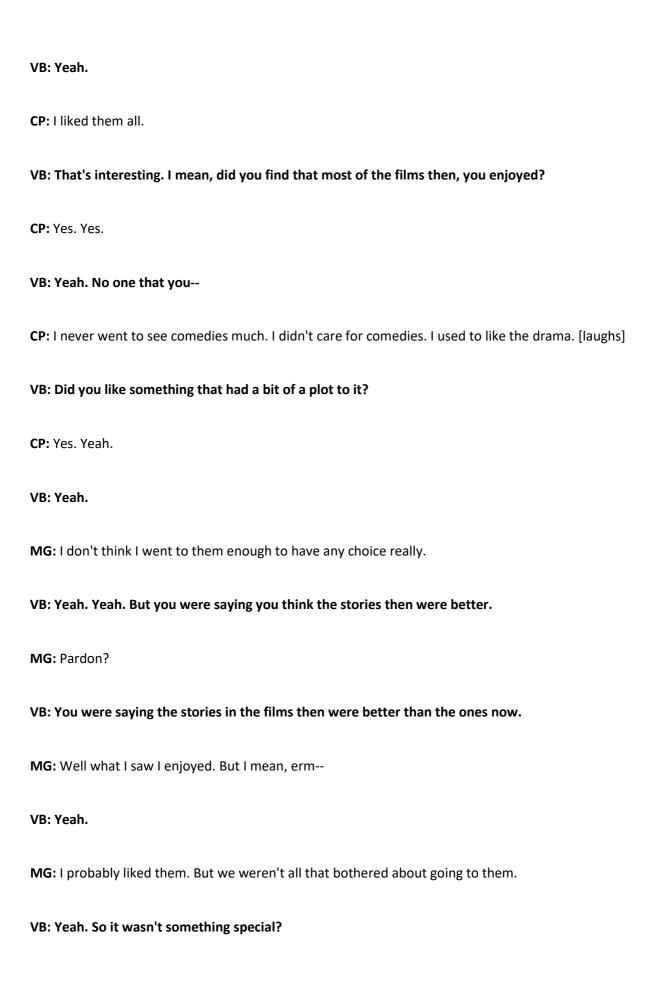
MG: Pardon?

VB: Did you like the musicals?

MG: Yes. Yes. They were all right. I used to like them. We went once or twice to town to see one or two of the big shows.







MG: No. Well I was twenty-four when my baby was born. Well you hadn't got time then. That was in 1922, '23. And in 1926 we moved out to a house in [Greenford?], which was country then. [Proper?] country. And then we had a new garden and new house and so, that was sufficient.

VB: So you had enough to be going on with.

MG: Yes. Yes.

VB: Yeah.

MG: We didn't even have any buses then. It was after we mov--, about 1926, '27 I think, when they started a [inaudible] bus--

VB: Mhm.

MG: That went through.

VB: 'Cause it, it sounds from what I've heard as if London was very different in the thirties.

MG: Well, I think we enjoyed life better. Now it's all noise. All noise, isn't it?

CP: Yeah. I don't know much about films now. I never go.

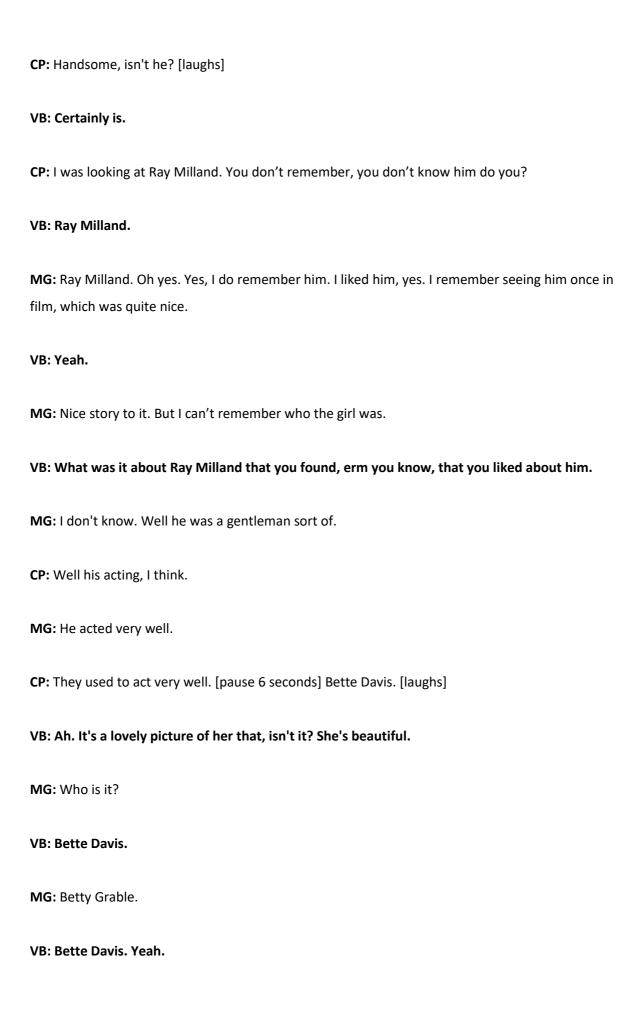
VB: No.

MG: They think the more noise you can make, the better they like it.

VB: Mhm.

CP: Yeah.

VB: Did you have any favourites amongst the male stars? I mean, I see you've got Tyrone Power there. Was he someone you liked?



CP: Do you remember her?

MG: I remember, yes, I remember her. But I wouldn't recognise the pictures now I don't think.

CP: Well, I just saw Bette Davis, you see.

MG: Yes.

VB: There's one here of Ginger Rogers.

MG: Ah. Now I do remember her and Fred Astaire. I remember we went to the <u>Playhouse</u> in Greenford when that was opened. That was new. We went to them in [pause 2 seconds] a dancing thing. That was quite nice. I enjoyed that. Can't remember what it was now. What the name of it was but--

CP: Yeah. And Astaire, with Astaire.

MG: Yeah. Fred Astaire. I liked their dancing.

CP: Yes.

MG: They danced beautifully together.

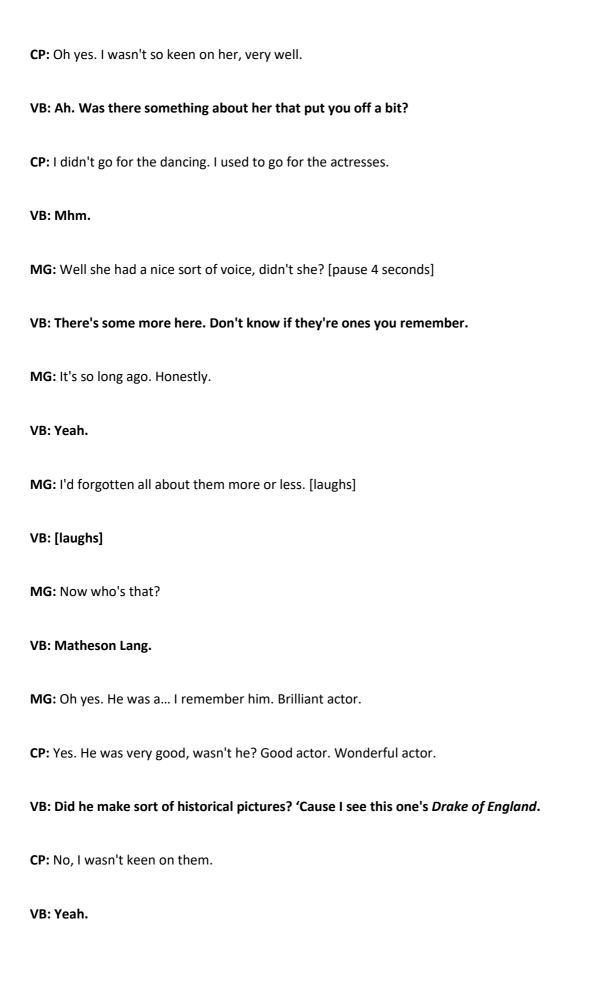
CP: She was a dancer, wasn't she?

MG: Yes.

VB: Yes, it's a nice, erm, photograph, this one as well.

MG: I think I saw [inaudible; overtalking].

VB: Yeah.





MG: I think he was thought a lot of but I couldn't tell you much about him. As I say, we didn't go
often enough.
VB: Yeah.
CP: Carole Lombard.
MG: [inaudible].
VB: Ahh.
VB: Jean Parker.
MG: Who?
VB: Jean Parker.
MG: Oh, I don't know the name. The face seemed familiar. That's all. [pause 2 seconds]
CP: Spencer Tracy, well. [laughs] [inaudible].
VB: Was he someone that you considered a good actor then?
CP: Yeah.
[pause 7 seconds]
MG: Robert Donat. I remember the last film I saw, for many years was him. Gosh, where, what was
the name of it now? And he was simply super in that. I do remember that very much.
VB: 'Cause he was, I think this one is from <i>The 39 Steps</i> .
MG: What was the name?

VB: The 39 Steps. It's this one...

MG: No, that wasn't the name of it. No that doesn't, that doesn't come back to me anyway.

VB: What else was Robert Donat in?

MG: It was a something. [pause 5 seconds] Oh gosh, I can't remember. What was it now? [pause 3 seconds]

VB: I think it's got bits about the stars at the back here. He was in erm, was he not in *Goodbye Mr Chips*? Or something.

CP: That was Robert Donat.

VB: Robert Donat, yes. Did you like him?

CP: Yes.

MG: What was the big film that he did? What was the big show he did? I can't remember. Got a feeling it was something to do with Windsor.

CP: Who you talking about? John Barrymore?

VB: Robert Donat.

MG: No. Robert Donat.

VB: This is one from *The 39 Steps* in this book.

CP: Robert Donat. Yeah.

MG: I remember distinctly--

CP: [The] 39 Steps!



VB: What was the Langham in Pinner like?

MG: It was quite nice. We always used to go in the upstairs. And it was very nice. I liked it very much.

My husband liked it too. We used to go there... [pause; 3 seconds] We used to go over, walk over

there from Ruislip. And then have a cup of tea in a very nice tea shop up in the High Street. Olde

worlde one. And then go there afterwards. Then, we used to get the bus home. The 220 used to run

to Uxbridge and pass near our road and we got off there.

VB: It sounds like a nice day out that.

MG: Yes. I, those sort of things I can remember very well.

VB: Yeah.

MG: But I'm blessed if I can remember the name of the film. [pause 4 seconds]

VB: Oh, it's irritating that isn't it? [laughs]

MG: Yes. It's maddening when you can't remember.

VB: Yeah.

MG: It's just because I haven't thought about it for years.

VB: Of course. Yeah. [pause 6 seconds] He made quite a lot of fairly well known films didn't he?

Robert Donat. I'm trying to think of--

CP: Oh yes. He did a lot. Yeah. You can't remember them all.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause I noticed at the back here, it said he was in The Private Life of Henry VIII.

CP: Mhm.

VB: But, I think that was Charles Laughton. Was the main part. It'll probably come back. Tomorrow

or, it'll probably come back when you're not expecting it.

MG: Yes. That's right.

VB: Memory's like that, isn't it?

MG: That's maddening isn't it? When you can't remember a thing.

VB: That's right.

MG: Well it's just because I've never had well, no occasion to try to think about it.

VB: Yeah. [pause 2 seconds] That's Leslie Howard, I don't know if you know him, Leslie Howard.

MG: Oh, I don't know him very well. As I say, we didn't go very often.

VB: Yeah. [pause 3 seconds] Was going to the pictures a bit of a treat for you then when, you

know, you were raising your family and--

MG: Well, I don't know, we had other things to do. We weren't all that sort of picture minded.

When, if there was something, sometimes my husband would look in the local paper and he'd say,

they got so and so on. And sometimes we went to the Langham, sometimes we went to the Rivoli in

Ruislip.

VB: Ah.

MG: Where Sainsbury's [supermarket] was. Before it was, before it closed down. That was the Rivoli

cinema. There were two in Ruislip. The Astoria in the High Street, and the Rivoli there in the side

street. Ickenham Road I think they called it.

VB: Yeah.

MG: And erm, that was a walk from home.

VB: What was the Rivoli like?

MG: Pardon?

VB: What was the Rivoli like as a cinema?

MG: Oh it was very nice. We liked it. We liked it better than the Astoria.

VB: Was it quite upmarket? Was it a fancy one?

MG: No, no. That's many years ago, my dear.

VB: Right.

MG: I wouldn't call it as upmarket as they are today.

VB: Yeah.

MG: Or what they tell me they are, anyway. But as I tell you, it's years and years since I went to one. [pause 3 seconds] My husband died thirty-four years ago. And I think I only went two or three times after that and that was with a friend who was staying with me. She wanted to go and she'd say, "Oh come along. Let's go." But I wasn't bothered. I would never have gone on my own.

VB: 'Cause it sounds from what you're both saying that erm, that you [CP] were more of a cinemagoer.

MG: I think she was more of a cinemagoer than me.

VB: Yeah.

MG: I think I'm a dud end of it.

VB: Yeah. I mean how often did you go to the cinema?

CP: Oh I went ever, ever such a lot. I did. I was only a youngster then. Before I was married. Didn't go

very much when I was married.

VB: Did you go at all when you, when you were courting your husband? Did your husband used to

take you to the cinema before you were married?

CP: No. No.

VB: No.

CP: He wasn't so keen on films.

VB: Mhm. I mean it's an interesting point that. Do you think that men in general weren't so keen

on films as women were?

MG: I don't think they did much. No.

VB: Mhm. [pause 4 seconds]

MG: We used to go to watch football matches, sometimes--

CP: Yeah.

MG: On a Saturday. I remember going two or three times to the Cup Final at Wembley. Because he

was the secretary of the sports department of his work. His firm, and they used to have so many

tickets allocated to them. And erm, if they weren't all taken up he'd say, would you like to go? I'd

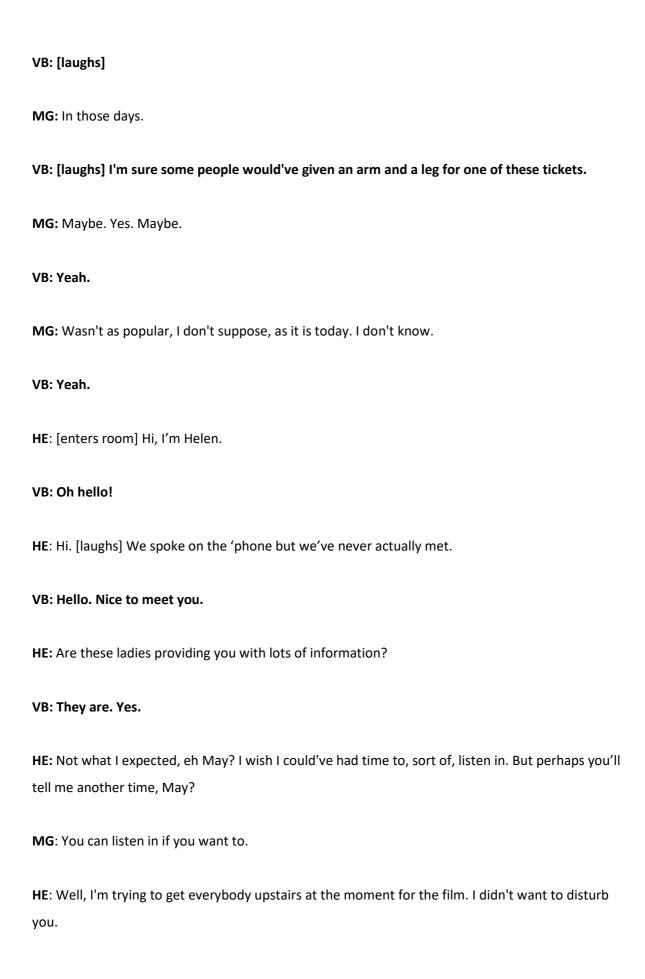
like to go. Will you come with me? And I'd say, oh, all right then. So we went to Wembley, once or

twice. I liked it, I thought it was fun. I liked, 'course, we were in a stand, and it was, we had a seat

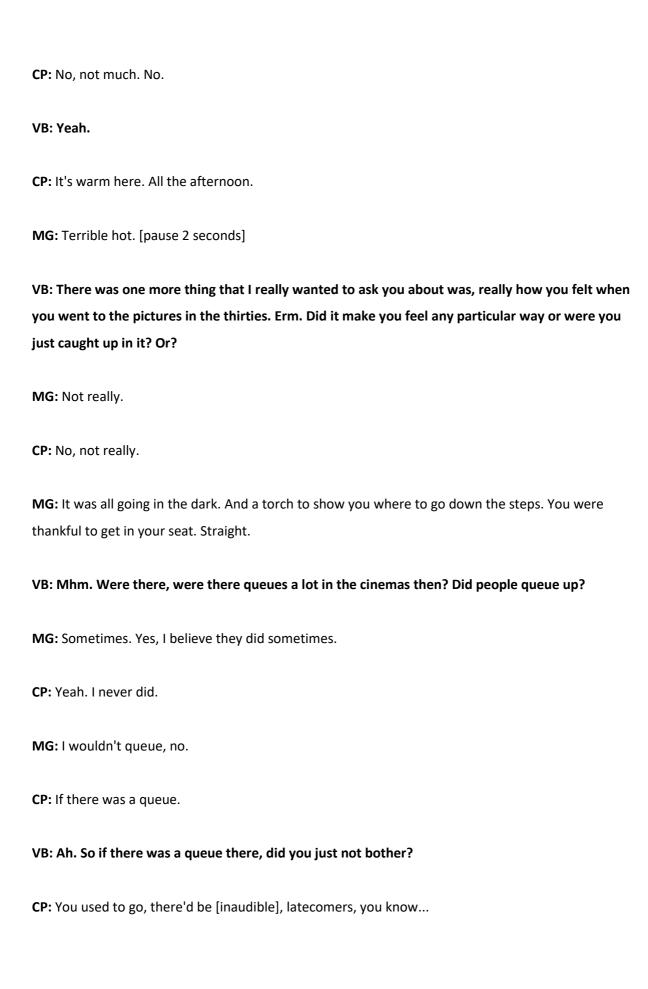
anyway, to sit on. Hard, but it was all right. It was a seat.

VB: It must've been really exciting. I mean I've never been to a big football game like that.

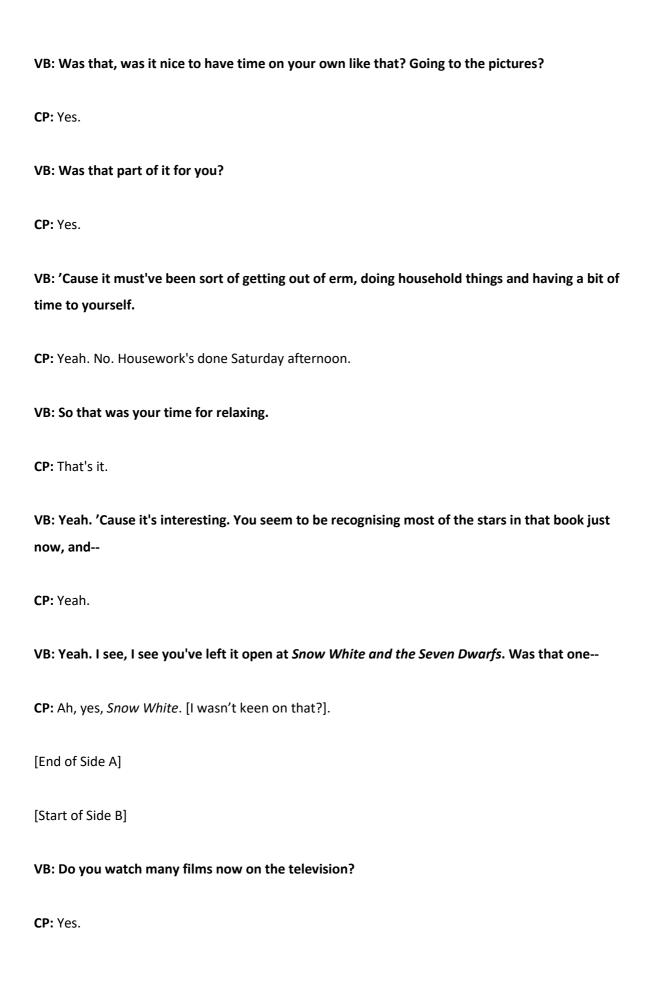
MG: Well, I'm afraid I didn't think much about it then.



MG: You what?
HE : I said I didn't really want to disturb you but I did want to introduce myself. Because we've spoken plenty of times on the phone and never actually met. So
VB: Yeah.
HE: I'll leave you to it.
VB: Right.
HE: Grab some tissues [inaudible] around the place.
MG: Is somebody speaking? I thought somebody spoke behind me.
VB: I think she was just going away there. [laughs] Yeah. [pause 3 seconds] Yeah, I think your entertainer's coming in a minute so.
CP: Pardon?
VB: You're having an entertainer this afternoon.
CP: Mhm.
VB: I was hearing.
CP: Yeah? [pause 4 seconds]
MG: You get the sun like me, don't you, badly?
VB: Mhm.
MG: Very hot, sun on these windows. Doesn't go up much till about six o'clock does it?

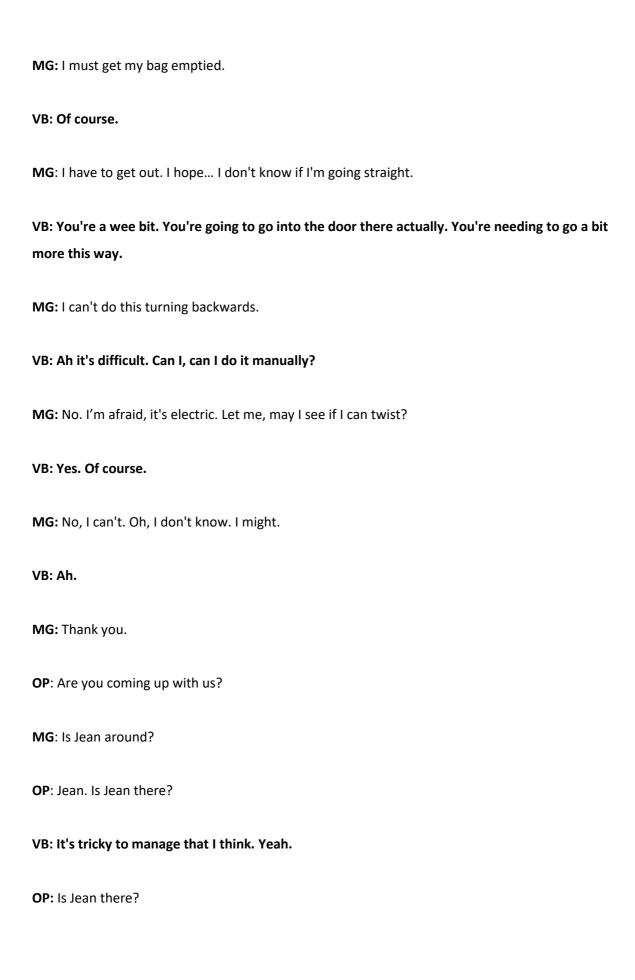


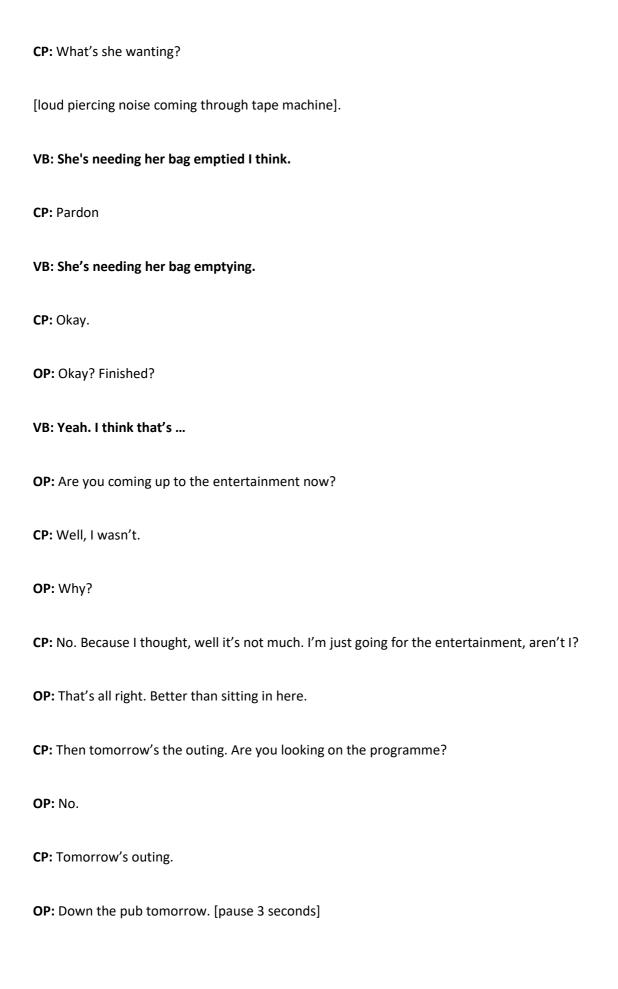


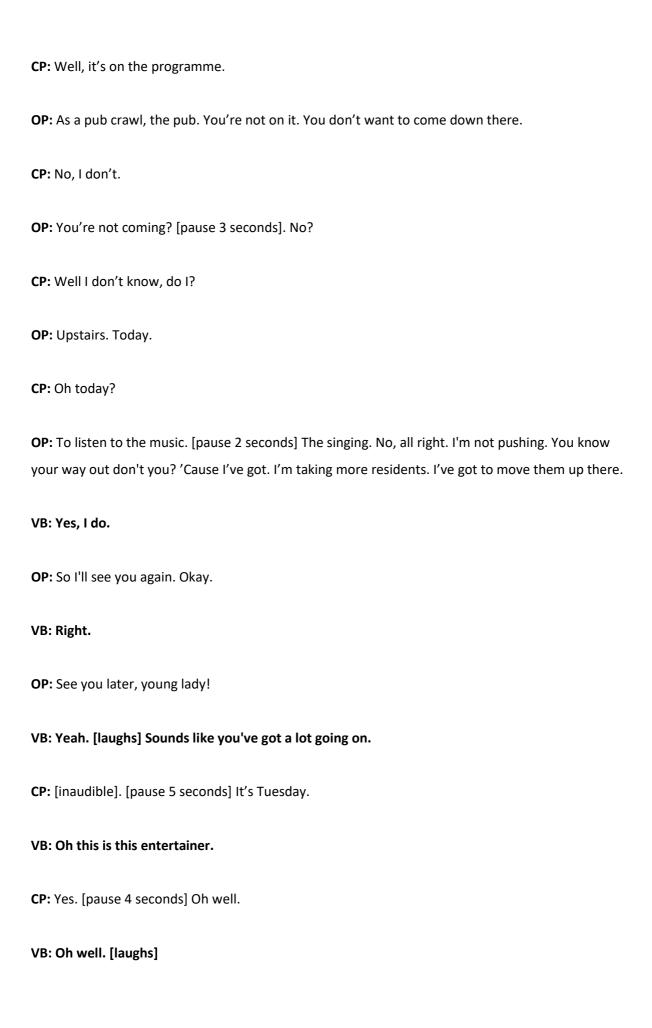




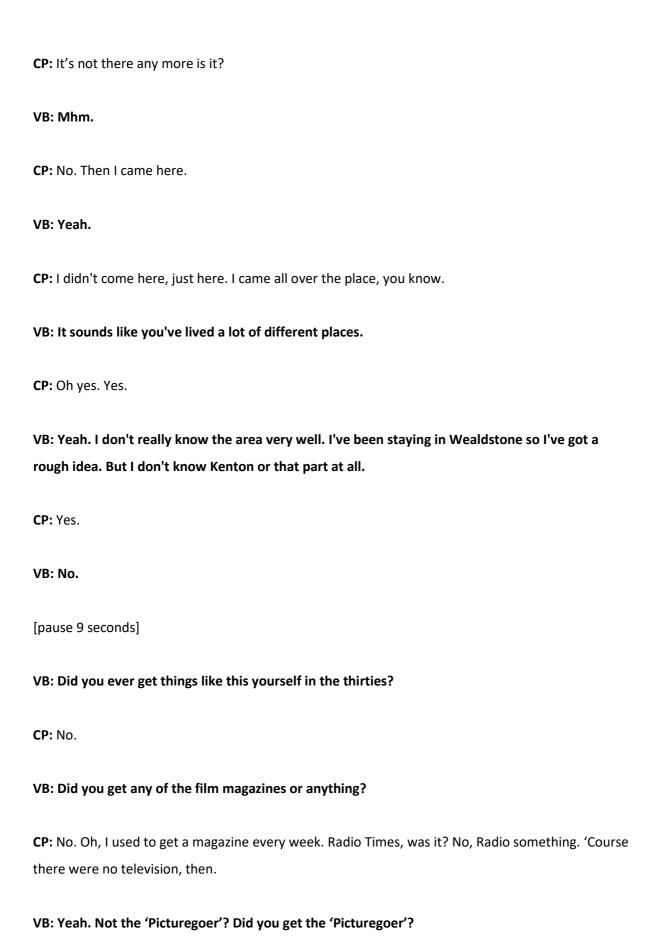
MG: You paid two shillings, you paid a lot. Didn't you? VB: Mhm. Did you ever go into the cinemas in the, in the centre of London? The, erm, sort of Leicester Square area or... **CP:** I didn't go to London much. Not in London. I used to live in Harrow, that way, you know. VB: Yeah. **CP:** This way. VB: How long did you live in Harrow? When did you? 'Cause you weren't born in Harrow were you? CP: Oh no. VB: No. 'Cause I remember from when we talked before. Erm, when did you move there? **CP:** Erm. [pause 4 seconds] VB: Just roughly. I mean... **CP:** I forget now. Can't remember. VB: Was it before you were married? Or after you were married? CP: Before. VB: Before. Yeah. MG: I think you'll have to excuse me. VB: Of course.

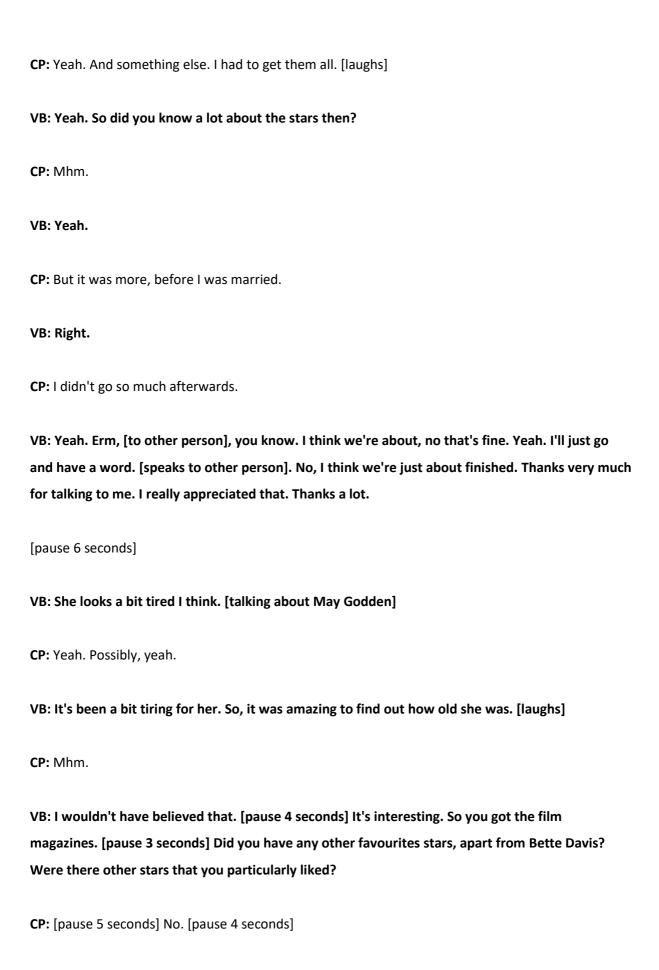




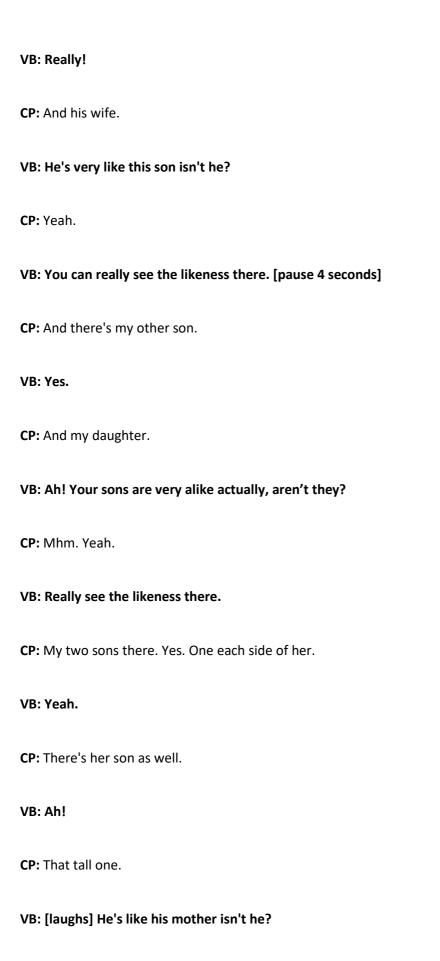


CP: She doesn't [inaudible]. VB: Ah it's nice and peaceful here. [pause 8 seconds] It's been, it's interesting listening to you talk about the thirties, 'cause it's so different from. [pause 2 seconds] I mean Harrow must've changed a lot. CP: Yes. Yes. VB: In that time. [voices in background] VB: Was it a lot, erm, quieter in the thirties round Harrow and--CP: No. No. Things would be the same. I seemed to grow up with Harrow, you know. VB: Yeah. I'm sure you've seen a lot of changes in the area. **CP:** Oh yes. Yeah. VB: What part of Harrow was it, was it you stayed in then? **CP:** Erm, I stayed in Wealdstone for quite a long time. VB: Ah. CP: And then I went to Kenton. And then I went to Formby Avenue. That is in, erm, Kenton Lane. VB: Ahh, yeah. CP: Near the Belmont. VB: Yeah.





VB: I suppose I should let you get on with your afternoon. It's, erm, been really interesting for me
to listen to you. And. Thanks very much for letting me come to talk to you again.
CP: That's all right.
VB: I appreciate that. [pause 3 seconds] I'm a bit loathe to go outside. It's so hot.
van approduce man [pauce o seconda] a zic ioanne to go calonaer ico so non
CD. Oh it's tarribly but out there
CP: Oh it's terribly hot out there.
VB: Oh! It's far, far too hot. It's been like this for so long as well.
CP: Mhm.
VB: You realise how nice it is to have some rain.
CP: Yes.
VB: When you've had this heat. Do you get much of a breeze in here?
CP: Not very much. That's all we get.
C. The very mach. That's an we get.
VD. Vools Vools
VB: Yeah. Yeah.
[sound of rustling paper]
VB: This is a lovely photograph.
CP: All my family there.
VB: That's a lovely one, this one.
CP: Yes. My two sons. My son. My eldest son that is, and his two sons.



CP: Do you think so?
VB: I think the face. Yes. Erm, he's got his, he looks like he's got the father's sort of smile though.
CP: Oh yes, yes.
VB: He's a combination. Yeah. Who's this on the end here?
CP: That's my daughter and her husband.
VB: Ah.
CP: He's a very nice chap.
VB: Ah.
CP: Very nice he is.
VB: I can see the likeness with your daughter. She's like you. Do your family live round about here?
CP: Fairly close.
VB: Yeah.
CP: They don't live on top of me, if you know what I mean.
VB: Yeah.
CP: [inaudible; tape noise].
[End of Side B]
[End of Interview]