

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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- * Pinner, Middlesex, 11 July 1995: Valentina Bold interviews Anthony Venis
- * Transcribed by Joan Simpson/ Standardised by Annette Kuhn
- * AV=Anthony Venis / MrsV=Mrs Venis/ VB=Valentina Bold
- * Notes: First of two interviews with Anthony Venis; Sound Quality: Good.

[Start of Tape One]

[Start of Side A]

[VB tape introduction]

VB: I think that should pick us both up fine. Erm, I mean I was wondering if well if, before we actually got on to the cinema, if you'd mind me asking you just one or two questions about yourself. Just so that I'm sure that I've got--

AV: Yeah, sure, sure.

VB: Your background right. So nothing too sort of personal or anything really. It's just eh... Erm, the first thing I wanted to check that I had right was where you were actually born. Was it in Wembley that you were--

AV: No, no. I was born at New End Hospital.

VB: Right.

AV: Hampstead Heath.

VB: A-ah!

AV: Because at that stage my parents lived in eh, Brondesbury --

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: Which is eh, next door to Kilburn.

VB: Right. And can I ask what your father's occupation was?

AV: Yes, he was a postman.

VB: Postman. Erm, and did your mother work at all?

AV: [pause 2 seconds] No. Not, certainly not after I was born.

VB: Sure.

AV: I don't think so before.

VB: And can I ask if you had brothers and sisters?

AV: Yes, I've got a brother.

VB: Right.

AV: Who's eh, four years younger than me.

VB: Right. Erm, and can I ask what places you've lived in yourself? How long did you spend erm--

AV: I was four years. When we were four, my parents moved to North Wembley.

VB: Right.

AV: And they moved onto the Sudbury Court estate--

VB: Right.

AV: Which was a Comben and Wakeling development from the 1920s, late 1920, erm, early 1920s.

VB: Right.

AV: Eh, [pause 2 seconds] the war came and eh, I was bombed out of where I was working in Holborn. And I, after the Blitz, went, the firm moved down to eh, eh, a village near [Pulborough?], in Sussex.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And eh, I went down with them and most of the company moved down there. And eh, then shortly afterwards my parents came down and lived in the village. Which... this was just after the Blitz.

VB: Right.

AV: It could be 1941. [pause 3 seconds]. Eh, I was called up in eh, I joined the Home Guard down there. Then I, the firm I worked for were heating and ventilating engineers. They were fan makers in Manchester, and the London office was eh, eh, concerned with designing eh, ventilation systems using the equipment that the company made in Manchester. And eh, so I started work as a junior draughtsman. And eh, when we were bombed out and moved into Sussex, I was there for about a year and then eh, they decided that I should have a year's experience on the tools.

VB: Right.

AV: So I went off in eh, the end of 1941, to join a fitter out on one of the contracts that he was working on. The two of us then toured around various places in southern England to different contracts. London and all around for the next year. Then at the end of 1942 I was called up. And went into the Army, into the Royal Signals. I eh, had always had a hobby of radio. Making radios and various things like that. And eh, so fortunately I was able to get into a job that I liked. The job was called eh, an instrument mechanic but it was in fact repairing all the radio sets and eh, and telephones and things of that nature. Eh, much of the time I was, I'm sorry. After eh, [pause 2 seconds] training, I then was posted to GHQ Home Forces at Hounslow Barracks. And I stayed there a couple of years. And then the Spring of 1945 I was posted to erm, West Africa, Gold Coast. Which is now Ghana, of course.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And eh, to join West African troops. To train with them and then take them out to Burma. And eh, which we did do. And eh, unfortunately, or fortunately, whichever way you like to put it, eh, when I got to Burma, I got amoebic dysentery. And fortunately, I think, was probably the answer there. I went straight into hospital and got cured of course when eh, the atom bomb dropped. So eh, you know, that's why I say it was fortunate I was in hospital when that happened.

VB: Ye-es!

AV: And eh, I travelled around India, going into various hospitals and convalescent depots because in one hospital I caught dermatitis. Or rather convalescing, I caught dermatitis. So I had to move, go back into another hospital to get rid of that. Anyway, at the end of it, the beginning of eh, 1946, I eventually got back into Burma and Rangoon, and there I stayed until eh, the middle of 1947 when I got demobbed and came home.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Or came home to get demobbed.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: Eh, after that I took up work again in consulting engineering. Eh, in heating and ventilating in London. I eh, had about, I worked for three firms in total, I think, until I retired. Eh, all in London. Erm... [pause 7 seconds] Don't think there was anything special happened in any of that situation. Eh, except of course that I got married. I got married in 1957.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, moved here. My wife lived at Rayners Lane which is--

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: Just the other side of the railway there. Came here and eh, that's where we've been since 1957. So we haven't really moved much around.

VB: That's great. And does your wife work?

AV: No, no. She worked up until I retired in 1989.

VB: Right.

AV: And eh, for a number of years, she worked at the same company as I was.

VB: Mhm.

AV: So eh, but her father became ill and that was the reason that eh, she stopped working--

VB: Mhm.

AV: When I did with retirement. So that we could both look after him which we did for a couple of years.

VB: Ah, I see. Yeah. And do you have a family yourself?

AV: Yes, yes. Got three daughters.

VB: Right. That's great. Well that's, that's what I wanted to ask. The other thing is, because I'm erm, tape recording our discussion just now, erm, I have a form that the university asks us to get people to fill in. Basically saying that you're aware that I'm tape recording it--

AV: Yeah.

VB: And that you don't object to that. Erm, and the other thing is, we're going to be keeping these tapes in the university and it's possible that in the future another researcher might listen to this.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Or that parts of it might be published in some form. Erm... and I don't know--

AV: Well, I've led a blameless life so...

VB: If you object to that.

AV: What I've told you, I'm not afraid of anybody knowing.

VB: Right. Erm, I mean, could I ask you--

AV: Yeah, sure.

VB: Have a look through it, of course. Erm--

AV: You want it filled in at this minute or at the end?

VB: Eh, whichever you prefer. You can leave it to the end if you like.

AV: Oh, it's only short.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Oh, I'll do it now then. Eh... [pause 7 seconds]

VB: It's one of these things, I think, nowadays everyone's frightened of being sued at some stage.

AV: Oh, well, of course there's the Data Protection Act, isn't there?

VB: That's right.

AV: I mean such little things such as eh, lists of people belonging to a society and things like this. All that has to be, you got to, as you know, you've got to ask the membership, do they mind being recorded?

VB: Yes.

AV: Just because it's going on a disc.

VB: Yes.

AV: And it seems to be different if you're gonna write it down in longhand. But I don't see the difference. [laughs]

VB: No.

AV: I suppose it's just ease of access.

VB: That's right. It does get to a sort of ridiculous extent. Erm--

AV: Yeah.

VB: The whole thing.

AV: Right. Have you got a pen?

VB: I've got a pen there, sure.

AV: Ta.

VB: Thanks very much.

AV: The date is, the twelfth is this?

VB: Eh, eleventh I think. I think it's the eleventh. I'll just check. Yeah, eleventh.

AV: Eleventh.

VB: Yeah.

[pause 15 seconds]

VB: And there's a bit for me to sign as well.

AV: I was going to say – the rest of it you've got to sign.

VB: Yeah. And then at some stage the project director is going to sign all of these.

AV: Right.

VB: And they'll be filed away in a drawer, [laughs] somewhere. Promptly. Never looked at again probably. Anyway, thanks very much for doing that.

AV: Okay. In fact I tape recorded eh, a lady in a local shop who'd been there right from 1936, no sorry, '38, I think. Eh, I mean I did none of this. So presumably I ought to have done.

VB: Technically.

AV: Yeah, yeah.

VB: But I'm sure. I mean when we were erm, making up these forms eh, I talked to someone at the National Sound Archive. And apparently there's never been one recorded case of anyone taking any legal action over tape recorded interviews.

AV: Still I can understand. I know at one stage we tape recorded. Eh, when I was doing this tape recording, quite a lot of it. And I've got the book next door. We used all of the information--

VB: Mhm.

AV: That we got from the tapes or bits and pieces of it and made up a booklet. It was called 'When I Was A Child' and eh, erm, we published it. And of course it acknowledged all the various people who contributed. Naturally, and went to them when eh, we were doing it. I'm fairly certain it was before the Data Protection Act came out.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But that sort of thing presumably eh, is still possible, naturally. But you've just to, like you've done there, get disclaimers and various things.

VB: That's right, yes. Yeah.

AV: Still, I don't move in circles where we got great superstar--

VB: I would think it's highly unlikely, no. Not when you're talking about local history. I mean it's unlikely somebody's going to tell you about an unsolved murder, [laughing] or something, I suppose.

AV: No. But surprisingly, you know, there were little eh, points that came up. I won't mention them in detail. But eh, you know, she was talking about a neighbour and this sort of thing. In recent times. So that eh, as it came across I thought well, you know, this is, erm, be careful with this sort of thing.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But I mean, in making eh, eh, [pause 2 seconds] a book--

VB: Yes.

AV: Or whatever. Obviously, in our case, I mean you wouldn't put in tittle-tattle and that sort of thing that--

VB: No.

AV: Was in living memory.

VB: Yeah.

AV: So the problem never arose.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But I can quite see how the Data Protection Act, you can see occasions when it's necessary.

VB: Absolutely. And the other thing is if, say, after I've gone you think there's something I was a bit uncomfortable about having said on tape--

AV: Mhm.

VB: Erm, we do have another form that means that erm, you can put time restrictions on it.

AV: Yeah.

VB: And say that, you know, no one can listen to it for twenty years, thirty years so--

AV: Yeah.

VB: If there was anything like that when we could tear up this form and give you another one.

AV: Yeah, yeah.

VB: So, there's cover for that, [laughs] as well. Erm, but I'm sure it doesn't apply just now.

AV: No, no.

VB: 'Cause I mean I was really interested in what you were saying about the, when we chatted over the phone, about the cinemas in Wembley. And there were three main ones you mentioned I think.

AV: Yes. The eh, [pause 2 second] Majestic. [pause 3 seconds] In the centre of Wembley. The Wembley Hall. Which I think I told you was a back-projection cinema. Obviously was a much older one. Although probably all the cinemas there were built around the same time, I suppose. Twenties. Just before the First World War. Not just before the First World War. We're going back too far, aren't we? But I think the eh, certainly in the late twenties. Eh, there was another one. Was it the Regal I mentioned?

VB: I think so. Yeah.

AV: Yes. Well those three cinemas. And of course as you've probably found, everywhere had cinemas and eh, two or three cinemas in the suburbs and eh, they're all just slowly disappearing.

VB: Mhm. I mean did you have any particular favourites out of your three local cinemas?

AV: Eh, well I was never struck unduly by this eh, back projection, because it's a bit eerie.

VB: Can you explain a bit more about that?

AV: Well, in normal cinema projection you have the, you're looking at the screen up there in front of you and the projectionist is behind you. And the eh, the film is projected over the eh, auditorium, onto the screen. So therefore, the light of that projection lights up, to some extent, the cinema. The auditorium. But with back projection, the film is put in back to front and then projected from behind the screen, so that all you see is a picture on the screen. You see no lighting within the auditorium. And that's why I say it's a bit eerie, because it's totally dark in the auditorium. Other than the bit of reflected light from the eh, from the film on the screen.

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: And eh, I think, I do remember particularly, there was one. *The Cat and the Canary* was a bit of a horrific film. I believe it had an H certificate. Because we, in those days we had 'H' certificates for 'Horrific'. 'A' certificate for Adult. And 'U' certificate for universal. And eh, and of course if the cinema was very dark, and I was quite young, obviously, then. Eh, it begs the question as to how I got in. [laughs] I can't remember really. Because 'H', I thought was eh... [pause 5 seconds] I'd have thought that I'd have been barred from that. But I mean just before, if was just before the war well I would've been nearly sixteen anyway. But erm, that could've been a reason for getting there.

VB: I mean how often did you go to the cinema when you were a child?

AV: Erm... [pause 3 seconds] I would've said probably about once a week.

VB: About once a week.

AV: I mean we can't compare those times. My parents didn't have much money. As many, you know, working-class families didn't. So therefore it was quite a luxury. I suppose it was a luxury in a sense. Although eh, erm, matinees I believe were quite cheap. That was the cheapest--

VB: Mhm.

AV: That you could go to the cinema. Eh, I think in those days the cheapest was eh, can't remember whether it's sixpence or ninepence to get in.

VB: Did your parents go much themselves or...?

AV: Eh, I can't remember my father ever going but my moth... I can remember my mother taking us. Eh, but by and large I think eh, I tended to go on matinees, Saturday morning children's matinees. I don't know whether they still do that sort of thing. Eh... [pause 5 seconds] Then also I suppose, you really want memories from before the war, don't you? But eh, there wasn't a lot of, knowing hold old I am, 1924. I was fifteen in 1939. So of course, eh, it was only the mid, from the memory point of view, really only from about 1935 that one could remember what was eh, what was around. What eh, films one was seeing. And of course at that time I think eh, [pause 2 seconds], didn't *The Wizard of Oz* come out? In 1935.

VB: Erm, something like that. Yeah.

AV: The cinema was, you know, mainly American of course, was beginning to find its feet. And this is why we've still got this hangover of this back-projection cinema that I mentioned. Eh, but by the thirties of course. And eh, things happened very quickly. By the thirties, the beginning of the thirties, it was almost as if the erm, cinema came of age. And there was not a lot of difference from memory between the types of films that were available. I used to like eh, musicals very much. And eh, then of course, those musicals ran through the war because America obviously wasn't in the same situation as us. Eh, so there were always American films to watch. Albeit that we perhaps only made propaganda films ourselves, you know. *In Which We Serve*, and all the films like this.

VB: Mhm.

AV: [coughs]

VB: I'm interested when you said that about the cinema sort of coming of age. D'you think there was a difference between the sort of films that were being made in England and the ones that were being made in America in the thirties?

AV: Erm, I think so. Because in the sense that America has always been the eh, eh the country for things like musicals. We never really matched the American eh, expertise on musicals I don't think. Eh, and since the war we may have produced a lot of better films than the Americans.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, I haven't been to the cinema much since the war. I think after, immediately after the war, in the fifties I did go quite a lot. And certainly when I was out East. We used to watch a different film every day. You know, [laughs] there was nothing else to do almost.

VB: Was that--

AV: That was post-war.

VB: Was that in sort of outdoor cinemas? Someone was telling me about--

AV: Eh, there were a number of outdoor cinemas.

VB: Seeing that.

AV: Yes. Like the American drive-in--

VB: Yeah.

AV: Cinema. Eh, in India certainly they were outdoor ones. Because, got to remember that em, during the war and certainly after the war there were an awful lot of troops with nothing much to do.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: And they had to entertain them. And eh, this is why cinemagoing to me, the period of greatest cinema going for me was in that period just after the war.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And certainly during eh, when I was stationed in eh, in London during the war, I used to go to eh, local cinemas. Perhaps two and three times a week.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Again, you know, I suppose in a sense it was boredom. You needed something to do. [pause 3 seconds] And I used to have, when I... after the war, when I was still out East, I had the 'Picturegoer'

and 'Picture Show' sent out to me. I think they were the only two picture magazines that were available. I think, during the war. Possibly not. But certainly after the war. It was like 'Picture Post' and 'Illustrated'.

VB: Yeah.

AV: These days there's thousands of, of eh magazines that sort of come up and then go down but eh, in the thirties and the fifties magazines were eh, very few and far between.

VB: Mhm. Did you read these magazines before you went into the services, or...?

AV: I'm trying to think. I think they were available. I can't be sure of that.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But eh, I know I used to cut out the pictures and make scrapbooks and all sorts of things and eh. I don't know what happened to them in the end, but eh...

VB: Yeah.

AV: Well I do know, in one sense, when I got to eh, Burma and went sick with dysentery, I went straight into eh, hospital and lost all me gear, all my kit.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Personal possessions, everything.

VB: Mhm.

AV: So that's probably where all this stuff went to.

VB: Yeah. I mean, did you have, when you say you cut out the pictures, did you have favourite stars that you concentrated on?

AV: Oh I think so. I suppose you can argue that the favourite stars were the stars of the era. Kim Novak and you know, various eh, stars. I don't think I had any I didn't like.

VB: Right.

AV: E-erm, one saw so many films it eh... [pause 2 seconds]. It's a job to remember, obviously what they are now.

VB: Mhm. I mean I've got some erm, cinema adverts from the thirties that are mainly for the Harrow cinemas that I found in the scrapbook box they have there.

AV: Oh yes, yes.

VB: And no doubt the films will be the same as the ones they were showing in Wembley erm, at that time.

AV: Gaumont, yeah. Gaumont Circle. When are these? Oh, '39.

VB: I think that's '39, '39. Yeah.

AV: Eh... [pause 4 seconds] Oh, I'm looking for a title here. 'Course not. It's the grand opening. *The Dawn Patrol*.

VB: Do you remember that cinema? The Belmont.

AV: Eh, I never went to it. I know the Belmont eh, Belmont Circle is still there.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Big roundabout. I never went there because I was at Wembley.

VB: 'Course.

AV: But eh, and erm, I'm just trying to remember if I ever went to that, Herga Wealdstone. I don't think so. [pause 3 seconds] But I certainly remember, you know, some of these names here. The film names.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Oh there's, the price is there. They did go down to sixpence.

VB: [laughs]

AV: I thought they did.

VB: I mean did you like these sort of adventure films with Errol Flynn, *The Dawn Patrol*.

AV: Erm, I suppose I must have done as a child. Erm, [pause 3 seconds] I think the answer has to be yes. Otherwise I wouldn't have gone to see so many I suppose.

VB: Mhm.

AV: I don't recall that, *Ceiling Zero*. [pause 3 seconds; noise of dog whimpering] Going back now to '36.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Coliseum Harrow, that was still there. Right up until about twenty years ago, I think. Or even less than that.

VB: Mhm.

AV: The Embassy, North Harrow. That's where we had our reception when we got married.

VB: Ah really!

AV: Yeah. And that's gone. The church has gone.

VB: Yeah.

AV: In Harrow where we got married. The cinema has gone where we had our reception. And the hotel has gone, we noticed two or three years ago in Brighton, where we eh, had our honeymoon.

VB: Mhm.

AV: So there's not much left. [laughs]

VB: So did that have an area for receptions then, the Embassy?

AV: Oh yes. Eh, yes well most cinemas, I think built in the thirties when most cinemas were built anyway, were built on that basis of having eh, the auditorium. And they all had, tells you in here of course. They all had restaurants. Erm, I thought I saw a mention of it.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Well there should be a mention here.

VB: 'Cause I had heard that some of these cinemas had tea dances.

AV: Cafe, cafe. Yes, oh yes, yeah. Yes. I can picture the large eh, eh, my wife probably remembers The Embassy, North Harrow more than I do. Eh, the large first floor area which was used as a reception area.

VB: Mhm.

AV: It may be that that was eh, it would've been a Saturday of course.

VB: Mhm.

AV: I'm just trying to remember. [shouts out wife's name] The Embassy, North Harrow, did it have eh, where we had the reception, was that the eh, a separate room?

MrsV: [comes in] Upstairs.

AV: Yeah, I know it was upstairs. The cafe was not in that and it was kicked out while we--

MrsV: Oh no, no, no! No. No. You went into the cinema and you got the pay desk.

AV: Big stairs to the side.

MrsV: Then you got a dip. And erm, what you call it, the restaurant was down a couple of steps in a dip. And you all sat there and you had your tea, coffee and whatever, waiting for the film to finish. Before you went in.

AV: Yeah.

MrsV: Because so many people went to the cinema that erm, you got in when you could.

AV: Yeah.

MrsV: And that's why you got the phrase erm, erm, "This is where I came in."

VB: Ah!

AV: Yeah.

MrsV: Oh sorry!

VB: No, it's--

MrsV: I didn't realise it was on.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Yes, it's just reminded me that the eh, eh, [pause 2 seconds] the cinema programmes were, obviously you had the various films and what made up a programme. Just trying to, oh the performance. That's the other one I was trying to think of. And eh, it was quite common practice, when you went to the cinema, you didn't like today wait for a particular programme to start. Because, nowadays I believe, the programmes are at set times. And you can't go in eh, at other times than that, or you don't normally. But in the thirties we always... and after, we always used to go to the cinema. And whatever time, wherever position a film was showing you then sort of did a quick mental thought and then you came out at that point. And this is where you had the phrase, "This is where I came in." And eh, I can't think why people bothered to do, or rather why people did it like that in those days.

VB: Mhm.

AV: It seems so stupid. But eh, that's the way we did it and eh, doesn't say much for the films I suppose. That you could eh, or it says a lot for them, that you could eh, go in at the beginning, middle, halfway through a film and then see another film and then come back and see the first half of the film that you eh, didn't see.

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

AV: I remember in 1936 when King George the Sixth, sorry Fifth died, there was a film showing at the eh, eh Capitol Cinema next to the erm, [pause 2 seconds] Wembley stadium eh, [pause 2 seconds] swimming pool. Which is still there, I believe. But it was called the eh, eh, Arena, I think. It was a swimming pool then.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: Anyway the cinema there had a film called eh, eh, *Where's George?* It was a footballing film. And eh, it probably was about one of the eh, eh, specialist football players of the day. But anyway George the Fifth died and eh, because they felt the title was too sensitive, it was changed to the eh, 'Pride of His Side' [referring to *Hope of His Side*]. Eh, that sticks out in my memory. I can't remember what the film was about other than eh, football.

VB: Yeah. It is interesting that. Avoiding offending the audience I suppose.

AV: Yes! Oh yes, yeah.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I don't know whether that sort of thing, well I'm sure it wouldn't happen today.

VB: No, I don't think so.

AV: But it eh, it happened very much in the thirties.

VB: Mhm.

AV: That sort of attitude.

VB: I mean did you enjoy the non-fictional films as well? The news and travelogues and things?

AV: Oh yes. That was eh, well of course without television and the only means of getting news of course was the radio.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, and eh, as youngsters you didn't tend to listen to the radio in terms of getting, getting news.

VB: Mhm.

AV: So of course eh, eh the cinema was where most people obtained, obtained their news.

VB: Mhm.

AV: By watching the newsreels of eh, Pathe and Gaumont-British.

VB: Mhm. Well it certainly sounds like there was a lot on offer in the way of entertainment.

AV: Oh I think so. Yes, yes.

VB: I mean you mentioned a minute ago that you liked erm, musicals particularly. I mean the other thing I've got here is--

AV: I still do, mind you.

VB: Some of the stills. [laughs]

AV: Yeah.

VB: Erm, and things like eh, the advert there, [laughs] for *Top Hat*. I don't know if Astaire and Rogers were--

AV: Oh Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, yeah.

VB: Yeah.

AV: You know I'd have seen this. As I say, I saw, I'm sure I saw every musical that was going. And of course musicals came, this is where I was saying the birth of the cinema, as far as I was concerned was in the eh, the thirties.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And eh, prior to that well it hadn't long been out of erm silent films, had it? Was it late twenties, early thirties--

VB: Yeah.

AV: That silent films were still?

VB: Yeah. About 1926 or '27 maybe.

AV: Yeah. This particular cinema that I mentioned that was back projection--

VB: Yeah.

AV: I do remember seeing silent films in there. But what they were, the name of them, I can't remember.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But eh, maybe they put on, kept on putting on the silent films because that's all they were geared up to do.

VB: Yes.

AV: And the other two cinemas there in Wembley were, were more modern. [pause 2 seconds] So that first one, that Wembley Hall, would've been built for silent films whereas the other cinemas were built for eh, eh, in the eh mid thirties probably--

VB: Yes.

AV: As eh, erm, you know to deal with normal films as we know them today.

VB: Yeah. It's interesting you say that 'cause I've heard that about some of the erm, the less posh cinemas in Glasgow.

AV: Yeah.

VB: They kept showing silents a bit longer.

AV: Yes, yes, yes.

VB: Erm, they just didn't, couldn't afford the new equipment, I suppose.

AV: Well that's right, yeah.

VB: Erm.

AV: And of course they couldn't have lasted long really after, eh after that with eh... [pause 2 seconds] Perhaps older people still went along and watched the eh, the silent films. But I know the Wembley Hall Cinema eh, although I'm fairly certain that it closed down as a cinema--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, which left only two. But the building stayed there some time, you know, as a store for somebody or something of that nature. When you looked around you could still identify different buildings many years later--

VB: Mhm.

AV: As being, you know, an old cinema or something. [pause 3 seconds] Erm...

VB: Did you go mainly... it sounds like from what you're saying that you went mainly to the local cinemas, or did you ever go outside Wembley to see a film?

AV: Er, not before the war. We're talking about when I was, you know before the war--

VB: Yeah.

AV: I was a youngster. We certainly couldn't afford then to go up to the West End.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I mean that sort of thing, I presume it, I haven't been to the cinema for years now. But eh, I wouldn't know how the cinemas operate in the West End now. But eh, certainly after the war they er, always got the releases there first. So that if you wanted to see a film that'd just been released, you could only see it in the West End--

VB: Mhm.

AV: At high prices. But I don't think that happens now, does it?

VB: Erm, I'm not sure. I mean I know certainly in Glasgow the cinemas in the centre of town get--

AV: I mean you can turn on the TV and see something that hasn't been anywhere yet.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But eh--

VB: That's true, yes. And of course with video.

AV: Yeah.

VB: They get hold of them quite fast.

AV: Yes. Oh yes.

VB: So were these cinemas all really within walking distance of your home or...?

AV: Erm--

VB: The ones you went to?

AV: I might've walked. I usually walked. We lived, as I said at North Wembley.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Which was about eh, I think about a mile and a half from Wembley, what is... what the trains, the railway call Wembley Central now.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But that was just Wembley. Well it still is Wembley. Eh, it was, it was one stop on the train. Eh... [pause 3 seconds] And I know that normally, I can't remember catching, catching...

MrsV: [Ant?] Raining! [in background]

AV: Eh?

MrsV: Raining.

AV: Raining.

VB: Mhm.

AV: S'alright. She can probably manage the eh--

MrsV: [Can you close the windows?]

AV: All right.

VB: Hallo. Hallo. [speaks to dog]

AV: Do you mind dogs?

VB: No, I don't. [laughs] Not friendly ones.

AV: Oh that's all she wants to do.

VB: [laughs] She's very friendly, isn't she? [laughs]

AV: She is, yeah.

VB: Gets the best seat.

AV: I'm not complaining about the rain. Syl!

MrsV: Yeah.

AV: The dog's come in here.

MrsV: Oh! Is she all right?

AV: Well she's... [laughs]

VB: She's fine. [laughs]

MrsV: Shall I get her out?

AV: Yeah, I think it would be best really.

VB: She's found a comfortable place to sit. [laughs]

MrsV: Yeah. I know, she will, you see, 'cause she knows... Can't you sit with daddy? Can you sit here.

AV: Go on.

MrsV: There's a good girl. You stay there. There's a good girl. You stay there then! I'll just close the bedroom window.

VB: You were saying about getting the train. Erm--

AV: Yes I don't think, I mean that cost money to catch a train.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, most people walked everywhere. Or cycled. Eh, I don't think, I'm fairly certain I would have eh, walked into Wembley.

VB: Yeah.

AV: That distance and back again to eh, to go to the cinema.

VB: Yeah.

[pause 5 seconds]

VB: I mean did you go mainly on your own when you were a teenager or were you going with friends or...?

AV: I... [pause 4 seconds] To be perfectly honest, [laughs] I can't remember.

VB: Right.

AV: I would've, I'm fairly certain, gone with my mother on occasions.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, certainly not with her to Saturday morning matinees for children. Eh, [pause 3 seconds] and I had friends so, presumably I went, went with friends. But I imagine that erm, I also went on my own.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: Just can't eh, at this remove, picture any, you know, I don't get any tableaux come before me as to eh--

VB: No.

AV: [pause 4 seconds] No. I just can't remember that.

VB: 'Cause I was wondering erm, you know, if your friends were interested in pictures or if you talked about films or stars and things.

AV: Well of course eh, we're talking about a period when eh, cigarette cards were very popular.

VB: Ah, of course.

AV: And eh, I've even been collecting them since. Now. And eh, I've got sets of you know, film stars and this sort of thing.

VB: A-ah.

AV: So that eh, the cinema eh, it wasn't just a cinema. It was, outlets such as cigarette card collecting, where that sort of complemented these things. You eh, eh went to cinemas. You had your favourite stars. And then you could get them on cigarette cards as well.

VB: Yeah. 'Cause some of these cards had information about the stars as well, didn't they?

AV: Oh they all had them on the back.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Yes. You got the picture on the front.

VB: Yeah.

AV: And then on the back. It eh, these days it's quite big business. I've got three eh, framed sets of cards in the, in the front room.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And eh, you turn them over, they're all... The picture's on the front.

VB: Yeah.

AV: And then you just turn the whole thing over and the way they've mounted them, you can then read all the backs of the cards.

VB: Ah I see.

AV: I mean they were very, very educational of course. But they are useful for eh, for turning up and looking back for historical aspects--

VB: Mhmm.

AV: Of cinema. And eh, so many cigarette cards were produced. On so many different things. And eh, things like eh, eh, film stars. They erm... some of the companies ran to two and three series. So that eh, you know, you might get a hundred and fifty eh, film stars on cards.

VB: Yeah. It's interesting when you say that, the sort of whole erm, not just going to the cinema but finding out about the stars as well. So was that something that you swapped with your friends to get a set of them?

AV: Well yes. Cigarette cards had two purposes really. One was to eh, to save them and eh, you put them, this is digressing, [laughs] I appreciate from the cinema. But eh, one method was to put the cigarette cards in a book.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: That for a penny you could buy from the tobacconist. And you either stuck the cigarette cards in. They usually came in sets of fifty eh, cards. Or you eh, clipped them in. And eh, the other thing that was done with cigarette cards, quite a lot was, you took them to school and eh, you stood them up at an angle, [demonstrates] like that in the gutter was around here.

VB: Right.

AV: And you flicked them until you knocked it down. And however many were left on, were on the floor when you knocked that card down, it meant you picked them all up! And you start again. You put another one up, or three or four. And eh, that's the way you, you collected cigarette cards.

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: They got a bit eh, damaged, but eh. But that was the two ways. You either collected them neatly and put them in albums. Or kept them just loose in packs of the set. Or you won them by playing eh, at school or in the street. You know that was done a lot. And collecting them also was the favourite one for me. After school go along to the railway station, stand by the kiosk, cigarette kiosk. And

every man, most men bought cigarettes. When they bought them you asked them for the cigarette cards, they'd open them up and give you the cards. That's how you got your cigarette cards.

VB: Ah.

AV: Not by smoking yourself to death. You got them by just asking other people. As I say that's digressing from the film.

VB: No it's interesting. D'you think it influenced the way that you, I mean if you were collecting cards and finding out a bit about the stars. Do you think that had any effect on how you--

AV: On how I--

VB: Yeah.

AV: It may well have done because normally eh, the other means of finding out about the film stars that you were watching of course were the eh, things like 'Picturegoer' and 'Picture Show'.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: I'm fairly certain they went before the war. Do you recall that?

VB: Yes, yes.

AV: From your research?

VB: Yeah.

AV: Whether they went during the war I can't remember. But, probably not. I mean most magazines were stopped although 'Picture Post' wasn't.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Eh, yes I'm sure that they eh, were the means of finding out more of the stars you were watching.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Although, of course, it didn't have the scandal that you get now-- [laughs]

VB: No.

AV: In the papers. [laughing softly]

VB: I mean do you think you found out much about the stars' personal life or was it eh--

AV: I can't remember whether I was really interested frankly.

VB: Right.

AV: Erm, [pause 3 seconds] bearing in mind, you know I was a youngster. Eh, certainly not in their love lives. So I mean it might've been things like Errol Flynn's exploits. Well, I mean, he was only a star with all his exploits. He wasn't eh, eh, in his private life he didn't, er, behave the way he behaved on film.

VB: I mean was Errol Flynn someone that you enjoyed as a teenager?

AV: E-erm, probably. I think as a youngster I do remember that eh, one was happy to watch any sort of film. Eh, because films were such a new thing and as I said in the thirties, the mid thirties, particularly with the musicals, they were so professional. And er, I don't think we've ever matched them in this country. So I always er, like to watch, you know those old musicals that are around. Well when I say the old ones, the heyday of the American musical, of course, was the forties. Eh, through the war when they didn't have any setbacks as we had in producing films. And er, just after.

VB: Uhuh. [pause 3 seconds] I just quite recently erm, saw Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald. I hadn't really seen any of their films.

AV: Eh, from memory they weren't my cup of tea.

VB: They weren't.

AV: Somehow. No.

VB: Can you remember what it was that put you off them, or...?

AV: Erm--

VB: Didn't appeal so much.

AV: I don't know. I don't go mad on things like opera and eh--

VB: Yeah.

AV: I like to hear it but eh, I don't go mad on it. I'd far sooner see, see a musical than eh--

VB: Yeah.

AV: Perhaps I'm a bit of a Philistine, when it comes to eh, that sort of thing but eh--

VB: Yeah. It's certainly a different style of film from say, erm, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire.

AV: Oh yes, yes. It's a job at this remove to eh, avoid. I think you'd better go, [to dog] with the noise there. Syll!

MrsV: Yes.

AV: Can you get rid of her?

MrsV: [whistles for dog]

AV: We're gonna have a tape full of all that eh, heavy breathing.

VB: [laughs]

[MrsV comes for dog, consoles her]

MrsV: I'll close the door.

AV: Right. Eh, so what did we start to say?

VB: We were talking about musicals and you were saying that the, this length of time erm--

AV: Oh yes. What I find difficult is to separate the thirties from the late forties--

VB: Sure.

AV: In terms of what was eh, you know, what was one and what was the other. Er... [pause 3 seconds] Without having done some, [laughs] research myself and made sure that particular films were running eh, before the war. I think because the Americans were very much less upset by the war, eh, there was this general continuity of standard, you know, from the thirties into the forties.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, and eh, certainly the eh, the early or the mid forties, mid to late forties, or late forties rather. So that I can't really decide, you know, whereabouts they were.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Late forties or early forties.

VB: Yeah. Eh, I don't know if some of these erm. As I say I brought along some stills from thirties films and I don't know if any of them'll be stars that you particularly liked but eh--

AV: Well, yeah. Laurel and Hardy of course.

VB: Laurel and Hardy.

AV: Yes, I used to watch all of theirs.

VB: Did you like the comedies then?

AV: Yes, oh yes. Yes. I rather intimated that I only liked eh, musicals but eh, musicals and comedies. In other words as a child. I mean I wouldn't be interested in necessarily Myrna Loy and all these various people. Love films. You wouldn't be, would you? [laughs] As a youngster. Robert Montgomery. Eh, well that's the sort of thing that eh... [pause 3 seconds]. Janet Gaynor, yeah.

VB: The sort of ones that weren't... [laughs]

AV: Yeah, I mean I wouldn't have gone a bundle as a child on those sort of films.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Edward G. Robinson. Yes, of course. That was eh, you know, gangster films.

VB: Ah. So did you like the sort of--

AV: Oh I think so, yes. You know Alan Ladd as well, they were.... Eh, trying to identify that--

VB: Oh I think it's erm. The woman's Gracie Fields. I don't know who the man is.

AV: Oh! I can see. I can recognise her now.

VB: I think it's from *Sing As We Go*.

AV: That looks like a kitchen sink drama, doesn't it?

VB: Yes.

AV: [laughs]

VB: [laughs] Did, I mean was Gracie Fields somebody--

AV: Oh *Sing As We Go*! I remember the name of it.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I wouldn't have been really struck on that type of film I don't think.

VB: Mhm.

AV: I don't like soaps anyway. That's Shirley Temple, isn't it?

VB: Did she appeal to you very much, or...?

AV: Not much. I mean er, and there was *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was another one. Eh, Roddy McDowall, wasn't it? And Deanna Durbin, she was a... was it Deanna Durbin or Judy Garland who was another child star?

VB: Mhm.

AV: One or other of them.

VB: Certainly thinking of Deanna Durbin films from the thirties and *Three Smart Girls* and that sort of thing.

AV: Oh yes, I used to like those. Well they were musicals, you see.

VB: Of course, yeah. So did you like Deanna Durbin. Was she--

AV: Oh yes, yes. That's eh, [pause 2 seconds] Joan Crawford?

VB: Yeah. Was she a star that appealed to you?

AV: Erm... [pause 4 seconds] ye-ah, I think so. It's eh, was she not in musicals?

VB: I think, she sort of changed quite a bit during the thirties.

AV: Yeah, yeah.

VB: 'Cause she started out I think as the sort of chorus girl type, I think--

AV: Yeah, yeah.

VB: And then she went into this sort of--

AV: Yes, I was just trying to think of films that she might have been. She was older of course.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Than a lot of those that eh, you know, stars like June Allyson and er... she was probably... George Formby. I can't say that I ever went a bundle on him somehow. [pause 2 seconds] Perhaps I didn't like banjos.

VB: Yes. [laughs]

AV: [laughs] [pause 3 seconds] What's that one then?

VB: Erm, I'm not sure. I think it might be from *It's in the Air*. Erm, I'm not absolutely sure.

AV: Whether it was the wartime one or not, I don't know.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Probably.

[pause 4 seconds]

VB: Yes, it's interesting erm, I think some stars appeal to different people.

AV: Mhm. Oh yes, yes.

VB: I mean were there stars that were particularly popular say in Wembley that more or less everybody liked or-

AV: I think so. Eh... [pause; 3 seconds] Because there was a set pattern with films anyway.

VB: Mhm.

AV: As I say, you had... the first releases were in the West End. And then every... once they'd been in the West End, then they went on release all around the country. Well I'm not quite sure but I don't think that quite happens now, does it? That pattern.

VB: Erm, not to that extent I don't think.

AV: It was quite a deliberate pattern and eh, you know, you could safely eh. When a film came in the West End you knew that wherever you were in the country, you know, in a couple of weeks, it was going to be out on general release.

VB: Yes.

AV: And maybe it's because there are far more films now that they couldn't operate a system like that.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But of course, not going to films, to the cinema now, I just have no idea.

VB: I'm sure that's right actually 'cause erm, last week I went to see the new erm, Sean Connery film in the Granada in Harrow.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Erm, I mean it is very new. It's just out. And from what you're saying sounds like if it had been in the thirties it would have been showing in a West End cinema.

AV: Oh yes, yeah. And then a couple of weeks later--

VB: A few months before it got there or something.

AV: Because I think this, there was in the West End there were, eh, they're probably still there. Eh, maybe about twenty big cinemas. And eh, they took by and large the er... all of the new releases.

VB: Yeah.

[pause 5 seconds]

VB: I mean were there other forms of entertainment that you enjoyed as well like, did you go dancing?

AV: I didn't go dancing. I have to keep reminding you of how old I was.

VB: Yes.

AV: Fifteen, you see, when the war started.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Eh, and I think once again eh, the Empire Pool was the name I was trying to think of. Which it was called at Wembley which is now, I forget what it is. Part of the eh, Wembley complex, isn't it?

VB: Right.

AV: But it's not now called the Empire Pool [renamed to the Wembley Arena in 1978].

VB: Mhm.

AV: But in there eh, they used to eh, have the six-day cycle races. And eh, I used to go and watch those. But again, I can't remember whether that was pre-war or just post-war.

VB: Right.

AV: I think it was just post-war.

VB: Yeah. I mean did you enjoy sports yourself?

AV: Eh, cycling a lot. I didn't go in for eh, running and eh, and athletics. But I used to cycle a lot. In fact my brother still does cycle. He goes all over and he's only four years younger than me. And he goes to France quite a lot. He belongs to eh, a cycling club. 'Cause he worked, till he retired, he worked at eh, Gatwick Airport and they sponsor that. And eh, in fact he was stewarding on the eh, Tour de France when it came over here eh, last year.

VB: Really? 'Cause there must've been some lovely places to go within cycling distance from Wembley.

AV: Oh yes, yes. Yes it was eh, having... I've always lived in north west London, all my life. Initially at eh, Brondesbury. Then Wembley and then I got here. And eh, we always used to, my father cycled a, a terrific amount. And he always used to take me out into these areas here. Into Hertfordshire. And

of course, the country roads before the war, as you can imagine, they were safe places to eh, to cycle.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But eh, you couldn't cycle along country lanes now. Well, people do try but eh, it's a bit dangerous.

VB: Yeah. Because I mean this area must've changed tremendously.

AV: Well, no. You say that, in the thirties... this is a product of the thirties, this area.

VB: Ah right!

AV: These were built, all these estates were built in the eh, 1934 to 1939.

VB: I see.

AV: These houses were built in '36. [pause 3 seconds] No '37 to '39. The road over... behind us was, I think, a couple of years before that.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: But generally this is the eh, these are the 1930s eh, estates that you're looking at.

VB: That's interesting, yeah.

AV: So of course they still look, apart from the double glazing,

VB: Yes.

AV: And eh, mature trees and cars littering the streets. They look exactly the same as they did when they were built.

VB: Right.

AV: So eh... [pause 4 seconds]

VB: That is interesting. I don't know much about the local history from the thirties. I mean, did they... who came to live in these houses? Were they--

AV: Well, the people who. Well if you take my parents. My parents moved out to North Wembley. And North Wembley is, is about eh, three miles, four miles closer to London than we are here.

VB: Yes.

AV: Because after the First World War when they started eh, they started building council houses after the First World War. There weren't any before then. Eh, and then eh, in the early twenties eh, there was a great need. They hadn't lost houses through bombing of course, in London. The odd ones. But eh, the living standards of people were very, terribly poor in London. And eh, the population was growing anyway. So of course everyone aspired to having their own home and this was the promise given by government to the eh, the returning troops after the First World War. You know they had an acre and a cow, [laughs] sort of thing.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But not quite that. And so there was a great move to eh, set up the erm, the suburbs around London-- [tape cuts out]

[End of Side B]

[End of Tape One]

[Start of Tape Two]

[Start of Side A]

AV: [tape starts mid-conversation] A great move to provide homes eh, better homes than they'd got at the moment for people to live in. So, of course, in the early twenties they started off with the eh, eh, some of the new towns [inaudible]. Letchworth in Hertfordshire and places like that. Welwyn Garden City. And eh, so there was a terrific spread of houses from London which probably was about eh ten miles in diameter.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Then it started spreading out all from there. Right out until the war came in 19... the Second World War was 1939. Eh, and that is now currently the cut-off point with the green belt. So eh, which took up the whole... virtually the whole of Middlesex. And eh... [pause 5 seconds] What you're seeing now is eh, what was stopped, the growth that was stopped in 19 eh, 39.

VB: I see. Yeah.

AV: If you take a place like, like Pinner. That remained a village. I mean they still call it Pinner Village. That remained a village right the way up until eh, eh, a small amount of building during the period after the First World War.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But that was really only in the centre. And then suddenly eh, in the eh, early thirties to mid thirties then there was this terrific eh, expansion.

VB: Mhm.

AV: To cover everywhere with houses. But eh, as I say fortunately Hitler intervened at that stage which effectively stopped the spread.

VB: Yes.

AV: Who knows if there'd been no war we'd have been spreading out into Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire. So it's eh, in a sense we can thank Hitler I suppose for eh, [pause 3 seconds] for starting.... starting a war.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But you no doubt have this situation in a place like Glasgow, don't you? Can you not identify the thirties suburbs?

VB: Well in Glasgow it was mainly, they had a big building programme in the twenties.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Late twenties. Erm, so you can, yes, you can see--

AV: Well that's generally the pattern here.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Probably the pattern throughout the country.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But it's very noticeable in London. The thirties eh--

VB: Yes.

AV: Building expansion.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Because being the biggest city in the country, of course everything that happens is larger than life anyway.

VB: Yes. [pause 3 seconds]. It is interesting 'cause I hadn't realised it was so specifically the thirties that--

AV: Yes, oh yes. Oh, I can show you maps--

VB: Yeah.

AV: In the 1930 or '39 Ordnance Survey maps. You look at them and you compare it with the current map, I'm talking about the last [government?]-

VB: Yes.

AV: And you hardly see any difference. All that took place after the war were the infilling of little areas where they put in cul-de-sacs.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: 'Course somebody sells a big house. And they put in a cul-de-sac in that, on that plot of land.

VB: Mhm.

AV: But otherwise, eh, you know, the place is still looking the same as it was when the war started.

VB: Yeah.

AV: 'Course fortunately the Borough of Harrow is right on... one of the outer boroughs.

VB: Yes.

AV: And a mile and a half up the road and we're in the countryside. Hertfordshire.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: So that's very nice. It's not an inner city--

VB: No.

AV: Borough which of course eh, by and large is Victorian.

VB: Uhuh, uhuh.

[pause 5 seconds]

VB: Erm, I was interested when you were saying just after I came in about erm, being this local history erm, book.

AV: Oh the eh--

VB: Must've found out a lot about the--

AV: Yes. That was the result of tape recording.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Yes, yes.

VB: Yeah.

[pause 3 seconds]

AV: Yes it's essentially, in the world of book publishing over the years or centuries--

VB: Mhm.

AV: In the past it was the eh, the big noises that got recorded and all written about and not the, you know, the ordinary person.

VB: Absolutely.

AV: And I think, certainly post-war and eh, of recent years it was realised that eh, tape recording old people's memories--

VB: Uhuh.

AV: Was something, you know, that had to be done. When you've done it, of course, you have to be very circumspect about, you know, what you're told. Because as I said, I was able because I was studying local history to eh, to show that eh, various people thought they remembered something and eh, they remembered it wrongly.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: You know. I mean you knew from your research that it was eh, that wasn't quite a true memory. So you have to remember this when you're eh, transcribing the tapes and not to eh, eh perpetuate a myth.

VB: Well I had one like that actually erm, I was corrected about the first Odeon in Harrow by someone who--

AV: About the what?

VB: The first Odeon in Harrow.

AV: Oh the Odeon. Yes.

VB: Eh--

AV: That was Rayners Lane.

VB: Well, I think that's right, yeah.

AV: Pretty certain of that.

VB: I'd eh, picked up somewhere eh--

AV: Because that. You know the, I forget what it's called now.

VB: Ye-es.

AV: It's not even a cinema.

VB: Yes. It's erm, that's right it's eh--

AV: But it has a preservation, not a preservation order. Yes, a preservation order, isn't it?

VB: Yeah. I think it's some sort of nightclub or--

AV: It's a listed building. It's a listed building.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Yeah. It's interesting how, I mean this was someone that picked me up on something I'd picked up from a published source about--

AV: Yeah.

VB: Harrow cinemas and corrected me because of local knowledge so it works both ways of course.

AV: Yes, of yes, yes, yes.

VB: Yeah.

AV: There was another Odeon at erm, it's still there the building. At eh South Harrow.

VB: Yes.

AV: Once again that would've been, that was a product of when they were building all the Odeon's.

VB: Yes.

AV: You know with the eh, e-erm, expansion of the suburbs.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Just trying to remember where the next Odeon was. One at Rayners Lane... [pause 3 seconds] I don't think there was an Odeon at Wembley.

VB: Ah.

AV: No. [pause 4 seconds] Anyway the Odeon, to me, is synonymous with eh, with this area's called Metroland. Don't know whether you, have you heard that phrase?

VB: No, I haven't heard that.

AV: Ah. Yes this is Metroland. Because the Metropolitan Railway, when they built the railway line out this way they eh, now this is erm after... [pause 2 seconds] the twenties. No, the turn of the century rather. The railway company built a great swathe of land--

VB: Mhm.

AV: All the way through. Sorry, bought a swathe of land all the way through and then they could eh, ring their options as to where within that swathe they ran the railway line. And eh, having completed the railways then, they then went into the eh, into building as well.

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: So we've got the Metropolitan Railway Surplus Lands Company and all of this sort of thing. Eh, in Pinner there were two or three alternative routes proposed for the Metropolitan Line in eh, 1885--

VB: Mhm.

AV: When it was the Great Central Railway. And eh, in order to cover those different routes, keep their options open, that's when they bought, as I say, land in a wide swathe. And of course, in Pinner they opted for bringing it right to the centre which is... upset everybody I think, in the end, but eh, but we're talking about 1885 now.

VB: Yes, yes. So that must have really affected the development of the area though.

AV: Oh yes, yes. One of the schemes was eh, you probably don't know the area well enough yet. But about half a mile down the road is a little, some shops.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Cannon Lane and a pub. That was gonna be the site of eh, the Pinner, Pinner railway station. Eh, it didn't take place.

VB: Yeah.

AV: So, of course, some of the land around that area, when you study it you'll find, was surplus lands of the Metropolitan Railway.

VB: Ah I see.

AV: And eh, but this is part of history, local history, of course, in finding these things out.

VB: Yes.

[pause 6 seconds]

AV: [inaudible] One of the things in the thirties of course was the eh, eh amount of cinemas that there were. Eh, we had eh, although I didn't live in, I mentioned Wembley. Well there were three in Wembley. Eh, then, now moving out this way, there was one at Rayners Lane, there was one at South Harrow. Every small area, shopping area or eh, estate area seemed to have a cinema. There was one in eh Pinner, one in Eastcote, one in Ruislip, this sort of thing.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And there was a second one proposed for, for Pinner. So that indicated that there was quite a demand for cinemas. But erm--

VB: I wonder why that was. I mean, do you have any--

AV: Well it was something new. Eh, don't forget that the suburbs were new. In the thirties, the suburbs were very new. It was a new way of life for people. They finally, those that moved into the suburbs and were able to buy property, I mean, you could buy a house for a five pound deposit! I know you have to put this in context with inflation and that, but eh, there was a great move to get people into the suburbs, in to buy houses to eh, you know, get them out of this trap of the slums in er London. And eh, any amount of things grew up in that period where you put an estate down and obviously it needed shops. And you put the shops and eh, there was still eh, in certain areas, shops named that were there in those days. Salmonds, eh, was just one particular one I remember. Eh, and it must have been, I suppose, each parade had about twenty names. I can't quite remember them now. Twenty names which those companies were repeated over all the suburbs around. And ran right up into the eh, into the seventies. And maybe eighties some of them. Before they finally eh, disappeared with the erm, supermarkets of course. So you could always go to any area and find the same sort of, the same names of shops.

VB: So the cinemas is part of a whole development package.

AV: That's right. The cinema is just, and eh... [pause 2 seconds] Well I think essentially it was the shopping parades and the eh, and the particular shops that were there and the cinemas. Erm and of course, when it came to London, the spread of the eh, particularly north of the river, the railways--

VB: Uhuh.

AV: You know, the Underground. That had all been, well virtually all of that had been established by the war. The war [inaudible] is quite a dividing line in time. It seemed to eh, when the war came, it seemed everything that was there was encapsulated and it stayed like that. And it still now is, by and large, there. The only difference really, when you go around, to me, when you go around these areas, is that eh, you know, apart from the double glazing sort of thing... effect on the houses, is the coming of the supermarket. Otherwise, to me, looking around, they all look just the same as they did to me when I was a child.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And eh, of course it's very nice to eh, be able to go and recall them as they were.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I often drive through the eh, the estate that I spent most of my childhood on at North Wembley. And it still looks exactly the same. The only difference is that eh, the fields at the back, the back of the estate are, what used to be a golf course--

VB: Mhm.

AV: They're still open fields. And this is where Northwick Park Hospital is built.

VB: Right.

AV: The Harrow end of all of that--

VB: Yeah.

AV: Well that's the only difference there and eh, you can still walk through those fields er which belong to Harrow School, Public School. And you can walk through, although it's derelict now, where the Harrow School ducker was, which is their swimming pool.

VB: Ah.

AV: And eh, you know, it evokes such memories that you can walk around an area and eh, providing you sort of ignore the traffic that you can hear, everywhere looks to me just the same as it did then. Or at least you could pick it out--

VB: Uhuh.

AV: As looking eh, you can identify with the area. Whereas you can't do that in the, in the centre of towns.

VB: No, no.

AV: Which, in the case of London, most of it was bombed anyway and it was totally redeveloped. You don't get that redevelopment eh, coming through in the suburbs. Except in south east England where, which, you know, carried the brunt. In south east London and east London, which carried the brunt of the Blitz and the doodlebugs and things.

VB: Uhuh. Uhuh.

AV: You know there was a lot of rebuilding there. But not in areas out this way.

VB: Mhm. [pause 2 seconds] It's interesting just to, yeah. [pause 3 seconds] So, I mean it sounds like from what you're saying that life was very centred around the local communities and--

AV: Er--

VB: Or--

AV: I don't know. If you eh, I think this is very much the individual. We're... my wife and I are very eh, involved in things like the Local History Society and the Ratepayers Association and this sort of thing. She belongs to a club. But, when you start looking into the suburbs of London I think you find an

awful lot, for probably the vast majority of people eh, are very much only concerned with themselves.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Er. [pause 3 seconds] Certainly pre-war, and certainly post-war, post-war when we came to live on this estate. Eh, you went out off in the morning. Most people seemed to go up to town, up to London to work.

VB: Mhm.

AV: And you'd come out of your door. Everybody else was coming out of their door. They were walking the mile to the station. Some of them caught the bus. But that isn't the case now. I mean, when I... just before I retired, I was still walking to the station. But eh, everybody else seemed to be roaring along in their car.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Eh, whether they were, well by and large I think, taking their car up to town. Eh, whereas I propose... prefer to go to walk to the station and get in the train and be taken up there.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Erm... [pause 3 seconds] It seems to me that eh, that, that's the big thing. When I say round here doesn't look any different--

VB: Mhu.

AV: The difference really is, is in the people. The people are not doing as I, as I always remember them doing. All walking to the station. They just come out of their door, get in the car. You never see them. I mean a lot of people, houses keep changing hands around here and I don't even know the people that live in them. Three or four doors away. Because you never see them! They don't walk past the front door. They get in the car and they drive, you see. And eh, come home, back again at night and get out of the car. You just don't see them. Huh! It's, it's a pity really. Erm, although in this particular area we've got a school at the top of the road--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Which is a very good school. At the end of the road. So of course you, you see a constant stream of cars taking children up to the school. Eh, twice a day. A lot being walked up by their parents. And eh, my wife got, obviously living here and children at that school--

VB: Mhm.

AV: She would see and be able to talk to people coming up and down the road. But of course that is getting less now as I say. Because so many of them are brought in cars.

VB: Mhm.

AV: I think because the parents are then rushing off somewhere to eh, you know, they've got a part-time job or whatever.

VB: Yeah.

AV: It's a pity because that bit of exercise in bringing their children, walking their children to school and back again, they're not getting now.

VB: Mhm. [pause 3 seconds] It's interesting. So it's the, the physical side of the place hasn't changed but people's lifestyles--

AV: Yes, yes, yes.

VB: Have changed quite a lot.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Yeah.

AV: So the older you get, there is something that you can hang onto. When all around you is changing.

VB: Yeah.

AV: People are changing. You can still hang onto the fact that you recognise the place that you're living in. Not that one loses too much sleep over it but eh, it is nice to be able to eh, eh, [pause 3 seconds] have that, I feel, to have that link with the past. Although as I say, I didn't live here during the war or, or before the war. It wasn't so far away and it was the same sort of setup.

VB: Mhm.

AV: My wife was... lived in eh, the other side of the railway. The estates over there which were built in, I think her parents moved there when they were building the estate in 1934.

VB: Mhm.

AV: She was born in 1935. Well she's lived in this area the whole of her life. I think she gets a bit fed up with it now and again but eh--

VB: [laughs]

AV: But we seem to have so many commitments now that eh, eh couldn't face moving.

VB: Mhm.

AV: Don't particularly want to.

VB: It seems like a nice area. You've got a lovely garden.

AV: Oh yes, yes. I could never live in flats.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I mean I might have to one day. I don't know but eh, it's very nice to have a... your garden. Particularly an established garden--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Where, in the summer you can sit out in it. You can't be overlooked.

VB: Mhm.

AV: You know, you've got odd trees. And it's only a small garden, really. I think it's only about eh, ninety foot. Ninety foot in total length. Nonetheless, you know, it's er, very nice to have that, which you can't get if you live in a flat.

VB: Yes.

AV: Obviously.

VB: Yeah.

AV: But then flats are there because a lot of people like flats.

VB: Mhm.

AV: I don't know whether you do, [laughs] or not.

VB: Well, I live in a flat, [laughs] at the moment.

AV: You do.

VB: But eh, I was brought up in the countryside and I miss having a garden.

AV: Yes.

VB: So, hopefully, in the not too distant future, we'll manage to get a house with a garden. 'Cause I much prefer it.

AV: Yeah.

VB: Specially in weather like this-- [laughs]

AV: Yes, yes.

VB: It's nice to go outside.

[pause 9 seconds]

AV: There's not a lot one can talk about in terms of cinema, I'm afraid.

VB: Well I think, I mean we've covered a lot actually.

AV: We've digressed now and again but eh--

VB: No, it's, well it's been interesting for me to find out a bit more about the area too.

AV: Mhm.

VB: Cause erm, eh, my forays into the library have been looking mainly for things about cinema so I haven't really eh, found out much yet about the actual erm, development of the area. So it's been very interesting for me to hear a bit about that.

AV: I mean I can show you some, some books.

VB: That would be great. Yeah.

AV: Oh well, I'll bring them in if you like.

[pause 10 seconds; dog comes back in]

VB: Hallo. [noise of dog panting]

AV: [comes back in] That's what the Local History Society has produced over the last two or three years.

VB: Wow.

AV: There's one there about somebody who was eh, born in Pinner--

VB: Yeah.

AV: And went to Australia. Another one about [inaudible]-- [MrsV comes in]

MrsV: [laughs] You've deviated by the sounds of it!

VB: Slightly.

MrsV: Have you switched off?

VB: Erm, I'm still on at the moment.

MrsV: Oh no! Do you want another drink?

VB: That would be lovely.

MrsV: What would you like?

VB: Erm--

MrsV: D'you want something cold or something hot?

VB: Erm, whatever's easier. I don't mind.

MrsV: Doesn't matter. It's what you'd like. What do you want?

AV: Well I'll have a coffee.

VB: Coffee would be great.

MrsV: D'you take milk and sugar?

VB: No, I just take it black with nothing.

MrsV: Right.

AV: See these are the sort of things. We have a fair in Pinner--

VB: A-ah.

AV: Once a year. It's being going since 1321. And one of my colleagues, he wrote a book about it.

VB: Right. The last 200 years. Oh just a snip in its history.

AV: Yeah. And in fact the same chap wrote this one--

VB: Ah, I see.

AV: About the eh, and we've written one there about eh. We try to produce at least one book a year. About different aspects of eh, of Pinner.

VB: Yes.

AV: You know, in the research. There's one particular road that was researched. You know, a whole road. About each individual house. That's an old road. In fact what I do, apart from general research. I draw all the maps--

VB: Ah I see.

AV: For the Society. It's all my maps that are in them. But we've got chalk mines in Pinner. Quite a lot of them actually. Erm, what I was gonna look for... [pause 5 seconds]

VB: I was just wondering if they showed films at some of these fairs. Eh, maybe at the turn of the century.

AV: Showed films in them?

VB: Yeah.

AV: That's a market there.

VB: Ah I see.

AV: All they do is they close off the main road and this sort of thing. Eh, those fairs, you know, at that age, were brought about by eh, charters, you know, where they sold eh, cattle and this sort of thing.

VB: Yes. That's really interesting.

AV: There's another one. I designed all the ten walks. All around Pinner--

VB: Oh!

AV: And drew all the maps. We sold three thousand of those copies.

VB: That's a wonderful idea as well. With the houses of interest and buildings.

MrsV: Can you see there? Close the curtains so that--

AV: Sorry. That's what I wanted to show you. Erm, a street survey that we did.

VB: Right. 'Our Streets Yesterday and Today'.

[pause 12 seconds]

VB: This is interesting. Yeah.

AV: In fact I've got a spare one of those somewhere. You can have it if you like.

VB: That would be great actually 'cause it looks very useful. Erm, just to get a good idea of the area. 'Cause I recognise some of the places there.

AV: Yes. You'll see the cinema at Rayners Lane in there [referring to Odeon Rayners Lane].

VB: Right.

[pause 17 seconds]

MrsV: [bringing coffee] Now if that's too strong, let me know.

VB: That looks lovely.

MrsV: Have you got what you wanted?

VB: Yes. Well, and lots of extra material.

MrsV: You're quite happy. Oh jolly good.

VB: Absolutely. [laughs]

MrsV: There you are then.

VB: Thanks very much.

MrsV: I've been putting my old postcards away. I collect old postcards, basically of Pinner but I moved out and I got some of London. And I was just putting the dates on them and the oldest one is 1902.

VB: Aw-w!

MrsV: Yes, it's erm, it's interesting to see what people said to one another.

VB: Aw yes.

MrsV: It's before the telephone really. Everybody wrote postcards and you had erm, four deliveries of post a day. So if you wrote in a postcard of the morning, you would tell Auntie Mabel you were coming in the afternoon to tea and it would get there. So she would know you were coming. So it's lovely the little things people said. [tells dog to come away]

AV: Well you can have that one.

VB: Thanks very much.

AV: You can have both those. They're both spares.

VB: Thanks very much. That's very kind. That'll be very useful.

AV: That's the one about Pinner.

VB: Yeah.

AV: And that's the eh--

VB: Oh that's fantastic.

AV: Old maps, of different times through the eh--

MrsV: There you are, some biscuits.

VB: Thanks very much. I'm taking over your table, here.

MrsV: No. I'll take this away. This is just gubbins [miscellaneous items]. There we go. Look, I was just saying, Tony, that the oldest postcard we've got is 1902. I've just been putting little dates above all of them.

AV: Oh yeah. 'Course the postcard centenary was 18, was 1994.

MrsV: Yeah.

AV: Postcards were brought out in 1894 when the government allowed eh, postcards to be sent through the post--

VB: Mhm.

AV: With a ha'penny stamp on.

MrsV: But before that you had cards but you had to put them in envelopes, you see.

VB: Ah.

MrsV: But erm, but to actually post postcards. That's only a hundred years old.

VB: They are interesting.

MrsV: It's quite good, you know, to see how these places change.

VB: Yeah.

MrsV: Anyway, if that's too strong, let me know.

VB: No, that looks lovely. Thanks.

[pause 5 seconds]

AV: That was the one we put together--

VB: Ah, yes.

AV: Based on all the taping that we did.

[pause 6 seconds]

VB: Yes, this looks interesting. Thanks and the police. [laughs] [inaudible] [pause 5 seconds] I was going to ask if you had these published locally as well.

AV: Oh yes, yes.

VB: It's a very, very well produced I mean.

AV: Yes, that one there is not ours. That's a Harrow--

VB: Right.

AV: Produced by the Harrow Library.

VB: Yes. [tape cuts out]

[End of Side A]

[Start of Side B]

VB: This is very helpful. It'll fill in a lot of the gaps.

AV: Well it'll just show you a bit of what eh--

VB: Yes.

AV: Happens down here.

VB: Absolutely. Thanks very much. It's very kind of you to, to let me take these.

[pause 4 seconds]

VB: I'll enjoy having a look at these in more detail.

AV: Ah, good.

VB: That's great. [pause 4 seconds]. How many members has your Society?

AV: Oh about eh--

MrsV: Three hundred and thirty.

VB: Really?

AV: Oh, Sylvia's secretary so eh--

VB: Yes.

AV: She knows these things.

VB: Yes. [laughs]

[pause 10 seconds; sound of stirring]

VB: This is really interesting. Mushrooms and blackberries eh, being gathered. Scrumping.

AV: Yes, it's amazing you, you know, I made all sorts of tapes at the time. You don't realise the potential but if somebody eh. Eh, the chap who wrote that--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Was the one who wrote the chalk mines and the fair. Actually he's an English teacher at Harrow Public School.

VB: Ah right. Jim, is it Golland or...?

AV: Golland, yes. Jim Golland.

VB: Yeah.

AV: And eh, so he's got a flair, obviously--

VB: Uhuh.

AV: For writing.

VB: Yes, it's always fascinating when you listen back to a tape, 'cause you forget--

AV: Yes, oh yes.

VB: Things that people say.

AV: I haven't listened to them. We did them, oh back in the eh, eighties, I think.

VB: Mhm. Have these gone into the local library or--

AV: Oh yes. The local library have got all of these--

VB: Yeah.

AV: These books.

VB: No, I was meaning the tapes themselves. Are they--

AV: Oh! E-eh, I'm not... They would go into the Harrow eh, local history collection.

VB: Ah, I see. Yes.

AV: I'm not sure whether they have in fact gone there now. I mean that particular one there underneath the eh, street survey.

VB: Yes.

AV: Well, actually, that's just the record of the survey that we undertook.

VB: I see.

AV: We had a number of people going round the whole of the parish at Pinner--

VB: Yes.

AV: And eh, recording. Looking at registers for the building dates. All sorts of things.

VB: Yes.

AV: And all that information in, you know, a couple of loose leaf folders and that, that's all gone in the eh, local history collection at eh--

VB: Right.

AV: The Civic Centre.

VB: I see. Yeah.

AV: But the book is just, put it all together and generally sort of charted the eh, the progress of building.

VB: Yes, it's fascinating. Erm, and getting the dates for all these houses as well.

[pause 9 seconds]

VB: Better put these aside just now-- [laughs]

AV: Yeah.

VB: Or I'll end up getting engrossed. They're really interesting. Eh--

AV: Yeah that particular book we're very pleased with--

VB: Yeah.

AV: Because eh, we, we sort of put a lot of thought into it.. It's eh... You can fold it back on itself because it's that comb-binding.

VB: Ah I see.

AV: When you go out on a walk, you leave the dust cover behind and eh--

VB: That's right... It's wonderful for tourists or--

AV: Yeah, oh yeah.

VB: Or local people to find out about the area.

AV: In three years we had three thousand er printed and eh, we sold them all in three years. And eh, they sold for seven pound fifty.

VB: That's very reasonable.

AV: And people still ask for it.

VB: Yeah.

AV: We only... we stopped... sold the last at the beginning of the year. But eh, they wanted us to produce another one, but I said no, I'd had enough. Because I used to distribute them all--

VB: Yes.

AV: And take them round to all the shops.

VB: Yeah.

AV: I think we sold them in about eh, oh as far afield as Watford!

VB: Really. Yeah.

AV: Uxbridge.

VB: I mean I'm sure there are fantastic days out there that someone could erm--

AV: Well they're walks just around the area generally here.

VB: No wonder you know so much about the houses. [laughs]

AV: Yeah.

VB: There's some lovely buildings. I was up at erm, Harrow-on-the-Hill for the first time a few days ago.

AV: Oh was that the School?

VB: And looked round the School and the churches. Beautiful.

AV: Oh it is. It's worth eh, and it's fairly quiet round there.

VB: Yes. Actually, that's right. I was surprised 'cause it's the sort of place I'd imagined as being eh, full of tourists and eh--

AV: Well, I think there are--

VB: People with cameras and erm--

AV: In the eh, in the summer.

VB: Mhm.

AV: There's a guide to Harrow School there. And eh, I produced the map for it. Now that's, give you an idea of the School buildings.

VB: Mhm.

AV: All of the, you know, the blocked-in buildings are School buildings on Harrow-on-the-Hill. Just shows you how--

VB: I didn't realise.

AV: Harrow-on-the-Hill is owned by the school.

VB: Mhm. So a lot of the houses on the main street are their buildings.

AV: Yes, oh yes. Yeah, yeah. Well you can see.

VB: Mhm.

AV: That is the eh... [pause 4 seconds]

VB: Mhm. I didn't realise it was on that sort of scale.

AV: Mhm.

VB: Amazing.

[pause 7 seconds]

AV: Oh there's a terrific amount of books on Harrow and eh, the surrounding areas.

VB: Mhm.

[pause 15 seconds]

AV: Did you find the picture in that street survey, the picture of eh--

VB: I didn't find it. Erm, I did see one or two of Rayners Lane but I didn't, didn't find the cinema.

AV: Mhm. [pause 3 seconds] This is the way--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Just to look at the map. Number sixty-eight. [turns pages; 17 seconds]

MrsV: I think it's going to rain again.

VB: Oh, I hope so. It would be nice to--

MrsV: Eugh! Oh, it's awful, sticky and horrible.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: [inaudible] upstairs, I think [Stephen?] is waking up--

AV: Oh there it is.

VB: Ah!

AV: That's the Odeon. Rayners Lane.

VB: Mhm..

MrsV: I'd say that's been there some time, hasn't it?

AV: Mhm. Well it's a listed building.

VB: It's a wonderful design, isn't it? I mean, it's just--

MrsV: Yes, yeah.

AV: This is not, yes er, yes, it's not the bit on the left. It's eh, that's eh, part of the est... part of the development.

MrsV: I don't know what they use it for now.

VB: Nightclub.

MrsV: Ye-es.

VB: 'Cause I went to have a, I was down in January just to have a look round and really get my bearings a bit. And went up and had a look at that then. So disappointed to see it was a nightclub 'cause it's such a beautiful building.

MrsV: Yes.

AV: Yeah. It was empty for a long time, wasn't it?

MrsV: Yeah.

AV: Then eh--

MrsV: I mean fortunately they didn't pull it down. 'Cause they pull down so many things nowadays.

AV: Well it was listed. That's why they didn't pull it down.

MrsV: Mhm. But eh, yes it's a nice-looking building. But we used to queue up there. That was before the war. One and nines and three and sixes and...

VB: What was it like inside? Was it--

MrsV: Erm--

AV: In actual fact--

MrsV: Yes, it was quite nice.

AV: If you wanna find out what it looks like and what it looked like at the time, go there now.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: Well they might have pulled it all down.

AV: I've not been in it--

VB: Mhm.

AV: For donkeys years. But I think that was part of the eh, the deal, you know.

MrsV: That they didn't alter it.

VB: Yeah.

AV: That it had to be maintained.

VB: I think erm, I went in and asked if I could see round but erm, what they'd done is, they've taken, the bottom floor I think they have altered. But they had to leave, as you say, erm, the top part where most of the seating was.

MrsV: Yes.

VB: But I think they were using it for storage or something. They weren't happy to have anyone look at it.

AV: Yeah. I just haven't been in there at all.

MrsV: No. No 'cause the one in North Harrow that we had our wedding reception in [referring to the Embassy], that's been pulled down.

AV: Mhm.

MrsV: It's a bowling alley now. Well, and erm, Safeways, isn't it?

AV: The Coliseum in Harrow's gone now, hasn't it?

MrsV: Uhuh.

AV: They redeveloped that.

MrsV: Yeah. Long time ago.

AV: Yeah, I know. I'm not talking about it as a cin... I'm talking about the building itself. 'Cause that was quite a landmark.

MrsV: This is why it's nice to collect old postcards, you see. Oh, that's Stephen getting up. He hasn't had his breakfast yet. He's not my son. He's just a friend who's eh, got nowhere to go. I've got to do his breakfast. Everything's running behind as it were. But eh, this is murder, isn't it?

VB: It really is.

AV: It didn't do any good--

MrsV: And apparently in Scotland it's been hotter than here.

VB: That's right, yeah.

MrsV: And everybodys.. Pull the curtains. It's erm, people up there apparently are not used to erm, all this hot weather because they're going out in it and getting sunburned.

VB: There were some really nasty cases coming into the local hospitals. Specially children that had been out.

MrsV: I know, I took my son-in-law actually to an Accident and Emergency hospital some time ago now. And erm, that was in the middle of some very hot weather. And there was a woman there and she'd been obviously been just sitting like this, you see.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: But got quite big legs. And there was a blister from there to there.

VB: Eugh! Oh.

MrsV: Hu-uge! You know, it was self-inflicted if you like.

VB: Yes.

MrsV: Erm, this is why, of course, they don't get an awful lot of sympathy--

VB: No they don't.

MrsV: At the hospitals. But erm, it really looked awful. But it didn't look as if she'd done it deliberately. Erm, she just didn't think.

VB: Mhm.

MrsY: That, [to dog] yes, I know, I know. It's all right. You can sit down nicely. Sit down nicely. How many people have you interviewed so far?

VB: Erm, in this area? Erm, I think I've spoken to about... I went to a couple of old people's homes and spoke to people there. But in terms of sort of one-to-one interviews, I've spoken to about twelve people I think.

MrsV: Oh good! Good.

VB: Yeah.

MrsV: Good. So what in fact, is it your own project?

VB: No, it's eh, it's a two-year project that's being run at the university erm, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. So, we're basically talking to people throughout Britain. Erm, though when I say we, I'm the only person that's on it on a full-time basis.

MrsV: Mhm.

VB: So I'm, [laughs] talking to people throughout Britain.

MrsV: But you see, going to old people's homes I would think is a very good idea, providing, you know that they're all sensible.

VB: Well that's... that can be a problem. Erm, and I find as well when you're talking to people in a group situation, it's difficult to get much detail.

MrsV: Yeah. Yeah.

AV: Mhm.

MrsV: You usually find that two or three people are dominant and the rest will sit quiet.

VB: That's right, yes, yes.

MrsV: I mean this is why I suggested Effie to you because erm, she's erm, she's eighty.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: But she is hundred per cent with it.

VB: Yes.

MrsV: And she used to be erm, eh a housekeeper in one of the big houses, you know.

VB: Ah I see. Yeah.

MrsV: When she was young. But I wondered about Frank Haywood. What d'you think?

[pause 3 seconds]

AV: Eh--

MrsV: But certainly John [Holst?], John and Mary [Holst].

AV: Yeah, he was a travel agent.

MrsV: Yeah. They're seventy-four, seventy-five, so they're a bit older than you. Erm, and I spoke to him this morning and he said, "Oh yes!" you know. "Quite happy to talk." Erm, and they would be the sort who would probably remember. 'Cause it's remembering really.

VB: Oh yes. Yes.

MrsV: In fact what you needed really was to talk to Ernest with his diaries.

AV: Mhm.

MrsV: Ernest has just died at 92! But erm, he had erm, we found a diary of his of 1916. And he recorded all the Zeppelin raids in the First World War. And he was only thirteen. But erm, all these records. And he was a bloke who kept diaries. So, you know, that's something else that's useful. People who keep diaries--

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: And keep them. But he died a month ago.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: But he would probably have remembered, wouldn't he? 'Cause he had a fantastic memory.

AV: Well he used to go and see films, didn't he? Used to watch 'X' films.

[general laughter]

MrsV: Yes he used to leave his wife behind and go out. [laughs] But I don't think they were nearly as 'X' as they are now. I mean the stuff you get on the ordinary television would be considered 'X' years ago.

VB: Oh yes.

MrsV: But eh, that's quite amusing.

AV: Where you staying?

VB: Erm, I'm staying in a place called Chandos Avenue.

AV: Chandos—

VB: Yes, it's eh, it's off Pinner View.

MrsV: Chandos? Yeah.

VB: Chandos Road, maybe it is. It's just down from the eh, there's a big church.

AV: Yeah. St George's.

VB: Yeah. And it's just down from that.

MrsV: And you're there for the whole month?

VB: Erm, I think so, yes.

MrsV: Oh good.

VB: Yes.

AV: Yes, it's just outside Pinner parish. That's why I had to think of the name of the road.

VB: Yes.

AV: I know all the four hundred roads in Pinner parish but eh--

MrsV: Yeah Heather could have had you for two weeks but that would have been--

VB: Yes.

MrsV: You really want to be somewhere for the whole time.

VB: That's right, yes.

MrsV: Anyway, I mean hotels, erm, 'cause you're not in a hotel, are you?

VB: No.

MrsV: No. They're quite expensive.

VB: I mean it's not really ideal where I am. Eh, it's a house where the people are out most of the day and they don't really like me being in which is a bit of a nuisance really 'cause I have to sort of stay out between nine and five. Erm, which is all right.

AV: Well I mean, if you go to a hotel you've got to be out, haven't you?

VB: Well that's right, yes.

AV: Although there's probably a lounge you can sit in.

MrsV: Well [you could do with?] doing an interview like this and then go back and sort of write a report on it or something?

VB: Yeah. I mean it would be handy to be able to do that. So I've just been sort of relying on, well the libraries are fine anyway so--

MrsV: Mhm.

VB: But sometimes you feel it would be nice to go and have a cup of tea and you know and then maybe go out again.

MrsV: Yes this is the thing. You can go upstairs in reference libraries and sit and work, can't you?

VB: Yeah. That's right.

MrsV: That's true. Yes. But erm, in Harrow. Have you got a list of libraries?

VB: I don't, no.

MrsV: Because erm, in the Harrow area, libraries all close at a certain day, and all open another day--

VB: That's right, yes.

MrsV: But in Ruislip, they're not. In Ruislip--

VB: A-ah, that's interesting to know.

AV: That's Hillingdon--

MrsV: In Ruislip and Hillingdon, they erm alternate.

VB: Right.

MrsV: So, I don't know if I've got two leaflets.

VB: That would be useful.

MrsV: If I have you can have one of them but--

VB: Yeah. 'Cause that's been a problem with the Harrow ones all closing on a Wednesday.

AV: Yeah. They all shut Wednesday, yeah.

VB: [laughs] Wednesday afternoons. Bit of a problem.

MrsV: I've got a library--

AV: Because Hillingdon, it's only just up the road here. It's a mile away and then it's the next borough, Hillingdon. So eh--

VB: Yes.

AV: Whereas where you are, you're in the centre of Harrow.

VB: Yes.

MrsV: Hours of opening, Monday, Tuesday, where are we? Monday, Tuesday, Thursday. Right. You have... I don't know if they've dated these... Here you are, you have that one.

VB: Thank you very much.

MrsV: That's Harrow. That tells you all the erm, oh I was going to say recipes. All the libraries.

VB: Yes.

MrsV: Now Hillingdon is totally different. In fact I can get another one of these so, you take this but erm, it's got all the libraries and they all open at different times. So that you could always find a library open.

VB: Somewhere... Thanks very much.

AV: In either of the boroughs though, the main library is always open.

MrsV: Oh yes.

VB: Uhuh.

AV: S'only the eh, the sort of sub libraries that eh--

VB: Yes.

MrsV: Well. Gayton Civic Centre libraries.

AV: They don't have closing days.

MrsV: They don't close. They don't close. That's true. Open erm, nine in the morning until eight o'clock at night, except on Friday which is nine in the morning until six. And on Saturday it's nine till five. Yes that's right. Gayton Road is erm, the main--

AV: Well they say just recently all the libraries were open all the time and eh, up till eight o'clock at night. Now they're not.

VB: Mhm. Uhuh.

MrsV: But there's a map.

VB: That's great.

MrsV: So that's useful. And as I say, but I found that erm, Hillingdon is a much better idea.

VB: Right. Well I'll definitely try that then.

[pause 9 seconds]

MrsV: It's looking nasty again, Tone.

AV: Yeah. Well they said it was gonna get cooler, so if it's... Although we want rain, we don't want storms.

VB: No, no.

AV: This was a nice thing, this is all... [pause 4 seconds; sound of saucers], plates of all... er, you know printer's plates. Before they were... they were rescued and then thrown away and we took eh, eh, impressions of them to make up that thing. But that's all Pinner.

VB: This is wonderful.

[pause 6 seconds]

VB: It's lovely as well having some local people in it as well.

AV: Yes, yeah.

[pause 20 seconds]

AV: What you must do eh, you say you're in Pinner View by St George's Church. If you walk on--

VB: Mhm.

AV: Erm, Pinner View one way south takes you down to Pinner Road.

VB: Yes. Yes.

AV: If you go north, it takes you across, it takes you to ultimately that road goes to the Harrow Museum.

VB: Right, yes.

AV: That's worth looking at. But you can't get in there until eh, preferably the weekend. Erm, Mondays it's shut. Tuesday afternoons, there's a talk in there. Wednesdays it's shut. Thursdays and Fridays, I think it's open at 12.30--

VB: Uhuh.

AV: Until five. But Saturdays and Sundays, it's open from 10.30 till five.

VB: Right.

AV: So it's Thursday or Friday in the afternoon.

VB: Yeah.

AV: Or Saturdays and Sundays all day. But they got exhibitions in there and that. It's a great big tithe barn. They're hoping to get money from the erm, Lottery Fund.

VB: Right.

AV: To the eh, the Manor House. There's a moated manor house there which has got a great big erm, protection over it. Eh, the eh, they've demolished part of it. Taken the roof off. And they want to put it all back as it was, you know, in thirteen hundred and something. Fourteen hundred. But eh, anyway, there is an exhibition going on at the moment which is eh, which is a wartime thing for the VE, VJ [referring to 'Victory in Europe' and 'Victory over Japan' commemorations]

VB: Yes. Yes. Well I will need to do that. 'Cause I'd been in touch with erm--

AV: Why I mentioned it was if, you know, you've got a moment to spare--

VB: That's right, yes.

AV: You know, it's only just up the road from there--

VB: Yes.

AV: That you might like to look in there.

VB: Yeah.

AV: There's a cafe in there as well.

VB: Yeah. I definitely will do that. That sounds good.

MrsV: You're down here for a whole month are you?

VB: Yes. Yes.

MrsV: Oh that's nice.

AV: When did you arrive then?

VB: Erm, on the--

MrsV: Third.

VB: Yeah.

AV: What are we now?

VB: Last Monday.

AV: Oh, it's the eleventh, isn't it?

MrsV: Eighth was Saturday.

AV: Mhm.

MrsV: Yes, eleventh. See now that we've retired we don't, [laughs] we don't know what one day is from another. [laughs]

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: It's nice to slow down too. You know, we both worked in London. So now it's nice.

VB: I was saying what a lovely garden you have. I can see part of it.

MrsV: Well it's erm, it's, it's like us really, you know. We just cram everything into it. It's not very orderly but I don't like an orderly garden. You know, I feel that nature is sort of higgledy-piggledy. But eh, I've got everything in there. We've got a nice vegetable patch at the bottom.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: And an apple tree there that's full of apples. Whereas last year we had two I think. It sort of fluctuates like this. But we daren't have a garden that commands too much time really. Because we're forever sort of out and about.

VB: Mhm.

MrsV: And erm, you know, a really super garden takes time.

VB: Yes.

MrsV: So I'm afraid it's very much the survival of the fittest, you know. We just stick things in there and say, you know, "There you are. Now get on with it." [laughs]

VB: [laughs]

MrsV: We water them but erm. Yes, I think it's gonna get stickier and then we're gonna have a storm.

AV: Well it's gonna get cooler they said so hopefully that means that you won't get a storm.

VB: Mhm.

AV: There was some rain there.

MrsV: I've just made Stephen a pot of tea. Then I'll get a large breakfast to him. We can take you wherever you want to go.

AV: Yeah, where are you going now?

MrsV: Where do you want to go?

VB: Erm, well I was just going to go back into, beside Eastcote station really.

MrsV: Because if you don't want to get caught in a storm. So where would you, where would you be going at the moment?

VB: Right. Well I was thinking stopping, there's a cafe there and just having a bite to eat.

MrsV: Oh right!

VB: And then probably going to the Library in West Harrow.

MrsV: As I say, you don't want to be... You know all about the trains?

VB: Yes, I'm fine with trains just now. Yeah.

MrsV: Yeah, yeah. And do you get a travel card?

VB: Erm, I just got a return ticket.

AV: I'll drop you up into Eastcote. I mean, save you... Walking in this weather is so eh--

VB: As long as it's not too much trouble.

MrsV: No, if you're caught in a fantastic storm you'll--

AV: Well it's not that so much. It's debilitating, isn't it? Walking in humid weather.

VB: That would be lovely, [laughing] actually. Suit me. Eh, that's great. And I was wondering as well, 'cause, I mean, as you know yourself erm, after I go back I'll undoubtedly think of things that I wished I had asked--

AV: Uhuh.

VB: Or asked you more about. Erm, I mean, if I gave you a call again--

AV: Oh yeah. No, no.

VB: Would it be all right if I dropped by and continued our conversation?

AV: Oh sorry, while you're down here, you mean.

VB: Would that, would that--

AV: Oh, yes! Yeah, yeah.

VB: What's usually the best time to catch you?

AV: Eh. [pause 2 seconds] Well after six o'clock at night, I suppose. To make sure we're in. [laughs]

VB: Right. Sure.

AV: Erm, what to phone you mean?

VB: Yes or I mean--

AV: Otherwise, I don't know. For the moment there's all sorts of things going on.

VB: Sure.

AV: I'm waiting to er... I've got to do some work upstairs in preparation for a company to come along and put us a new window in completely.

VB: Yeah.

AV: That's got to be done pretty quickly. This one, the washing machine's just packed up. So this afternoon we've got to go out and buy another one.

VB: Aw.

AV: Eh, I've got to change two taps over the kitchen sink. They don't owe us anything. And I'm waiting for the firm that I've ordered them from to ring me to say they've come in. So, eh, I never know from day to day what's happening the next day.

VB: These things always happen at once, don't they?

AV: Just give us a ring. We can fix something up. [tape cuts out]

[End of Interview]