

Interview with respondent 0721

Interviewer: Emma Pett

Respondent: Ones I went to in the 60s certainly, have all disappeared, either being converted into supermarkets or I mean one of them's a mosque

Interviewer: Yeah you mentioned that, the one on ... Road?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: Because I've walked past that, and it was the Ambassador.

Respondent: It was the Ambassador, yeah.

Interviewer: What was it...the Ambassador like inside, can you remember? Have you got any kind of memories of it?

Respondent: It wasn't particularly grand. It was quite sort of stark but it was comfortable, yeah.

Interviewer: Was it quite big or...?

Respondent: It was quite big yeah.

Interviewer: So was that, the Ambassador, was that one of your local cinemas?

Respondent: It was, yeah

Interviewer: And did you tend to go to the cinema in Stoke Newington and that area, or did you go to the West End or a bit of both or what sort of places did you go to?

Respondent: I did go in to the West End. I was born in 1946, grew up in Stoke Newington, so I went to local cinemas during the 50s and the beginning of the 60s but of course 1962 I became 16, I started working in Central London and also I could get in and see X films. So I was able to...

Interviewer: Everything changed then

Respondent: Everything changed in 1962 and so I was able to go and see films by Fellini and Goddard and... what's the other one...Truffaut and Ingmar Bergman and Buñuel who I particularly loved.

Interviewer: Did you?

Respondent: Yeah, I loved Buñuel

Interviewer: What did you particularly like about Buñuel?

Respondent: Just the dark humour. Just really dark humour and his hatred of Catholicism

Interviewer: Are there any stand out moments for you from Buñuel films? Can you remember when it first kind of captured your imagination?

Respondent: I think it was a film, I think it was called...it was either "Simon of the Desert" or "Viridiana" were there was a coffin propelled across a desert landscape on its own power, you know, nothing pulling it, nobody with it and I thought "that's wonderful" you know.

Interviewer: So you did his sort of... the surrealism and the creativity of that what appealed to you about him?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Because you mentioned in your questionnaire that you sometimes found filmmakers like Bergman slightly kind of dreary and it seems like you were drawn to the continental and world cinema films that were a bit more creative and imaginative, and less realistic perhaps?

Respondent: Yes, that's right. Like Fellini for example, grand imaginative scenes, "Juliette of the Spirits" for example with all those little nuns running around, yeah that imagination I just like

Interviewer: Because you said you...I found it really interesting because people have got different memories of London in the 60s and one of the things that you said was that you found that you needed to escape from the acute boredom. I don't know if you can remember writing that, you might have revised that view now. You were talking about how you identified with characters in things like Lindsey Anderson's films, those sorts of characters that had that sort of mundane repetitive existence and that was a little bit how you felt so is that what your, you know as a young man, your experience of cinema going in London was about escaping?

Respondent: Well yeah. I mean, I was very bored in the 60s because when I left school and started work in 1962 at the age of 16, I became an accountant, I was a sort of clerk to a firm of accountants in the city which was insufferably dull. So to go to the cinema, hop on a bus and go to the West End and see some of these films was great.

Interviewer: Relieved the tedious kind of repetitive nature... So can you remember which cinemas you used to go to when you went up to the West End to watch those films?

Respondent: In Oxford Street it was the Academy, I used to go there and near Tottenham Court Road station there were two cinemas quite close to each other I think they were called the Barclay and the Continental

Interviewer: You used to go to those?

Respondent: Yeah I used to go to them

Interviewer: Did you go quite regularly then once you were 16 and you were working?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: How often do you think you went to the cinema in that time?

Respondent: Probably once or twice a week.

Interviewer: So was that one of your main forms of entertainment, really?

Respondent: It was, yeah

Interviewer: And you said you sometimes went alone, was that because you wanted to go more than friends did, or because you were interested in films they weren't or...?

Respondent: Yeah, mostly I was interested in films that they weren't

Interviewer: Yeah, so you kind of went alone to see continental films, and things like that, because it wasn't something that other people you knew were interested in?

Respondent: That's right

Interviewer: Okay. Just going back a little bit, before you were 16, because I've had some stories of people who tried to get in to X rated films before they were 16, can you remember trying to do that? Did you go ...

Respondent: I do remember yeah

Interviewer: And did you get in, or...?

Respondent: No, they were quite strict I don't know why. I remember the Ambassador's cinema, they showed the film Psycho which came out in 1960

Interviewer: I'm just going to pause it for a second....

Respondent: Corrupt

Interviewer: Definitely

Respondent: So much of it was

Interviewer: That obviously played a big part in your interest in Buñuel then, that kind of corruption

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: The 60s was quite an interesting time in terms of the way it was revising a lot of traditional ideas so, one being religion but also things, in terms of the cinema, standing up for the national anthem at the end, those kind of traditional British values were being challenged by a lot of people

Respondent: Of course, yeah

Interviewer: Can you remember films reflecting that, or people's behaviour reflecting that? Can you remember when people stopped standing up for the national anthem for example?

Respondent: I think that must have happened early in the 60s, it just sort of died out. As well as the foreign films I did quite enjoy in the early 60s the kitchen sink films, "A Kind of Loving" and "Saturday Night Sunday Morning"

Interviewer: "Taste of Honey", "Up the Junction"?

Respondent: "Taste of Honey" "Billy Liar" all those. I used to go and see those because they were different

Interviewer: What was it about them that appealed to you? Was it the realism...I mean realism was quite new in British cinema in a lot of ways, we had documentaries before then but particularly that representation of the working classes was something quite different. Were you aware of that then because you were quite young?

Respondent: No, I was aware of that

Interviewer: Yes, you were, yeah. That had a particular interest for you? Can you remember seeing any of them in particular, and how you responded to them when you saw them? "A Kind of Loving" was the first one you mentioned, can you remember going to see it at the cinema?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: What was...how did you...what was your response seeing people taking the working classes seriously really, giving them those stories and their narratives, and not treating them like comedy characters, was something quite different in British cinema, can you remember how you responded to that or how people around you responded to that? Was it seen as something quite different and radical or...?

Respondent: I don't remember how other people responded but all I remember is that I enjoyed the portrayal of working class people mostly from the north.

Interviewer: Did it seem...living in London, because a lot of them were filmed in Nottingham and Manchester and Salford, did you recognise the kind of lives or did it seem very different to life in London, or not really?

Respondent: It did seem different

Interviewer: Can you remember what struck you as being different?

Respondent: I think...well a lot of the landscapes or townscapes just seemed really drab, like in "A Kind of Loving" they worked in a factory you know with terraced houses and so on. Whereas I was a young professional, as an accountant, even though I hated it, it was just a different class you know.

Interviewer: So was it...it's a strange one to say but was it almost exotic in that it was so different to your life?

Respondent: I suppose it was really, yeah, I never thought of it as being exotic but...

Interviewer: But there was that element of intrigue?

Respondent: Yes that's right

Interviewer: Can you remember any of the actors or actresses in particular standing out from those films. Obviously when you see a lot of the European films you see very glamorous actresses and can you remember how you responded to seeing those films because some people feel that they don't really measure up to the European nouvelle vague films, they have quite a different tone, did anybody sort of stand out to you? Any of the kind of British stars resonated with you?

Respondent: I always liked Alan Bates

Interviewer: Yes?

Respondent: I thought he was just a really good actor and I saw quite a few of his films
because he did a lot of diverse genres

Interviewer: Was that one of the reasons why you liked him?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: He had that kind of flexibility. Were there any particular favourites of his
films that you enjoyed?

Respondent: I liked the Ken Russell one, "Women in Love"? With Oliver Reed? I thought
that was a good film

Interviewer: Yeah, there's quite a lot of literary adaptations in the 60s, was that
something you were particularly interested in? It sounds like you had quite
a wide ranging interest in cinema generally. So you had "Tom Jones", "Far
From the Madding Crowd", "Doctor Zhivago" lots of novels were adapted
into films, did you enjoy going to see those?

Respondent: I did go and see them. I didn't always read the novels, I mean I didn't read
Doctor Zhivago, it struck me as being too big, too long

Interviewer: I haven't read it either, but you liked the film?

Respondent: But I liked the film yeah. I mean Julie Christie was an actress I've always
admired

Interviewer: Yeah, she sort of embodies that 60s spirit for a lot of people. Did
you...when I've interviewed a lot of female respondents they've talked

about how they aspired to be like Julie Christie, because obviously things were changing in the 60s there were more opportunities for women, there was more sexual freedom with the pill, all this kind of thing, were you aware of all that going on around you and did you feel like films reflected that? I'm thinking particularly about some of the 60s films like "Darling" and some of the other 60s films like "Alfie" and "Blow-up" and that sort of film, some people feel encapsulated the era, did you think it did encapsulate it?

Respondent: I do yeah

Interviewer: So that sort of swinging London thing was going on around you, obviously you were working in the city. When you were younger you were saying that your life was quite boring in terms of that you were an accountant, were you aware of that changing throughout the 60s?

Respondent: Very much so

Interviewer: So you...can you sort of say a little bit about that, did you feel that London as a place was changing and that was reflected in the cinema or...?

Respondent: Yeah, I mean London changed a lot, I think society changed a lot in the 60s, everything seemed to be opening up, not just cinema but all kinds of things. Betting shops became legal in the 60s, homosexuality became legal, that didn't affect me but I thought it was really good that all these freedoms were being introduced and probably the best thing I did in the 60s was a bit later when I was 21 in 1967, I went over land to India.

Interviewer: Oh did you?

Respondent: Yeah, I became a hippie.

Interviewer: Did you join the Hippie Trail?

Respondent: I joined the Hippie Trail. Through Europe, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, travelled all through India and I loved it. That was quite exhilarating to see all these places and all the countries I went to at that time were politically stable. I went through Iran on the way back, I wouldn't go there now, and Syria I went to and loved and again I wouldn't go back to Syria, I would end up being decapitated.

Interviewer: Unfortunately yes

Respondent: But I mean Damascus and Aleppo lovely old cities, I really enjoyed it.

Interviewer: Great, it's good that you did it while you had the opportunity.

Respondent: Yeah, 22 on my own walking through the main souk in Damascus without a care in the world.

Interviewer: So when you saw films like, I don't know, "Easy Rider" and those kind of late 60s films about people who were kind of on the road and eschewing their conventional conservative lifestyles did that kind of resonate with you then?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: And did you...were you aware that the older generation...was there a sense of disapproval? Did you pick up on the fact that you were doing something that was quite radically different from your parents and grandparents and...

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: And did you ever experience that disapproval first hand?

Respondent: Yes, I mean when I told my parents in 1967 that I was going to quit my job and go overland to India, my mother fainted, she literally passed out. Just collapsed on the floor, my father was okay you know "it's your life son, you want to do it you go and do it" he was very laid back, but my mother went into a paroxysm and she just didn't want me to go at all. She foresaw...saw me being attacked by tigers in India and bitten by snakes and scorpions and whatever and none of it happened. But it was all a great adventure for me.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds fantastic. When you came back to London did you, you felt like London had changed as a place, were you aware of things like the anti-Vietnam marches and that sort of thing, so that sort of sense of a counterculture, were you...did you see that going on around you or not really?

Respondent: I did yeah

Interviewer: Okay. What about sort of people's behaviour in the cinema, did you feel that that reflected...so at the beginning of the 60s more people standing up for the national anthem so that kind of post-war period, by the end of the 60s did you feel that the culture had changed, the cinema going culture?

Respondent: Yeah it had changed. You got a lot of younger people going. I mean, when I went to the cinema in the 50s they audiences tended to be my parents' age, watching Norman Wisdom and Terry Thomas and things like that whereas in the 60s it seemed to be...the audiences seemed to be younger, my age in their 20s

Interviewer: Do you think that's because the films were appealing to younger people?

Respondent: Yes, I think they were, much more appealing. And much more innovative

Interviewer: Did you go and see anything, any experimental kind of films, like Andy Warhol made some films?

Respondent: I did yeah

Interviewer: Where did you see those, do you remember?

Respondent: Where did I go and see them?

Interviewer: Yeah, was that in London?

Respondent: Probably but I don't remember

Interviewer: It doesn't matter if you can't remember. Can you remember anything about those sort of films? They don't really get screened any more

Respondent: Some of them were quite boring, you just had a camera on an object for hours, I think Chelsea Hotel was one like that. Then he did some more sort of erotic films with Jo D'Alessandro and they were more entertaining.

Interviewer: There was a bit more going on

Respondent: A bit more going on that's right.

Interviewer: Did people...some people I've interviewed talked about how they saw one of those experimental films and there weren't even seats that people were just wandering around with a drink in their hand. Did you...?

Respondent: No I didn't go to one like that.

Interviewer: No. So you went to a cinema like the NFT or something and sat down and watched it?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: That must have been quite odd watching one of those experimental films where nothing happens for hours in an actual cinema. Were you aware of cinema attendance declining throughout the 60s, perhaps because you went to the more popular cinemas in London you might not have been aware of it but throughout the decade about a third of cinemas closed...

Respondent: Yeah, I wasn't really aware of it. I think the only...the films I remember from the 60s as attracting huge audiences were the James Bond movies, "Dr No", I mean I saw that at the Angel Islington and the queue went right round the cinema it was amazing and the same with Goldfinger. Also the Hammer Horror films were very popular, they attracted huge audiences.

Interviewer: Really? That's interesting. Not many people have talked about the Hammer Horror films. Did you see those just at your local cinema or...?

Respondent: Yeah, they came to my local cinema.

Interviewer: And they were really popular with young people?

Respondent: Yeah, mostly young people.

Interviewer: Did you like them?

Respondent: Some of them, yes. I just thought they were a laugh really.

Interviewer: Good entertainment. Were you, so you mentioned that you went to see European films and one of the things I'm interested in is the way the

exhibition of those films has changed so when people go and watch European art cinema it tends to be in a very middle brow arthouse cinema, but in the 60s I've been looking at the programmes they tended to be shown in cinemas called continental cinemas or with continental programming and also you'd often get arthouse films like something by Truffaut alongside a soft porn film or something like a nudist film, so they were exhibited in quite a different way. Can you remember that, because to me this seems quite odd now that there were those double bills where they would put basically an arthouse film and a soft porn film together whereas now that sort of film would be considered very middle brow. Is that something you can remember?

Respondent: I do, because I always got the impression that the distributors showed foreign films or arthouse films because there was often nudity in it so they showed that film and "oh, there's naked women in that let's stick on Nudes in Paradise" or something like that as a double bill.

Interviewer: So it was really because in British cinema there wasn't as much nudity as there was in European cinema. Is that how it seemed to you?

Respondent: Yes that's how it seemed to me

Interviewer: So because of that they would have to go with something else that had nudity in it rather than it being recognised maybe on the merits of the director or the stars or whatever...

Respondent: That's right yeah

Interviewer: So you would get things like "Last Year at Marienbad" on a double bill with something that was just a kind of low brow soft porn kind of film. Can you

remember which cinemas used to do that? Was it, can you remember cinemas in London that ran films like that?

Respondent: I think the Barclay and the Continental used to do that. There was a soft porn cinema in Old Compton Street, the ? I think it was called, that often showed a mixture, I didn't often go there because you had to be a member, it was a member's only cinema and I didn't want to pay a subscription on top of an entrance fee

Interviewer: Do you think, you were obviously aware of the directors of those films so you can remember Buñuel and Fellini and so on, do you think that people were generally aware, that even though they were being exhibited like this in Britain perhaps because of a kind of residual prudishness, that actually people did recognise that they were made by respected directors and so on?

Respondent: I think some people were aware yeah, not everyone.

Interviewer: So you think some people differentiated. One of the things I'm interested in is the fact that in the 60s films were still promoted by the stars a lot of the time, so even though it was a time when you have all these incredible directors making some of their early films, they didn't really promote the film through the director in the way they do now, with a couple of exceptions like Hitchcock I think was probably an exception because of the way he marketed himself. But you obviously were aware of the directors, can you remember how you developed that interest? Was it through film magazines or just kind of looking at the credits at the end of a film that you found particularly interesting?

Respondent: I did used to subscribe to a film magazine called Films and Filming so I'd read them. I'd read those magazines and got a lot of information about films that were about to come out and reviews of films.

Interviewer: So is that where you kind of developed that interest in particular European directors and things like that?

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Okay, yeah that's interesting. Did you ever look at reviews anywhere else did you look at them on...listen to radio programmes or TV programmes or did you just use the magazine for information?

Respondent: I used to watch Barry Norman, I think he was around in the 60s.

Interviewer: Yeah I'm not quite sure when he started, it may have been late 60s yeah.

Respondent: I used to watch his programme. There wasn't much else

Interviewer: No, I think that's a programme called World Cinema on BBC2 that some people have mentioned

Respondent: No I don't remember that

Interviewer: You talked a bit in your questionnaire about Hitchcock, can you remember what it was that you particularly enjoyed about his films? What was so special about him? I think you were just starting to talk about Psycho when we got shifted downstairs.

Respondent: I remember wanting to go see that because I'd heard it was really gory but the Ambassador cinema wouldn't let me in.

Interviewer: Oh okay this was when you were trying to get in...

Respondent: Yeah they wouldn't let me in because I was too young.

Interviewer: So did you see it when it came round again?

Respondent: Oh yeah

Interviewer: Yeah. What had you heard about Psycho then, had you picked that up from people talking about it?

Respondent: From people talking about it, yeah.

Interviewer: What at school or...?

Respondent: At school yeah, and I think my parents went to see it which was surprising.

Interviewer: And they were impressed by it?

Respondent: Yeah they enjoyed it.

Interviewer: So you developed an interest in Hitchcock's films then and started going to see them. Were there any in particular, have you got any favourite kind of...

Respondent: I do like "the Birds" that was...

Interviewer: Tell me what you enjoyed about it

Respondent: It was a very original and quite scary. People being attacked by birds

Interviewer: Yeah, I have a memory of someone on a window ledge and the birds pecking her feet or pecking somebody's feet being particularly scary. Is there anything that kind of captures your imagination that you can remember?

Respondent: There's a scene where Tippi Hedren is upstairs in a house in a locked room and the birds somehow get in either through a hole in the roof or the window and just attack her in the room.

Interviewer: Yeah I know the scene, pretty scary

Respondent: That was pretty scary scene.

Interviewer: Were there particular genres that you were interested in, you've mentioned "The Birds" and you've mentioned Hammer Horror, do you like kind of horror and violent kind of films, were you aware that films were changing and becoming slightly more violent?

Respondent: Oh yes. I mean, in the 50s I used to watch the genre, a lot of Westerns but I noticed, and I did still continue to see the odd Western in the 60s but I did notice that they were much more violent especially when Sergio Leone materialised in the mid-60s, I mean they were really bloody and I enjoyed them

Interviewer: Yeah they were great films. Was it...did they attract younger audiences were you aware that it was for younger people?

Respondent: Yes, yes

Interviewer: And you mentioned exploitation films like Russ Mayer's films and...

Respondent: Oh Russ Mayer yes, yes

Interviewer: And was that, those attracted quite a young audience as well

Respondent: Mostly

Interviewer: So there was a sense perhaps in which cinema was catering to a younger demographic, did it feel like that in the places where you went? So by the end of the 60s then it must have been quite different to the dreary kind of life that you describe at the beginning, if you were to try and sum up what cinema meant to you personally in the decade was it a key part of your life, of your cultural life and how you changed? Because obviously you went travelling and broadened your horizons, did you feel your cinema going was part of that or...?

Respondent: It was part of it but I, my memories of the 60s is mainly that everything was changing, including me leaving school and working and beginning to read and watch foreign films and travelling it was just a whole growth, there's a whole decade of growth for me and cinema was part of that growth.

Interviewer: Okay that's great, thank you very much. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you'd like to mention?

Respondent: The only thing I would mention, it's not really concerned with the 60s is that I hardly ever go to the cinema now. I don't know if any of your other...

Interviewer: Some people do but generally not as much as they did. Why do you think that is?

Respondent: Because I don't like the kinds of films that are being made. I don't really like all these special effects and CGI, helicopters blowing up and I just find it really dull and if I see...I mean I keep an eye on what comes out in the cinema, where I live now in Beckenham there's a multiscreen Odeon, so I

always check on that to see what's on but if I see Tom Cruise in "Mission Impossible" I'm not going to see that. Perhaps I became a bit of a snob

Interviewer: No

Respondent: Not that, it's animation, I haven't really got into animation at all.

Interviewer: You don't go to any arthouse cinemas where they show slightly different...

Respondent: No, no I don't. I'd have to travel up to London to do that because I mean the Odeon in Beckenham doesn't show any foreign films it's...just doesn't show them

Interviewer: Do you get films on DVDs sometimes or you just don't go

Respondent: No, I subscribe to Sky and I've got a host of film channels and occasionally they'll show a gem and I'll enjoy that. I think the last gem I saw was a few years ago was a French film called "the Page Turner"

Interviewer: I don't know it

Respondent: It's a French film about a young woman who gets a job for a singer and she has to turn the page of the piano music while this woman was singing and playing the piano and it just develops from there her relationship with this woman. But it was, it became quite dark towards the end but it was just so well made and I remember thinking I haven't seen a film as good as that for ages

Interviewer: I'll have to look out for that. I don't remember it coming out, how old was it a few years?

Respondent: Probably about, maybe 8 or 9 years, during the first decade of this century.

Interviewer: It was a little while ago. Thank you very much I'm glad that you're still enjoying some films, even if it's not as many.