

Interview with respondent 0722

Date: 27/8/15

Location: Respondent's house, Faversham

Interviewer: Emma Pett

Interviewer: So what's really helpful at the beginning of the interviews, if you just say a little bit about how old you were roughly in the 60s and where you were living just to kind of set the scene a bit.

Respondent: Right, in 1960 I would have been 23 and I was living in Oxford. I was working at the Bodleian Library and then during 1960 I applied to BOAC(?) to be a stewardess and I was successful, so for the next until about '63, I was travelling around but I was still living in Oxford at home. We had...in between trips they gave us half the time at home so I was still living a sort of ordinary social life in Oxford although I would suddenly go off to Sydney or Singapore or somewhere for two weeks at a time. Then at the end of '63 I got married and I had to leave, you had to leave when you got married you see, and so I went back to my old job at the Bodleian Library so I lived in Oxford again for another year, but I was married and we lived in a small flat. Then at the end of '64 we moved to Canada.

Interviewer: So that's going to be the bit that I'm interested in, yeah. I mean there was a few things that you mentioned in your questionnaire that really interested me and one was the Oxford Film Society [Respondent: Oh right,

yes] because I haven't heard anybody talking about that, we'll come back to that in a minute, because it was the city film society wasn't it?

Respondent: It was the city film society, town not university.

Interviewer: But the other thing was that you talk about going to the Scala and I've interviewed someone that's told me about the Scala in the late 60s who was a student in sort of '68,'69 but I haven't heard, because obviously the 60s was a decade of great change so the early 60s were quite different really culturally than the late 60s so I'm quite interested in hearing your memories of what that cinema was like in the early 60s. So it was an arthouse cinema already wasn't it?

Respondent: Yes it was. That's where the film society was held, it was on Sunday nights at about... I think it was every two weeks, I think it followed term times I have still got some of the programmes actually.

Interviewer: You kept them all this time

Respondent: Yes. I'm a terrible hoarder. I joined it when I was still at school and lived in Bicester, I didn't even live in Oxford, so I had to go in by train and catch the last train home and I would often have to miss the end of films to sort of run all the way down Walton Street to the station. But it was a very nice arthouse cinema...so they had exclusively foreign films or English arthouse films or American indie films and the film society was held there on Sunday nights. I think later it turned almost into a sort of porn cinema for a time

and then it became resurrected and very aptly it was called The Phoenix and it still exists, if we go back to Oxford we still go there.

Interviewer: Do you?

Respondent: Yes, it's amazing and I used to live quite close to it. My mother moved to Oxford and she lived quite close to the Scala and she used to go as well. So I've always lived around that area...

Interviewer: You've got quite sort of ongoing memories of it...

Respondent: Yeah. There were other small independent cinemas in Oxford but I don't think they were there in the 60s. I think there was the Penultimate Picture Palace and there was one at Headington opposite where there's the shark, you know the famous shark coming out of the roof? There was a cinema opposite that, but I think that was later when we came...

Interviewer: So how did you find out when you were at school, because this was presumably in the late 50s...

Respondent: Well, mid-50s. About '56 I think I joined.

Interviewer: How did you find out about it?

Respondent: I honestly can't remember how and how I knew that I wanted to see foreign films, this is what I was thinking about. I think I used to read...my parents used to get the Sunday Observer and I used to read the film

reviews in that and I got really interested. I think I wished I could see some of these foreign films that they reviewed. I don't know who mentioned the fact that there was a film society in Oxford, I've no idea and it was quite...

Interviewer: That's quite young to join a film...that's quite a grown up thing to do isn't it?

Respondent: I was I think probably one of the youngest there and I was quite shy so I never used to speak to anyone. I would sneak in and hide and go home and it was quite a thing, standing around on this very dreary railway station, which Oxford was, on a Sunday night waiting for a train home. I think on one occasion I did miss the train and I think my father had to come and get me. It was quite sort of grim and sometimes the film I'd been seeing was very sort of grim, you know Bergman or something, I'd come out feeling I was a character in one of these films.

Interviewer: Sort of romanticising it a little bit?

Respondent: I used to because I was an only child of quite elderly parents. My parents used to send me off all the holidays to stay with various aunts and uncles because they were working in a shop and they couldn't afford to shut the shop down to go on holiday or anything so I was just sent away. I used to spend all the summer with a maiden aunt in Walton on the Naze in Essex but I was quite an imaginative child and I used to imagine adventures and write things. I used to like writing. I was actually quite happy, I mean

some...imagine modern day children being sent to live with a maiden aunt
for 6 weeks in the summer would probably have gone berserk..

Interviewer: But you had an active imagination so...

Respondent: I did have a very active imagination. My family were into cinema going
anyway, my parents used to take me to the cinema a lot.

Interviewer: Did they? To the same cinema or...?

Respondent: No where we lived in Bicester. When I, I suppose it must have been the
early days of the war, there were three cinemas in Bicester and they
changed programmes twice weekly. Then eventually there was just sort of
one big one I can remember, but either my father or my mother would
take me sometimes once or more a week.

Interviewer: So you'd developed that...

Respondent: I developed the cinema going habit very early on...

Interviewer: Sort of family culture

Respondent: Very much so

Interviewer: When you joined the film society was there a membership? How did it
work?

Respondent: I'm trying to think. I think you had to join a membership and then you paid something or other, it wasn't very much, but I can't honestly remember. I think the programme just gives what film's on, it doesn't mention anything about price. I don't remember there being sort of formal contract or anything that you joined.

Interviewer: That's interesting. What were the other people like? How big was it and how many...what sort of age range?

Respondent: I'm trying to think about the...quite sort of narrow cinema...going by our local Faversham cinema which I know has got 450 seats in it, I should have said it was maybe 300 something like that.

Interviewer: Is it the same size now?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah

Interviewer: So it's about that size, I've been to it. How many people would go to the film club?

Respondent: Quite a lot, yeah. There was...it always seemed to be quite full. I used to like sitting quite near the front and I could generally get a seat there because a lot of people sit right at the back of cinemas and I couldn't understand why. I like the screen filling my vision and I couldn't understand...

Interviewer: Rather than the back of someone's head.

Respondent: Yes. I honestly don't know anything about...as I say I hardly ever talked to anyone there.

Interviewer: No, you just went to watch the film. Was there an introduction or did they...?

Respondent: They had...usually had three films. So they had a short which seemed to be...it wasn't always inevitably but they were fond of Norman McLaren the Canadian film artist who scratched things on reels and it was sort of fashionable...

Interviewer: Avant-garde

Respondent: Very avant-garde and sort of strange beeps and bleeps, then a short film of some sort and then a longer feature so it was quite a varied programme

Interviewer: That's quite alternative isn't it showing that sort of thing?

Respondent: Oh yes, it was quite yeah....

Interviewer: Interesting that there was such an interest in it, you know, that it would fill the cinema up.

Respondent: No I'm sure it was successful. And at the same time there was a university film society as well and I did get to go with that sort of on a date with a student or something occasionally, I can't remember where it was...

Interviewer: But you went regularly to the city society?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So to discuss actually feature films that you saw there, which are the ones that kind of stand out in your memory?

Respondent: "Wild Strawberries"...you see I can't remember, the problem with the dates..

Interviewer: Don't worry, some of these are late 50s but...

Respondent: I think a lot of films I probably mentioned in my questionnaire were late 50s but there always seemed to be a gap before they came to Britain anyway.

Interviewer: Yeah there was so it could well be...I've had people talking about the "10 Commandments" for example but they did actually see it in the cinema in the 60s so it's part of the culture of cinema going in the 60s

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: But I mean presumably all those incredible sort of nouvelle vague?

films...all the cinema that came out of Europe in the late 50s and early 60s,
you would have seen a lot of that?

Respondent: I saw more nouvelle vague actually in Canada because it was sort of after
'64. There were a lot of Japanese films "Yugetsu"M something I can't
remember the title

Interviewer: I know the one you mean, a sort of ghost story?

Respondent: Yes and there was a lot with samurais in the pouring rain, they seem to be
very fond of those

Interviewer: Do they? I know a lot of kind of post-war Kurosawa and people like that
really made it on the European festival circuit...Cannes and...so maybe they
picked up on that

Respondent: La Strada, I think I saw La Strada there which had a big effect on me. I fell
in love with Italian film I really did...Fellini and the weirdness of it and the
strange characters and the photography and everything I just I always liked
Italian cinema ever since.

Interviewer: That's interesting. It's a different kind of vitality I think to the British films
of that period. It feels different. I understand what the appeal is. Were
there...when you've talked about going to see some of the, what we call,
kitchen sink films that came out in the early 60s, you liked those?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: But presumably the world that they were depicting, sort of working class world of the North and South Wales and places was quite different to yours...was it different? Did it feel different to your sort of daily reality or not?

Respondent: Not really. I grew up in quite sort of humble circumstances. Although we were a...the sort of failed end of a middle class family actually...sort of fallen down the social scale. The shop where we lived in, we lived above the shop basically and it was a sort of old house in an old part of Bicester and it was medieval house actually and it had got absolutely no mod-cons in it. We had no electricity upstairs, we had gas lights. The only running water in the house was a stone sink in a sort of lean-to scullery and we had a bathroom but it was across a com....yard. So I lived in very curious circumstances when I was young, so people living in sort of back-to-backs up North would seem quite normal to me. I came from that sort of rather...difficult surroundings really.

Interviewer: It hadn't been modernised?

Respondent: No

Interviewer: A lot of the post-war period was quite austere?

Respondent: This was war period because I was born in 1937 so I can remember the war period.

Interviewer: What about in terms of those films, thinking about the kitchen sink films, some of the issues that they dealt with were quite difficult social issues, particularly for women, getting pregnant outside of wedlock, abortion all those sorts of things...

Respondent: Trying to work your way up in the world. Being...a lot of them seemed to be about young women trying to better themselves.

Interviewer: To get on in life, which to me seems really interesting particularly because working class characters hadn't really been given that much attention and dignity I suppose in terms of film making.

Respondent: No they hadn't, they were figures of fun like comedy cockneys. That was how working class people were portrayed in films usually or cheerful char

Interviewer: Regional accents were seen as comic. So I find it fascinating that that was sort of a key moment in some ways that social realism as we kind of see it now, which is very much a part of British cinema kind of came to the fore. I was wondering if you can remember anything about your responses when you saw some of those films in the cinema, those stories being told? Were you aware that that was quite different to what had come before or were you too young to kind of compare it?

Respondent: No I could compare it. I mean, one I remember particularly was the

“L-Shaped Room” which really stuck in my mind because I...when I moved to Oxford I lived in lodgings on my own, in digs, in circumstances very like a lot of the young women in these films...particularly like the woman in “The L-Shaped Room” I lived in a bed-sitting room and it wasn’t sort of sleazy but it was very small and restricted and the landlady said that we had to conform to university regulations. I don’t know why, because they had the upper hand you know, so all men out by 10 or whatever and you shouldn’t come in after 10 or make a noise. If you had a friend, obviously a woman friend, staying over...I had a room about half the size of this but I did used to have a friend...because I had a friend who was engaged, she lived in Abingdon so outside Oxford, this was when I was at the Bodleian, and she would be seeing her fiancé and miss the last bus to Abingdon and then she’d come and knock on my door to say could she stay with me. I had a single bed, we had to sleep sort of top-to-tail. The landlady had stuck signs on the door...on the bathroom door saying “if you have anyone staying you will have to pay two and sixpence for use of toilet paper etc”. So I never let on when my friend came to stay. I used to go out at night. I suppose it was another sort of romantic frustration, I used to cycle all around the middle of Oxford in the middle of the night because it’s a very beautiful city and it used to look amazing and there was nobody about. I once got caught by a policeman for not having lights but he sort of sent me home with a caution sort of thing. I used to cycle round in the middle of the night and I used to creep in and out of my digs without my landlady ever knowing. Also I had a steady boyfriend at one stage and I used to cook

for him and he used to be up in my room until about 11 o'clock eating these frugal meals that I used to cook with no money and creep out at 11 o'clock or something. But it was very restrictive, your lives were restricted...

Interviewer: Regulated a bit more I think

Respondent: Yes I could see the lives of these women and their dreary, lonely bed-sitting rooms you know.

Interviewer: It resonated with you?

Respondent: Yeah. Very much so.

Interviewer: When you saw those people's lives on the big screen for the first time I suppose...did it have a strong impact?

Respondent: Yes it did have a strong impact. As I said I used to come out feeling like I was almost a character in the film. I would imagine I was in these situations. Yeah, they did have quite a strong effect on me. I could imagine what they were feeling and I could see myself in these situations if I did anything stupid, so if I got pregnant by accident which I obviously wasn't going to, but it was all very real suddenly. Whereas before the English cinema hadn't been.

Interviewer: No. It was quite different, a marked different. So you'd go to the film society once a fortnight, but...particularly after you moved to Oxford and

were working at the Bodleian, did you...went to the cinema more regularly than that?

Respondent: Yes I went to ordinary cinema as well. I mean there were several cinemas, they were like ABCs...

Interviewer: Chain cinemas

Respondent: Yeah, really big cinema. My overriding impression is of having to queue all the time

Interviewer: Really?

Respondent: Yes, because if you got a really big film, like a Bond film for example, you know and the big Odeon...was it the Odeon or the ABC, I can't remember which but this very big sort of neo-classical...not neo-classical

Interviewer: Art...

Respondent: Art deco, that's what I'm thinking of, in George Street and you'd be queuing right round the block to get in to a film like that.

Interviewer: I find it fascinating how cinema going in the early 60s was still quite similar to cinema going in the 50s...

Respondent: Oh yes very similar

Interviewer: Because by the end of the decade I think about a third of screens had closed, so it was in decline across the decade, but in those early years it was still very popular and people still went...some people still went a few times a week. Can you remember the programme, anything generally about the programme because presumably they still had the rolling programme...

Respondent: They had the rolling programme yes, I can't remember when that stopped, but I certainly can remember you know, you just queued up so you'd no idea how long you'd been in the queue, so you just went in to the film at whatever state the film was you know three quarters of an hour through and then you saw the end of the film and then you saw maybe the next film and the news reel and then you would sit there and then you'd watch the beginning of the film and if you really liked it you'd sit through it again to the end. So it was very strange...it was like started a book halfway through and then going around and reading... but people just took it for granted because you could sit there all the time, you weren't thrown out you'd paid your money and you could be there all day virtually and some people did, they just sat there.

Interviewer: Yeah I've heard so, particularly from kind of Scotland and places where it was quite cold, people actually saving on their heating bills..

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Staying in the cinema all day. Can you remember the usherettes
and...because I think there was more staff in cinemas in those days wasn't
there?

Respondent: Yes there was always someone to show you to your seat and you know if
people were being noisy they would come and tell them to shut up. They
would come round in the interval and sell ice cream or sweets or
something. There were intervals in between the short film and the news
reel and whatever, so you could be in there for the entire evening and not
for very much money. It seemed relatively cheap then.

Interviewer: I think so, compared to today, I think it was a more affordable pastime. Did
you have a television during that period?

Respondent: No, I didn't have a television at all

Interviewer: Or radio or...

Respondent: We had radio a lot. My mother and I were both very keen on listening to
the radio...I still am. My parents didn't have television, my mother, when
my father died she moved into Oxford and I lived with her for a bit, we
didn't have television. Then...we didn't have television actually until I got
pregnant with my first child in Canada and I...we were both mad on ice
hockey and I used to work for the local newspaper and I used to go to the
press room and watch hockey matches but when I...which was another job
I lost, I had to resign when I got pregnant from the newspaper. So we

decided to get a television in Canada, but that was the first time we had a television so we could watch the hockey games.

Interviewer: So you waited quite a while. I suppose there was a lot more choice of films to watch in the cinema I think. When I look at the films that came out in the 60s it's incredible really the range, both in terms of world cinema and British cinema I think.

Respondent: There was a huge range really and lots of American films, lots of dramas, you know you could see Westerns or dramas or comedies or romantic ones or musicals. My parents were very fond of musicals so I got...I think they were the first films I can remember. I can remember one called...I think it was called "Harvest Moon" and it started off in black-and-white and then the moon came up and it all turned into technicolor I can really remember that. Along with my ill-fated trip to ... my father took me and he had to take me out because I howled so much because ... I think his mother was killed.

Interviewer: It was quite sad, I can remember thinking...

Respondent: No I howled and howled and I can remember being carried out of the cinema under his arm.

Interviewer: A lot of Disney films are..

Respondent: It's like Bambi I remember seeing that...

Interviewer: Family members dying, it's not that cheerful actually

Respondent: They never seem to do things like that nowadays.

Interviewer: In terms of your wider interest in cinema, so you've talked a little bit about how you first got interested, you used to read reviews in the Observer, but then as you got older and were in your early twenties, you...did you talk a magazine...?

Respondent: Yeah, I used to read "Films and Filming".

Interviewer: Yeah what sort of things were in that.

Respondent: There were things about foreign film stars. I used to have a huge crush on Gerard Philippe and they had a sort of feature with him on the cover once...

Interviewer: Did they do the thing, you know, with the star, you know those quite stylised things that kind of go back to the star system a bit earlier where they would have a star on vacation and...this very kind of formal way of showing their private life?

Respondent: Not so much. Films and Filming wasn't so much like that, it was sort of more serious. It wasn't as serious as like Monthly Film Bulletin or Sight and Sound but it wasn't like Picture-goer or anything..

Interviewer: It was somewhere in between

Respondent: It was definitely somewhere in between. It was more sort of serious things about what the stars... what films they'd been in and the sort of thing and interviews...and reviews of all the latest films. I used to, I didn't have a subscription to it but I used to buy it whenever I saw it or I could afford it.

Interviewer: Did you buy or collect anything else?

Respondent: Books. I've got shelves of books, a lot of them date from that era about sort of new British cinema. I've got two shelves of books there and then I've got some bigger Picture-goer annuals from sort of the 1950s and I've got quite a lot of other ones. I did used to buy, often second-hand books, mainly, what I used to buy if I could. When I was living in Oxford I had very, very little money as a stewardess we were very low paid so I couldn't afford very much.

Interviewer: But they got quite...I presume they had quite good second hand bookshops in Oxford?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: So you could pick things up. So you sort of collected things that you could read more in depth rather than collecting pictures or...

Respondent: Yes, I like reading...I've got a lot of Pauline Kael's reviews because I liked her reviews and I like looking back on films that I'd seen and remembered.

Interviewer: In terms of actors and stars that you were interested in, you've mentioned...

Respondent: Gerard Philippe

Interviewer: Who was kind of like an early crush, but did you have favourite actors and actresses as you went into your twenties?

Respondent: There was Marcello Mastroianni of course because into Italian films. Then Paul Newman and Steve McQueen, English I'm trying to think English...

Interviewer: Can you remember the... when those new wave actors and actresses like Rita Tushingham and Albert Finney and...

Respondent: Laurence Harvey was in "Room at the Top" but he wasn't an English actor.

Interviewer: Who was I thinking of just a minute ago? Tom Courtenay, people like that.

Respondent: I really liked Tom Courtenay but it wasn't sort of crush I just liked him as an actor.

Interviewer: How did you...can you remember thinking I've looked at some of the early articles about Rita Tushingham, I was quite interested in the way she was discussed in the press and how gradually throughout the decade I think the press gradually took more pride in her as a British actress, but some of the earlier things kind of not mean but a little bit sort of "she's a bit plain" sort

of thing, because she wasn't in the film star mould. Can you remember being aware that the actors in those films weren't as glamorous and in that tradition as someone like Liz Taylor was?

Respondent: Well the epitomes of glamour that I can remember at that time were Brigitte Bardot and Audrey Hepburn and you either...sort of as a young woman, you were going to be like one or the other. Yes I had a boyfriend who was absolutely mad on Brigitte Bardot he even had an LP record of the songs she sang. I don't know, I don't recollect that about Tushingham

Interviewer: It didn't register?

Respondent: It was The Knack wasn't it she was in?

Interviewer: Yeah, well she was originally in A Taste of Honey

Respondent: A Taste of Honey that's right, I remember that. No, I thought she was just amazing and she was so unusual looking, but I can't remember being conscious of that sort of press reaction. No I thought we were really lucky to have these...like you say sort of Richard Harris and Tom Courtenay and all those British actors that came along and I thought what an amazing time because they were just so good and so unlike...well it was the sort of look back in anger reaction to the matinee idol type actor.

Interviewer: It was it was a very this is a regular...these are real people you see on the street and I think even some of the big stars that were quite glamorous like

Julie Christie or Michael Caine had that kind of person-living-next-door element to their aura didn't they?

Respondent: Yes Christie did because she wasn't standing for the sort of star treatment at that time.

Interviewer: If you were to pick out a...I know it's difficult to do this but if you were to pick out a favourite British film from that time what would it be?

Respondent: Again I'm not quite sure how the dates fit in. Oh goodness there's a lot isn't there? Julia somebody was in...I've forgotten the...

Interviewer: No don't worry, I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

Respondent: It's just I'm getting to the age where my memory is definitely not as good as it was. I mean the one I liked and I thought was so original and interesting hasn't got a British star in it at all it was "Charlie Bubbles" with Liza Minnelli.

Interviewer: What did you like about that?

Respondent: Because it was...she seemed so sort of ordinary in a way and the story was so interesting and the photography was...also no actually I think my favourite would be "Georgy Girl" but it that 60s or 50s?

Interviewer: The book is about the 50s isn't it? But was the film made in the 60s possibly

Respondent: I think it might...

Interviewer: I think it might have been early 60s.

Respondent: That was Lynn Redgrave and Charlotte Rampling yeah, and James Mason,
yes I really did enjoy that.

Interviewer: Can you try and summarise what was so...what resonated so much with
that film to you?

Respondent: I liked the sort of spunkiness of the Redgrave character and then the
contrast between here and the Rampling character and I liked the music, I
even bought the record

Interviewer: Did you?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: We've talked about music because a lot of 60s films are memorable for
their music, there's a strong sort of connection between the two...was that
the only film that you bought the music from or did you do that with other
films?

Respondent: No I've got "Theme from a Summer Place" that was definitely American
and "Catch Me if You Can", Dave Clark which was...he made a film on that.
Not Cliff Richard. Shaft, that's 70s.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Respondent: Blaxploitation.

Interviewer: What was the...it's funny because I read Georgy Girl recently I can't remember when I saw the film, what was the music like?

Respondent: [sings] I can't sing but that's one of the tunes.

Interviewer: So you bought the record

Respondent: I've got a little 45 yes

Interviewer: Well, it's been really interesting, thank you very much for sharing your memories with me. Is there anything that you think I haven't..we haven't discussed?

Respondent: We've covered it

Interviewer: We're only talking about a little period

Respondent: Quite a small period yeah. I mean a lot of the films I saw at the film society were of the 50s, in fact probably the majority of them. Although my membership did go into 1960 I think. I think yes for the...I'm trying to think what else. Actually my all time favourite film I think is 1960 and that's "The Apartment" but that's outside your remit is it? I really like Billy Wilder and that sort of mixture of bitter-sweet comedy I really found...

Interviewer: They are very distinctive films, Billy Wilder films. Did you see “The Apartment” when it came out?

Respondent: Yes and I’ve seen it several times since. We had it on at our local film society and it went down very well, we had it quite recently because it was re-issued.

Interviewer: It was yeah. Okay thank you very much it’s been great.