

Interview with Respondent 0450/0772

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Location: UCL

Interviewer: Dr. Matthew Jones

Interviewer: I wonder if we could start by you just telling me a little bit about your life in the 1960s.

Respondent: Well I was born and brought up in Barnstaple in Devon. Both of my parents came from London. Barnstaple was a reasonably large town by Devon standards, north Devon standards, and when I got to eighteen, I decided it was time to leave home for a number of reasons and went up to Newcastle, which was a real eye opener in terms of the arts in general. But....I went to a boy's grammar school, and really the only arts education or arts experience there was...cinema wasn't particularly seen as an art form...were the two cinemas in town. One, The Eagle, which faced the bus station, and around the corner was The Gaumont; and The Gaumont is still there but as Scots Cinema now and a multi screen that I just happened to see a couple of weeks ago which was quite pleasing. So what we tended to do was, on Friday night we'd go to one cinema, and on the Saturday night we'd go to the other one. But in those days, I remember very often you didn't have weekly ones, and I remember, but I could be wrong on this, they didn't open on the Sunday. So you had a three day, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday program, and then a Thursday, Friday, Saturday program. And if there are other things you'd only go once and I had two or three friends I would normally go along with. As much from football I would play. I went to (?) from school and yeah that's the basic grounding of that, but...'coz it was U, A and X I think were the certificates in those days. And as a fourteen year old, if you wanted to get into an A film because you read about it or seen it, it was a case of "excuse me mister, can you take me in?" or whoever you'd spot or try to spot as they came along. I suppose one in ten would say "alright" and then

you'd give them the money, they'd buy two tickets and then you never saw them again, 'coz they'd go off and seat where they wanted to and so would you. And of course, when it came to Xs err... you couldn't do that and you had to remember that you were going to pay the full adult price, not the kids' price. And same with the As as well. But that was just some of the games. I also remember now 'coz I don't know what you're like, but I hate the popcorn generation. But of course it wasn't so great in the '60s either because you didn't see the screen that well because everybody was smoking, so you had this sort of fog between you and the screen. And I was one of the smokers as well. I also remember, of course, the Ushers coming down if you were making a noise, or up to no good. You would have the torch shone on you, and there were (???) sat in the stools, I think at both there was a balcony but you didn't really want to sit underneath in the seats where the balcony was...err finished, because people liked looping stuff over. Apparently suckling morning pictures were the ones where there was general carnage but my parents being somewhat gentile they said no, I shouldn't go to that. I went to play snooker instead at the local club, which having done my paper round, which of course gave me the money to go to the cinema on the Friday night and the Saturday night. I didn't tend to go mid week because the programs weren't possibly quite as interesting, and also there was this thing, homework, that I was supposed to be doing, and other things that got in the way, and nobody else was tending to go mid week.

Interviewer: When you say that the programs were less interesting mid week, what do you mean?

Respondent: You've got to remember that we weren't getting stuff directly from London as you tend to now. It wasn't done globally so....and of course there were the two films, and I'm not sure I knew that much about film then, but they seemed much more of a general or lower quality dare I say? Not that I really was aware of that much in those days, I think it was only when I got to college that I really started taking an interest in genres, so I didn't realize of course, that I knew more than I thought I knew.

Interviewer: But you generally preferred the weekend films then.

Respondent: Yes, but that is also to do with the film going, as well , so you might go for a drink beforehand, you seeing your mates and we've got nothing else to do and it is the weekend; 'coz that was interesting in a small town as well, they used to turn out the street lights at...was it eleven o'clock? Was it even half past ten, the last bus home was at twenty past ten, 'coz I lived about a mile outside and if you were walking it suddenly went dark. But you know we accepted that.

Interviewer: So you had to arrange your cinema going around the bus timetables?

Respondent: Err...well it wasn't so much that I was arranging it; the managers tended to arrange it around bus timetables as well.

Interviewer: The cinema managers.

Respondent: The cinema managers. So you'd probably be out by ten past ten.

Interviewer: In order to catch the twenty past bus.

Respondent: Yeah. I think all buses really finished around about ten thirty five, and not as many people, certainly young people actually had their own cars then, so not everybody was getting on the buses. And there would be bus queues which were quite long after the cinemas came out.

Interviewer: So you'd take the bus back with your friends who you were...

Respondent: Err...no. I met friends in town. People came from all over the town to meet, so we'd meet outside the cinema and the pub next door. I also remember, for really popular films, queuing up around the side of the cinema in a way that you don't tend to do now; but, of course, in provincial towns like that if you didn't actually see it then you weren't going to see it.

Interviewer: Because of course there was no home release either.

Respondent: No, we got television probably when I was twelve or thirteen, but certainly there were no film channels like there are now, so it was one hit and then you'd read about it in a magazine.

Interviewer: So let's talk about the magazines in the '60s. You say in the questionnaire that you used to read film periodicals in magazines. I was wondering if you remember which ones you read.

Respondent: No. Probably if you jog my memory I might remember them. I think it was more when I got up to Newcastle. I was a student where there was the art cinema which was ran by...was it the BFI then?

Interviewer: It was the NFT.

Respondent: The NFT; and they had the original cinemas, and it's really pleasing to see the BFI programs are still the same...somewhat thicker now than they were back in the '60s. And up there you would get your sheet of cast and so on. So then I think it was probably the first time I saw Sight and Sound, but it was really too heavy for me. I liked ones with pictures shall we say, and...?Why do I remember A Valley, which had nothing to do with that [laughs]? I think it was looking really in the local newspaper to see what the film was going to be about. I also remember, 'coz we were queuing up outside, the pictures that they had for the publicity or the marketing....just little card shaped things with the title of the film and the stars. I'm not even sure they had the director's name on it then. So that's really the only way you got to know what it was about. So I think I took the scatter gun approach; okay its Friday, Saturday, I would do (??) which one should we go to. Psycho is the one that I really remember, that we were all waiting for. And that was largely, not just because it was Hitchcock, 'coz certainly at that age I wasn't quietly Hitchcock efficient. We knew when it was Hitchcock you've got to see it; but Psycho was like...you will not be allowed in in the last eight minutes. Wow, this has got to be good. And it lived up to every...of course we didn't jump or scream, did we? Oh no, we didn't hide [laughs]...

Interviewer: [Laughs] I might detect that you're being a bit sarcastic.

Respondent: No, I actually, I think it was “oh there, that’s good...” I don’t think I was actually with the shower scene but...Because another thing that has changed totally now is that you go in when you got there. So there were some films that you’d actually see the second half of first, then sit around and see all the B movie, and then see the main feature. And you might just stay five minutes beyond where you’d taken it, and then you’d disappear off to the pub again, or go and do something else. Or, if it was a particularly good film, you would stay to the end then.

Interviewer: Did it bother you if you came in halfway through a film?

Respondent: There would have been a reason for doing it. Like it was cold outside or whatever, so no it didn’t really. Because it was Pearl and Dean, always; you certainly got three hours of entertainment, and three hours is actually quite a lot of time, especially if your last bus goes at twenty past...twenty five past ten. So...and it was continuous entertainment, so you weren’t sitting around in the cinema...and nobody seemed to worry too much about whether you’d seen the film through twice. And even though cinemas were very busy, once or twice there were blockbusters where you’d have to book in advance. I remember having one row with my parents over two Oscar Wilde films, and one was just called Wild and something...of Oscar Wilde and my parents went to see the one that I didn’t see and they were both A films. And I tried to instigate a conversation about it and I got hammered for actually going to see an A film, so that was...and there was no conversation to be had really, which was a shame, but...And because both of those I remember reading probably in The Sunday Paper or something like that, that they were films to be compared and they both came out at the same time. So...that was interesting. Our conversations were really I suppose not that sophisticated, but there was a gradual awakening of what makes a good film; but it was also about being young lads and were you a Brigitte Bardot fan or a Sophia Loren fan, I particularly liked Claudia Cardinale personally, but trying to be sophisticated [laughs]. So when it came to see movies like...was it Once Upon a Time in the West much later when (???)? I was right.

Interviewer: I wonder if we could talk a little bit, I'm very interested in what you say about Psycho specifically. It seems that you remember quite a bit about that particular day at the cinema.

Respondent: I think it was the build-up... 'coz it was sort of going on and it was...now I realize it was marketed in a way that I wasn't aware that films had been marketed before. 'Coz I could still see the poster, which was bigger than those little ones that you're putting behind glass. And it was done a month or so before, so a lot of us, both at school and among friends I tended to go to the cinema with, were talking about Psycho coming out. And I think it was also going to be running for two weeks...yeah there were plenty of reasons why you would see it, and a lot of the publicity was...you really don't want to see this. It's really too scary for you. Okay....oh no it's not. And you know, that was the master at work, even before you'd seen the frame of the film. So then of course, after that we wanted to see every Hitchcock film that came out. It's quite possible that I'd seen some of his earlier black and white stuff that he made while he was over here, as part of the general mishmash those Friday and Saturday nights, but not in a way that Psycho really hit us. 'Coz a lot of the films we saw were black and white. Anyway, so you know, current films technical are wow, then you've got the wider screen even more wow and I'm not sure if this is into the '70s now, but The Guns of Navarone...

Interviewer: I believe that's '60s but I'd have to look it up.

Respondent: Yeah, it's (??) 'coz I saw that down in Exeter and that's the first time I heard stereo sound, so as they fired the guns, you could hear them coming from over the back of the auditorium into the picture and that was wow. Now it's....you would expect that and Dolby? Who's he? It would have been in those days, but...so I think that's one of the things I remember...and that's a film I still like because I like those action films as well. The first film...I remember the first film I went to on my own was Reach for the Sky with aviator Douglas Bader, with Kenneth More, and the week after that because I saw the trailer, Whale Boats which was about the Japanese Kamikaze pilots bombing the USA fleet in the Pacific. I don't remember much about it but it was all action and flames here there and everywhere.

Reach for the Sky was in black and white, Whale Boats was in glorious red. Not for blood, but for fire and...

Interviewer: Do you remember the first colour film that you saw?

Respondent: I was brought up as a Quaker and I remember my parents taking me to see, and I think this was just before Reach for the Sky, so trailers maybe had a big influence on me, would have been Friendly Persuasion with...was that Julie Stewart? I think possibly...

Interviewer: I think I have to look that up.

Respondent: And a lot of the religious people around were there as well. (???) fights against adversity in a way, that's why I thought it was probably Julie Stewart, and that sort of thing, like A Wonderful Life...but it was in colour.

Interviewer: Did the colour make an impact on you? Do you remember how you felt about that?

Respondent: Umm I think it was another reason for seeing a film. But it didn't, because we were so used to I think being sort of involved in from...I suppose the early '60s we're talking aren't we? You were used to them being in black and white so it was...yeah a bit like now 3D is, you know it's the next extension on, but what's the story like actually? So...oh this is in black and white? Okay, we're used to black and white. 'Coz television was in black and white. So yes, it was important but...and given the choice do you want to see a colour or a black and white, I don't think it would make a lot of difference. Because the colour quality wasn't that great, you know it wasn't as sharply defined as the black and white was by then. So there were pluses and minuses with it.

Interviewer: You say in the questionnaire that you went to the cinema with friends, which we've talked a bit about today, and you say that there was a particular group of you that went together to the cinema.

Respondent: Two or three I remember. One was somebody I made friends with from the football team, 'coz I went to a rugby playing school; it wasn't that much good but I played football for a local team and, I think he was actually out of work and we used to meet up a lot. Then there were a couple of schoolmates who would come from time to time, coz they got to know me as somebody who liked film and would be going anyway. Girls, no I didn't...in terms of girls I do remember actually breaking up with a girl in Newcastle and then going and seeing Doctor Zhivago on my own that evening. The fact I still remember it is fairly central I suppose. Not a bad film, Doctor Zhivago, I'm not sure I was in the right state to see it [laughs]. 'Coz there's that sexual side to it as well...and there was also a time when you could pick up girls inside the cinema, so yeah I went to the cinema, oh girl sitting on her own over there, or a couple of girls over there, so this is the bit that should actually be cut. And a girl happened to sit down, and if you were lucky you ended up snogging and never saw them again. Because really, going to an all boys school there weren't actually that many opportunities of meeting girls and anyway if you did then you had to talk to them. Who knows what you would say? So actually sidling up in a cinema sounds really bad now, doesn't it? I didn't get slapped across the face, but it did cause the usherette to come down sometimes, you know, with the torch. And that was part of the whole filmic experience, because as a drama teacher, because I realized now that the fact that I became a drama teacher must have been tied in to the experiences I've seen, story and plot lines and sort of becoming imbued with it because it was very little theatre down there. There was actually a professional company came down and did a play, but I can't remember what the play was but the lead of the company was called Antony Moil and I actually saw him en I came up to London in the mid '60s, I actually saw him in a cafe. I went up and thanked him for bringing his play down to Barnstaple and he was amazed and delighted, you know, I wouldn't dare go and talk to an actor now, but...and you know that was...I think we were really thirsty for an art form of any sort. 'Coz they had gigs as well on the Thursday night and the Saturday. That would be it. Friday night was definitely cinema night, 'coz Saturday night we used to go to the Queen's Hall, now the Queen's Theatre, for dancing. And that was another place to meet girls but (??). And you'd get the bigger bands come down on the Thursday night; so Thursday, Friday and Saturday, that was your social life really. Thursday night was the gigs and dancing and listening to people like Brian Poole, we even had The Animals down there once, and Friday night definitely was cinema.

Saturday night, shall we go to the gym and dance, or hey there's a good film on, oh let's do the cinema again. So I think you could guarantee you'd go once a week to the cinema.

Interviewer: Fantastic.

Respondent: But sometimes twice a week.

Interviewer: And how did that change when you moved to Newcastle?

Respondent: Well studying drama up there, there were film clubs in the university, or the college so I joined that (???)...if you get luck you might see the whole film. And then going to the Thames Side Cinema and ...was it the ABC on the Haymarket? Yeah, I think it was the ABC on the Haymarket while I got into Clint Eastwood, or was that when I was up there again in the '70s? Could be. Josie Wales, that's '70s isn't it?

Interviewer: I believe so.

Respondent: Yeah, that wasn't there then. And I think that was when the Odeon was around...certainly for Chicago; that was on Northumberland Street. But there were so many other things to do then, so it wasn't a regular thing. But I think with that kind of growing awareness of what film was about and getting interested in, (??) Bourbon and playing the student...But that certainly opened up doors into what film can actually do.

Interviewer: And where did you see these foreign films?

Respondent: At the Thames Side cinema which was the NFT outpost.

Interviewer: The original hub.

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about that cinema.

Respondent: I think it sat about one hundred seats, it was in the centre of town, I don't know the history of it 'coz it could well have been a converted...well as a former private cinema; 'coz when I came down to Croydon in '68, classic cinemas of course were around then. And there would be twenty or thirty people in there who just spent everything. I probably only went once a month or so in the end. Very often I might go in the afternoon if I couldn't be bothered to do an essay or oh that looks interesting, let's get down there to pass the time or whatever, so I wouldn't call myself ultra regular. And of course there was a lot more theatre up there that I was either making or going and seeing. So I think it was probably at that time that not only did I start learning more about film, but also move away from it into theatre as an art form.

Interviewer: Was it experience of going to the regional NFT different from going to other cinemas?

Respondent: Err...in a snobbish way, yes. Look where I'm going...I have to be able to read here because it's all subtitles. I think that was possibly the main thing. And of course I was mixing with people who also put on this pseudo awareness of foreign film without actually knowing anything about it. Because we certainly weren't doing a film course in any sense, but I'd probably been to film much more often than most of my drama colleagues. But they'd probably done more theatre work than I had. You know, 'coz it's all down to opportunity. And most of them had come from the bigger cities, so...I don't feel at all deprived about it; it was just one of those things that became part of my life, and still is; I still go to the cinema quite regularly. And that would last for a couple of years, and I would find that I'm doing more theatre for a couple of years and so it's always been cutting in and cutting away from it as well.

Interviewer: I wonder what else, if you remember what else they showed in the NFT. Was it all European movies?

Respondent: Err...those were the ones I remembered, because they were so different. And they were probably all in black and white as well. Those were the ones that I do remember. 'Coz God I was, you

know...and it was a case...I have to admit, I think it was a case of trying to catch up with what everyone else knew. But it was not an unpleasant experience. Because I would be alerted to see something new when I went; and it would be of interest. Maybe not thrilling, 'coz I still enjoyed James Bond enormously, but yeah...we did the James Bond bit and it was good entertainment, but you know, when it comes to depth of characterization and so on, not really. I think possibly that's why Psycho was so interesting; I think it was actually Perkins' character. 'Coz years later that came back to me...sorry that's not answering your question, but too bad. I had a friend who is sadly no longer with us, who lived in Godshill on the Isle of Wight, in a very old cottage, next to a very old church. And I was staying in the front room upstairs, and there were these Americans coming and making a lot of noise coming to see the church. And I just stood in the window looking down, you know, tiny little window, thinking that's my Norman Bates moment, because sure enough they all looked up at me and were quietened down [laughs]. And that struck me as being a Norman Bates moment. And you know, there are really quite a few things that one can attribute to particular moments in particular films and news. I'm also aware that, and this is to do with theatre as well as film, that I have a way of seeing life that...and a broadness of view that people who don't see film don't have as easily. And I think that's possibly made me more tolerant as a teacher of people's behaviours, because I've seen those behaviours before in film and there's usually a reason for that. And as a drama teacher I've always been able to see the other side of any situation very easily, which can be a pain in the ass [laughs], if you're actually talking to somebody because they would take a contrary view. And I think film has a lot to do with that, possibly more than theatre, because having grown up with film, when you see the hardships of...you know, it's a wonderful life, it's a classic example that comes to mind straight away, of... you know, you're doing the best but sometimes it just....you can't. And I did like the cowboy ones as well, you know, between good and evil and it's you know...so it's clearly had a great influence.

Interviewer: Yeah...

Respondent: I must mention one film though that was a really big disappointment. 'Coz I told you about how we'd been naughty as well...It was one of the early week films: Seven Deadly Sins and we were really looking forward to it, ah we're going to learn something here. It was the most dire film ever. It

was in black and white, I don't know if you've ever heard of it, but it was...it wasn't Edward, but it could have been...seven little contrite little stories about what each one...I even think they put up the word up on the screen before, and people were badly dressed. This is lust, this is gluttony...and nobody was enjoying themselves at all. It was such a letdown. So that was a good lesson to learn as well. I think I might have even made a comment about it there.

Interviewer: You say that you sometimes went to the cinema alone, you've mentioned that a couple of times today. I wonder under what circumstances would you go to the cinema alone?

Respondent: Err...I don't mind going...I have friends who don't mind going to the cinema on their own much more than going to the theatre on their own, because you can take (?) and if there's nobody around who is either interested in film or won't have an intelligent conversation about it afterwards. I much prefer...this is why I'm still in touch with the film course people, 'coz if I was to discuss film or talk to people who understand...I just pop along on a Monday night and we go to the pub afterwards and catch up like that. But in some ways it's...I think in some ways it's better to go to a film on your own knowing that you're not going to have a conversation except with yourself about it, than with somebody who cannot rise to the baits of anything that you say about the film, or if they just say "yeah, it was alright", or "that was good" or "I enjoyed that", yeah end of conversation.

Interviewer: Is that how you felt in the '60s as well?

Respondent: Err...not so much...certainly not at college, 'coz...it was more...have you seen what's on? "We went and saw it last night, you really want to go and see that one", and then I could do the reciprocal as well. So it became...with students I think, you know, part of the general conversation. Or, and I think there were one or two occasions, where we were all pushed for time, so somebody would go off and see one film, somebody would go and see something else, and then we'd meet at the pub afterwards and talk about it. You know, so it was part of that sort of film going community, which I still feel part of 'coz my friends now sort of tend to live down the road, you know, they're round and about, so we all meet up, two or three friends. We were at the concert at the Royal Festival Hall on Tuesday,

but yeah, '60s music, you see. But we all go to the cinema, but different cinemas, so we actually saw Gravity down in East Grinstead, you see. But normally we all go and do music, but when we meet up, once a week for the pub, we will often talk about films that we've seen, or intend to see. Sometimes you don't get round to seeing it, but...So I think it's part of a way of life, because I suppose when you're in there, the cinema, it is you and what's going on the screen, or it should be. "Shut up" [laughs].

Interviewer: So did other people talking in cinemas in the '60s, did that bother you?

Respondent: Well, it was only whispering. No, 'coz when you're young it's like the...well I hate it, but I'm tolerant. I hope I'm tolerant of the popcorn generation. What was it...Romeo and Juliet...I know this didn't come out in the '60s, but this woman sat next to me with a huge pile of, you know, the big box of...this gigantic box of popcorn which she the devoured bit by bit, and even scraped it around when she got to the bottom...great. And then she stopped...ah good, and then [mimicking crying] 'coz there was something on the screen that had made her cry. I thought oh God, will this woman ever shut up? But she has been clearly watching what was going on. Ah no, Romeo and Juliet was another one that (??) and just at the end (???) and I thoroughly enjoyed it, but I heard tears from the back. There's somebody here who doesn't know the story. And in that sense film can work. And back to the '60s, for my first teaching job in Croydon, I was asked how I would introduce Shakespeare to young people. And I actually said...well take for example The Taming of the Shrew with Burton and Taylor, scratching each other's eyes out, as a good example of bringing it in. And I got the job there and then.

Interviewer: So you used film in your teaching.

Respondent: Nothing near as much as I wanted to. Because of the technology; getting hold of them is much easier now with DVDs, but when you're using tape, you've still got to find the right bit or it's not appropriate, and can you get a projector in there, will the kids settle down? So you might with older students, but I don't know.

Interviewer: Did you ever take your students to the cinema in the '60s?

Respondent: We used to bring them to the West End which was quite funny. Because most kids from Croydon school...although this is more like the '70s now, just didn't understand the West End, didn't know about it. I remember taking them to see The Canterbury Tales up on...where was that? St Martin's Lane, was it? Or China Cross Road? China Cross Road, I think...and going past some cinemas with X certificates on them, and "oh can we go and see that?" No, we're going to see The Canterbury Tales. "Oh sir, sir, sir..." [laughs]. And we went to The Canterbury Tales and did the Miller's Tale behind the bed, and the whole row was looking at me [laughs]. So I've always thought that cinema is accessible to young people, in a way that theatre isn't. So, if you're going to make the effort, you do it for theatre. And I would still stick with that. I think it's important to take young people to theatre for them to experience that because cinema they can get now so much of at home anyway. You'd have discussions about; I would relate it in teaching drama I would relate film as a shared experience. Have you seen such and such? And do you remember the scene where...but I wouldn't actually show it 'coz it's too cumbersome. And it gave me the open endedness that I would want as a drama teacher.

Interviewer: So did you discuss film with your students in the '60s?

Respondent: Err...informally I think. 'Coz before I was teaching drama full time I went and taught English as well. So yeah, largely informally.

Interviewer: Sure.

Respondent: But it did form my thinking in terms of what I was setting up on the possibilities. And I certainly think visually. Now, whether I was born that side or whether it was that continued experience seeing films that actually developed that way of thinking I'm not sure. And I certainly see the possibilities of any idea before I actually think it through, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah, it does. We talked a little about European films earlier on in your exposure to them at the Newcastle branch of the NFT. I wonder if we can talk about British films for a moment.

B: I can try [laughs].

Interviewer: Do you remember seeing British films in the cinema in the '60s?

Respondent: Must have done. 'Coz Carry On was started then, wasn't it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: 'Coz we were looking at, I really am dreading it when it comes to genres, we were looking at...there was James Bond, so that was good for the thrilling stuff, and then there were the carry ons which were for the laugh. And the rest was...I don't think, you may be able to remind me, but I don't think there were sort of series other than that. There may be one other...

Interviewer: The Hammer Horror films?

Respondent: Err...I didn't get into horror that much. Now and again I just thought I was not strong enough in that sense, you know. For Carry On, you knew it was sort of rubbish, but it was good for a laugh. It did what it said on the tin. With Hammer...and I think that's maybe why Psycho was so much better, because that genuinely was scary, whereas Hammer was cheap and cheerful. So, yeah, I suppose if it was on a Saturday night because we'd seen something we wanted to see on the Friday night...'coz I think we were into strong story lines, be that Westerns or dramas. If it was a question of Hammer or dancing, we would go dancing.

Interviewer: Do you remember seeing any of the Swinging London movies? Movies about that...

Respondent: Err...I must have done. Absolutely must have done, but it's only when I've been doing the courses in the last few years that they really came back to me. Because some of them I just didn't really get. You know, the whole drug culture that seemed to be underlined so much. Drugs for us were having two or three pints and chain smoking cigarettes for a couple of hours, you know that was it. And a mate

of mine smoking grass, literally grass. In fact, I was sitting out with him and he said “oh I fancy smoking some grass” and he picked up some grass, wrapped a bit of newspaper around it and lit it [laughs].

Interviewer: God!

Respondent: ‘Coz we were doing it as a joke...it’s not our thing, but people smoke grass, alright let’s see what green grass tastes like. ‘Coz, you know, we knew that that wasn’t it, but we weren’t going to play that kind of game, so there was that satirical bend to it all. Yeah, so I couldn’t still say the short skirts and (??) did something, but that could be from what we saw earlier and yes, yeah, but that was our thing. This is how London live, and we all tried to dress smartly, but didn’t actually have to actually wear it all. You know, I think it was part of the myth that we all had a swinging time in the sixties. We grew up, we had some fun, we did some stupid things, but were you around with the swinging sixties? No, and if you meet somebody now and they say they were, they either lie or they were on the very edge of it. Or they lived in London and went to clubs, Marquee, One Hundred Club, because they were following their music and it wasn’t the fashion so much, it was, you know, growing up like I had film down in North Devon and up in Newcastle and theatre up there; they had the music scene in London.

Interviewer: So you don’t feel the basketball was swinging in the ‘60s.

Respondent: Was it ever swinging? I’ve no idea what you mean; see, we had a good time, we did what we wanted to do, and come back to the other thing, can you have a swinging time if the lights go out at eleven o’clock?

Interviewer: [Laughs]

Respondent: Yes you can! You know what I mean. So did anybody, you know, the other people that you interviewed, did they really get into those psychedelic films and all of that? We all saw pretty much the same stuff, but modern rockers; well it certainly was London or Brighton. You know, so...

Interviewer: What about Newcastle? Was there any sense of that type of lifestyle?

Respondent: Locally, local culture was (??) quite important, although that might have been largely me because I did enjoy the culture of the north-east.

Interviewer: What was the culture like up in the north-east?

Respondent: Well, the strong regional cultural music, the language, and the work ethic as well, you know, I went down the mine, you know, there were still mines around then. So (??) ten pints a nigh; that wasn't me, but we had five pubs around the college and we'd go there and have...we could make a half last an hour, and we'd have two halves because that was basically all we could afford. So the pub, although packed, wasn't making any money, so eventually a landlord would knock knock kindly on students coming in so we'd just all block move to the next one [laughs]. We had five like that, which was very well over three years, so...or we'd go into town and yeah, sort of spend the day at the (?) so...I think for me it was the same but bigger, and there was a regional identity that I didn't feel part of down in Barnstaple.

Interviewer: What about when you moved to Croydon?

Respondent: I took one look at the place and thought "I'm not stopping here". I still live there. I got away a couple of times, but I always come back.

Interviewer: So you didn't feel like you were part of the swinging London culture even when you were in London.

Respondent: I didn't have any money. I came in and I had to get an overdraft from the bank and I left teaching after fifteen months because my overdraft was getting bigger and bigger every month. I can remember going to free concerts up at Parliament Hill Fields, because I knew friends who'd done that, but coming up to London was not something I did regularly.

Interviewer: What about the other type of...there are two kind of iconic types of British film from the '60s. There are the swinging London movies which we've talked about; the other ones that people tend to talk about a lot are the kitchen sink dramas, the gritty...

Respondent: Most from the theatre.

Interviewer: Yes, yes...

Respondent: A Taste of Honey...yes I did see that, Oh and Sporting Life, I loved the too...err, yeah I did take those on I think, because I remember I'd either seen them as plays and enjoyed them, or enjoying the Penguin Books with Ellen Totes, and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning was another one, wasn't it? So yes, I did, thank you for reminding me of them. And clearly I did take notes on those, 'coz I was reading or seeing them in two forms, not just the film form.

Interviewer: Hmm...do you remember enjoying them?

Respondent: And Lucky Jim as well. Do I remember enjoying them? What, the films or the...?

Interviewer: The films.

Respondent: Err yes. I would say...yes. I did enjoy them. Otherwise I don't think I would have bothered reading the book, and if I'd have read the book first then I would have been measuring the film against the book. I think for the '60s it was about taking it all in, grabbing it while it's there; and it sifted out later. And probably I think even the filmmakers were growing up in the '60s as well, and it wasn't the sophisticated form that it is now. I was listening to an interview but yesterday, or the day before, where they were saying that games, video games are now becoming an art form. Like someone going "Hold on, you have to work really hard for thirty or forty years to be regarded as an art form, you don't get there that easily." Yeah, and I think because I had to defend cinema as an art form right up until the '90s; and doing it unproportionately as much as anything else. You know, there are so many films that come out and did back in the '60s. There would only be one or two masterpieces, there was so much

music made. There would only be one or two masterpieces and books and so on. So don't diss it because you happened to have been in a film that didn't happen to be very good. It's only time that will tell. That's why I was so annoyed at these games "oh it's state of the art, this is an art form." Not yet it's not. We will decide that twenty years down the line.

Interviewer: Did you feel that film was an art form in the '60s then?

Respondent: I don't know, in Barnstaple I don't think I was conscious particularly of this concept of art form. It's just...it's what we intelligent pseuds in Northern Devon...I was quite happy going to the youth club...that's why I didn't do much work, 'coz there was always a youth club in front of (??) and listening to pop music. I think probably pop music in that sense in terms of swinging sixties was much more influential than film. And you asked whether it was swinging down in Barnstaple. We listened to the music, we saw the films, we tried to have a good time, and we tried to make friends with girls. I think that was swinging enough; you know, we did what we did, and films were a part of that in the way that music in particular was. But again on a much lower level than it would have been in London. You know, it is a case of opportunity. Now I don't know what your research is, whether people who lived in urban areas had better experiences of film than we did. They probably had a lot more choice. But I don't know, you tell me. Was it a different experience? Possibly not because there was so much choice, they probably didn't get into film in the same way, I would guess.

Interviewer: Well I find it interesting that you seem to have, if I understand you correctly, you certainly saw a lot of films while you were in Barnstaple. But you talk about your tastes refining in Newcastle when you were exposed to different types of film.

Respondent: And art forms as well.

Interviewer: Of course.

Respondent: It became just one of several.

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Respondent: I think that was part of being a student. Which is why I push really hard for three year courses to continue for teachers as well. 'Coz that three years was growing up and learning about yourself, as much as learning a trade, if not more so.

Interviewer: So, looking through the questionnaire, there's a section that I wanted to talk about, which is to do with genre. We ask you about your favourite genres, and just to remind you, you said thrillers, westerns, European art cinema, and adventure films. Is that something you still...?

Respondent: Well, I suppose comedy, now that you've mentioned Carry On, 'coz it was good for a laugh, and there must have been other comedians. Because I think I came to the Marx Brothers a lot later, via television...I don't know, it's all part of a distant past. 'Coz certainly, visual comedy I enjoy, and do, and that must have come from somewhere in film. And I loved Keystone Cops as well, and again, I think that probably came a lot later...I may have caught up with one or two up in Newcastle, but I don't know.

Interviewer: You talk about, we asked what you enjoy about these genres in the questionnaire and you mentioned other worlds opening up. I just wonder what you meant by other worlds opening up.

Respondent: It's a thing of...if down in Barnstaple all there is, you know, I've told you what my life was and I went to school and I did somehow work, but not enough because to get out of Devon, if you are a grammar school boy, if you were bright, you went to university. If you were fairly bright, you went to teacher training college, and if you couldn't get the parties to qualify for that, the careers service would try to find you a job in Devon. It was as simple as that. My career advisor was something like "and what do you want to do when you leave college?" Sorry, "what do you want to do when you leave school?" Well I want a job that gives me Saturday afternoons off to play sport and pays a lot of money. "Right, you can become a solicitor." And so for two years I was following this but I could never pass the O Level Latin, which you had to have to do law. So that eventually went out, and I was travelling through

Newcastle and though ah, this looks like a nice place. So I didn't make that top band; I had to do a third year in Sixth Form, because I got one A-Level pass the first time, enjoying myself far too much. Got a second one, fortunately in a different subject, but I met improvised drama in that final year. But what I've told you about Barnstaple, apart from spending summer on the beach, there wasn't really that much in terms of cultural input.

Interviewer: And so cinema...

Respondent: Cinema was that, you know, there's got to be something else, because the number of people who, certainly for twenty years after I'd left, "You come from Devon? Why did you leave?" You know, they couldn't understand it. My response to them was, you go down there in the summer, don't you? For the other eight-nine months of the year there is nothing to do. And I think I was making the best of what there was to do. And then....and cinema is a fantasy in that sense, and it's...if you imbue yourself with it, then you are being taken into another world. And you don't need to (?) to do that; you are actually in there already, if it's working.

Interviewer: Would you describe it as escapism in the '60s for you?

Respondent: Err...yes, without I think in the '60s knowing what escapism was necessarily. But it was the storytelling form of choice, 'coz I've never been that quick a reader. But yeah...and it's that visual thing again; that's where the information is coming from. That's how I knew about swinging London and so on. But that and the music related...I think possibly in that sense the music was stronger. So yeah, I would stick with that. And I think television generally has done very good for kids at school, because before television they'd hear about say America, but they never actually saw it, they never listened to the accents. So you have to assume that children come into school with a much wider experience of the world than we had. So much of the way education is set up will not take that into account. But I was anywhere, and have done through my career; I assume a lot of knowledge. It's just a case of how do you challenge and channel that knowledge to take it on further in a way that academia maybe requires,

or certainly getting through the courses require. So that's what it did. Si if you like escapism, it opens doors into something else you wouldn't otherwise get.

Interviewer: So you learned about the world through cinema.

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: I see.

Respondent: And not having responsibility for any of it as well comes into it I think. I think because it's so much of growing up, you are supposed to take responsibility for...as soon as you've paid, or got somebody else to pay to get you in, you can just sit back for...in those days three hours, and what will happen will happen. Call that escapism if you like, but maybe not in the sense of, you know escapism from the day to day chores.

Interviewer: I wonder if we can talk for a little while about watching 1960s cinema now and about how you feel about that. You mentioned in the questionnaire that you feel that to some extent watching 1960s films feels like watching them become period pieces. I wonder if you could tell me what you meant by that.

Respondent: Well apart from the obvious one of seeing people who seem very glamorous to you when you were growing up, I'm thinking in particular of Vanessa Redgrave, and...was it Blow Up?

Interviewer: Yes, she was in Blow Up, yes.

Respondent: And that they got older or they're dead and long gone. Err...as I was saying earlier, I think film making and all art forms got so much more sophisticated. That doesn't mean that there was anything wrong with the rawness, in fact, very often the rawness of just going alone was much better, but we are not as innocent now. Also, you couldn't get away with a lot of the carry on stuff. The smuttiness...are you allowed to use words like smut now? Oh no, you can get arrested for smuttiness

now, can't you? And so, as we have become more sophisticated, I think we've become more guilt ridden. And I also think that the film makers then were just trying things out, or seeing what would work with the basic stuff that they had, whereas now the technology certainly helps them a lot, and the pressure is on to make the next scene bigger and bigger and bigger. 'Coz a couple of weeks ago I saw Gravity. Have you seen it yet?

Interviewer: I haven't, no.

Respondent: And it had some really good reviews, and I saw it in 3D, and there's nothing to it, but I loved it. Because they took something really, really simple, and just played it fairly straight. And in that sense there was a sort of innocence to it that I think was around in the '60s as well. Yeah, like Edward would never get near it now, would he? And it's because the technology had gotten so beyond...although last week I was at the Crystal Palace International Film Festival, and it's a festival of short films that people are making, animated films, some of them really funny. There are people who are able to make full length films and are not great, but they're actually making them, and re-mortgaging their houses and so on. So there is still all that...if you like '60s feel about it, we will explore this at a level. And of course picture quality has changed; and ratios as well. And clothing, 'coz when they say, we're back in the '70s or the '60s, yes we are, but we're not, because clothing hangs differently. And I can still remember ration books, not being used, but I was allowed to play with them when they no longer used them. And sherbet that you had from a packet and you ended up with a yellow finger, and that was a delight. And you would save up, you know, going back now to the '50s, if you have one Mars bar a week from your pocket money, you ended up doing really well. And it was part I think the '60s British film was part of that exploration, we're moving away from the hard times, and there was that crossover too from let's stop talking about the war and let's start looking at what the human condition is in the '60s. That's sporting life and the influence of the North and out of London as well. So you were talking about swinging London, much of the literature and the film was not about London. And I think that was another reason why I was so positively affected by Newcastle. Although I'd get (??) later and is not (??) of that area particularly, but it was...I caught Taylor, I can't remember his first name, there was a play writer up there, who was very clear on what the North-East was about. And

small theatre companies were opening up at the same time. So if you like, British film in the '60s was part of that art explosion that...and the can do effect of...and some did it better than others, and of course, people like Nick Rogen, you could argue that he did his best work in the '60s. And then they found out they could do it, but actually they just did it rather than were exploring it. Who else was there...Russell was another one, I feel like that, and you know it's...How that compares to now I'm not bothered to think.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy watching 1960s films now?

Respondent: Not really [laughs]. I think it's a bit like books. There's lots of books I have read and enjoyed, but I don't think I will ever have the time to read them again. There are better things to do with my time, and explore new things. That's maybe the way I am. Now and again, and I can't think of examples off the top of my head now, when I see a film coming I think yes, I've got to see that. I think '70s and '80s possibly more.

Interviewer: Why so?

Respondent: Clint Eastwood. Martin Scorsese.

Interviewer: So it's to do with particular stars and directors.

Respondent: Yeah. Oh that's on again...or I miss that...and then sometimes I may only do half an hour of it and something click in the brain, yeah, I remember it.

Interviewer: Wonderful.

Respondent: I think maybe it's partly to do with growing up in the '60s and the brain sort of (??) itself.

Interviewer: Well that's all the questions that I have for you, but before I turn the recorder off, I just wanted to ask, is there anything else that you'd like to add that I haven't asked about yet?

Respondent: I think I'd like to talk to you about what you are finding out. If only finding out where one, myself, fit into the general feeling about how other film lovers are viewing their '60s experiences. Because I also belonged to a writing course a few years back, and there was a guy there who kept repeating stories, much older than us, and he'd actually been a projectionist at the (??) as it was then before it became an Odeon. And he got some lovely stories and he got some of those pictures, and stories of people he'd met from the '60s; he's sadly no longer with us...and his view on, and coming up to town to see the big bosses up in Soho, presumably where training courses were before they thought of training courses...that was a different world in film to the one that I was used to in Devon. And (??) how is the research going to come out? Because I'm thinking...I want to measure sort of my experience; is it a common one, well I think it probably is, or does it differ in any significant part to anybody else's?

Interviewer: Well as I say the book's going to be available at the end of (?) so we'll be in touch to let you know about it. I hesitate to say too much now because we're still collecting data, so I couldn't give you a complete picture; we'll be giving a summary of the results via the website at the end of the project and then...

Respondent: Oh yeah...

Interviewer: But other than that thank you ever so much for the interview.

Respondent: Thank you for inviting me.

Interviewer: Cheers.

End of interview.

