

My name is Robert Gregory and I was born in 1922.

I remember the Duke of York's because that was the first cinema I went to with my grandfather. I remember the film we saw. It was called Cuban Lovesong with Lawrence Tibbet the baritone. I was probably round about 9 or 10. That's my very first memory of any entertainment. It was later on in the 30s that I started going to concerts and things like that.

In the 30s I was a great cinema goer. To the Odeon, especially, in Kemp Town. That was my favourite cinema. It was just near Paston Place. It was bombed in the war. They had a bomb there on a Saturday morning during a children's programme.

I used to go to the cinema a great deal. In those days there was no such thing as television of course. All you had was the cinema and the radio. So I mean people used to go probably at least twice a week to the cinema. This was a regular thing. I used to go to most of the cinemas - certainly the lowest one of all was the Arcadia in Lewes Road where you paid 3d to go in, that sort of thing. Sat on a hard bench. It was the scruffiest cinema in Brighton and the cheapest but it was the first to have the double seats at the back if you went in with your girlfriend you could hold hands. It also was, I think, one of first cinemas in Brighton to have a special type of screen but I don't remember any more than that. I remember the man who used to come around with the flit spray, spraying the air, because it used to get rather fetid in there. They used to do that in the Duke of Yorks as well.

At the Arcadia in Lewes Road, on Saturday mornings, it was a children's programme. It was usually cowboys or something like that. Or slapstick comedy. I don't know about the other cinemas. I don't think they catered for children especially. I think they changed the programme twice a week, if I remember correctly. I remember we often used to have to queue, especially with the Savoy in Poole Valley. The one in East St. I remember we used to have to queue there quite often to get in. They were very good at advertising. What they did was, they got in league with the local tobacconists and paper shops and they had their little hoardings outside. The cinema advertised on these boards, usually on the pavement. If the shop did this, they had free passes. My friend had a shop and he did that so consequently he and I used to go to the cinema free, which was rather good. Especially the Odeon in Kemp Town where we just used to go very often and didn't have to pay a penny.

There were many things such as youth fellowships which were usually attached to churches. That's where you met. And the local dances. I don't think we met in cinemas.

I used to go to the dance at the Co-op. The Co-op had a hall at the bottom of Islingword Road. I think it's not there now. This was the Co-op Dairy. They used to have dances there, and as I lived in Elm Grove it was very near. They were very simple pleasures. They had live music. I formed a little dance band with 3 or 4 of my friends in 1937, 1938. One played the accordion, the other played the

trumpet and I played the piano and we used to play for the blind club in Kemp Town for them to dance to. We didn't charge anything. We used to have quite good fun doing it. I don't know what the club was called. A different world now! People were doing a very sedate foxtrot and waltz. There was no great animation. It was quite casual.

The Regent Ballroom had the finest dance floor in the south of England. It was sprung. It was a wonderful dance floor. I used to go there very rarely because I think it was rather expensive and you had to be a little posher. But the floor was very famous because it had this spring to it. When they demolished it, it broke my heart.

I went to the Hippodrome quite often. Not for dances. I wasn't a dancer. I used to go to the dancers principally to meet girls. Let me put it quite frankly. I used to get around the floor very amateurishly but at least it was a place one could meet them. It was all very nicely innocent if I remember correctly, but it was how you met people. But I never remember meeting people at either the cinema or the theatre. I went there but I don't think I made any friends.

I was 19 and I was at the Art School studying. I did 2 years there and then I had to go in the army. I was away for 5 years, from 1942 until the end of the war. Then I came back to the college again. There wasn't much bomb damage in Brighton. There was the Odeon in Kemp Town and a pub in Lewes Rd that was badly hit at the bottom of Franklin Rd. There were some bombs in Whitehawk. There was a bomb at the back of this house (in Seven Dials). But we were lucky in Brighton. We didn't get a great deal. They were ditching their bombs on the way back (from London). Sometimes they did that. The worst raid was the Kemp Town raid. The one that hit the Odeon.

I started going to the theatre a great deal when I came out of the army, in 1947-48. I went to the Hippodrome. I was a great fan there. Also the Theatre Royal and also the Dolphin Theatre which was adjacent to it, which was demolished. It used to be the Court Cinema and then it was called the Dolphin. I went to quite a number of concerts there, ballet, opera. I loved opera very much.

The Sadlers Wells used to come down, Carl Rosa. They were mainly visiting companies. I was a great fan of opera. I loved it. There were certain singers who had quite good careers locally but I don't think they'd mean anything to anyone. But there were no international stars. They were usually the Carl Rosa Company or Sadlers Wells. They were fine singers but they weren't international. I heard, the most famous possibly was Tito Gobbi who many people know as a baritone. He made films as well. He came here. Gigli came here. They were well patronised. Very well indeed.

My mother was a great bingo fan and she used go to the Hippodrome when it stopped showing features and I used to go down there and collect her from her bingo. I remember going there in the beginning of the war, before I went into the army, when the tenor Richard Tauber was singing. A world famous star - I remember him very well from the Hippodrome.

See we had the concert halls, we had the Theatre Royal. We had the Hippodrome. We had the Isoldo in North Street. From the time I came out of the army I was regular theatre goer. The Theatre Royal hasn't change in the least. Not in the slightest.

We tried to get to the ballet as much as possible when it was down here. The Dome did concerts. The local operatic societies used to do their annual productions in the Dome. They were of a very good standard. I used to go every year, whenever one of the local societies did a show. They were usually things like Bless the Bride or the very popular musicals. So yes, we used to go to the Dome. Very good productions, I must say. I always wanted to be able to sing. It was my great regret in life that I had a voice like a crow. Loving opera so much and couldn't sing myself.

I had a very brief spell as a stagehand at the Theatre Royal when I was a student, to earn some money. Moving scenery between acts. There were no international touring acts at all. None whatsoever. They didn't come along until much much later. I think the international companies, the opera, came when the Brighton Festival started. Then they came.

The Imperial Theatre was in North St. It was demolished. First of all it was a theatre, then it became a cinema, then it came to a bingo hall and then it was demolished. The sad story of most of them. If I remember correctly, in the heyday of cinemas, there were 14 cinemas in Brighton. In the 1930s. There were terribly tiny ones, most obscure ones - a tiny one in Western Road; Norfolk Square, there was a cinema; a cinema in Blatchington Road, Hove. Even then there was a trace of the class society. I think you had the poorer members of the community who went to, what I would call, not the "posh" cinemas. There was definitely a distinction there. The luxury cinemas were the Regent and the Savoy. They were the two. Then the Odeon, in West St. They were the high class. I must be very careful here - I'm not saying that people didn't go there because of any sort of class feeling, but there were posh cinemas and not-so-posh cinemas, let me put it like that. And I think the prices varied.

What you had in the 30s, mostly exemplified by things like the American films of Astaire and Rogers, where everything was very immaculate. It was just the same here, in Mayfair and the London theatres. They retain the elegance of the 30s. I think we've gone downhill terribly. From the entertainment point of view, we've sunk down in Brighton I think. Well they've had to concentrate on the young haven't they. This is really what it means.

Now they're making films with extreme violence with bright colour and they think it's entertainment. Well perhaps it is, but it's not for me. They wouldn't be able to make a film without the violence, without the loud noise, they couldn't do it. So that's why I love the old black and white films. Nostalgic, certainly, but I like the quality of the production. There were some black and white films that were awful - one must be honest about it. But generally speaking, there's an artistry there which is different - I'm not saying it's better or worse. It's so different. The other thing - how humour has changed. I can see it so well over the years. What

we laughed at in the 50s, now we would cringe, it would seem so amateurish. There's a great deal of nostalgia attached to it, but because of my age, possibly, I dislike what we call stand-up comedians because their humour is a different way of presentation. They've got to talk very quickly and you've got to be very attentive to catch the joke. And you've got to be up to date with everyday life. It's extremely difficult. The theatre is still, what I call, on the level. They can't do too much violence on the stage. They can do a certain amount. It is restricted.

When you consider, in the cinemas in Brighton, nearly always you had to queue to get in. Nearly always. They had a change of programme it was continuous, the programme. So people were on the move all the time, so people always queued outside. I remember queuing in the rain to get in with my parents. You took an umbrella and you queued outside the Savoy in East Street, pouring rain, waiting to get in.

The Regent cinema, I think they sold refreshments in the cinema. When there was an interval I believe people came round with coffee and cakes. A light would go up, there'd be an interval of 10 minutes and a couple of the usherettes would have little trays with ice cream on and walk around to the stalls. You always had a newsreel. In the larger cinemas of course, you had the cinema organ. There was one in the Odeon in West Street. There was one in the Astoria and there might have been one in the Savoy. There was always a feature of the organ, played during the interval. It was tremendous programming, when you think of it. You had a short newsreel, you had a recital on the organ and then you had 2 films. Some going, isn't it. That programme, I think, lasted 3 hours.