

BECTU INTERVIEW: BARRY QUINTON

(15:45 duration - transcription date: 20 April 2011)

Interviewer:

... tell us your name, where you were born and when.

Barry Quinton:

My name is Barry Quinton. I was born in 1946 in Islington, London.

(Interviewer/Tech check recording okay)

Interviewer:

So, tell us a bit about your family background and how you came to be in the business.

Barry Quinton:

My family background basically is that my mother and father were not in the industry at all.

My mother's brother met his future wife whilst working at the Leicester Square Theatre, which today is the Odeon West End, in the middle Fifties after he was demobbed from the Army.

Interviewer:

And at what stage did you decide that you were going to come into the business that you've been in?

Barry Quinton:

I came into the business in August 1961 as a trainee projectionist at the Odeon, North Finchley.

Interviewer:

And what memories do you have of that time?

Barry Quinton:

Well, quite a lot I suppose in a way because it was the first time whilst at work and seeing all the films for nothing basically and it was a very happy, family-orientated cinema.

Interviewer:

Any particular films stay in the memory or ones that you looked forward to?

Barry Quinton:

Well the ones that stay in the memory was the first ever double-X bill which was some three weeks after I started with the films called *Mary Had A Little* and *A Cold Wind in August* and I never out what Mary had a little of!

Interviewer:

Right. And then you progressed from there to where?

Barry Quinton:

That closed down on Boxing Day 1964 and then I moved on to the Odeon at Temple Fortune for about six months and that was a very big, dilapidated, really old theatre which was built as the Orpheum Temple Fortune and was rather a white elephant.

Interviewer:

Pardon my ignorance, but where is Temple Fortune?

Barry Quinton:

Temple Fortune is a suburb of Golders Green. It's almost on the edge of North Finchley, oh I should say Finchley Central and the North Circular Road at Henley's Corner.

Interviewer:

Right. So you were with the Odeon circuit, you were with the Odeon management as it were and they pushed you wherever they needed you?

Barry Quinton:

Yes, all the cinemas I worked in all belonged to the Rank Organisation. They were either the Odeons or the Gaumonts and I moved then on to the Gaumont. I moved back to Finchley at the Gaumont Tally Ho Corner.

Interviewer:

And what memories, were you still a trainee projectionist or were you now King?

Barry Quinton:

Oh no, no, no, no. By then I was a second projectionist at the Gaumont Finchley which was from, as I say, from June 1965 up until I went back to Temple Fortune then again some three years later.

Interviewer:

And what sort of projectors were they in those days?

Barry Quinton:

Well at the Odeon Finchley we had BTH Super projectors and then at Temple Fortune there was a mishmash of projectors. It was Westrick Sound, Universal Base, a Kalee 21 Mech and a Lightmaster Arc.

Interviewer:

What did that mean to you then in terms of the complexities of it?

Barry Quinton:

It was a mishmash of bits and pieces, nothing was universal.

Interviewer:

Did that make changeovers difficult or ...?

Barry Quinton:

Oh no, no, it was nothing wrong. It was just a mishmash of all various bits and pieces within the actual cinema industry, it seemed to be all put together in this particular unit.

Interviewer:

And what about the staff at that time? I mean, were there lots of usherettes and assistant managers and sales kiosk people, I mean was it a full house in those days in terms of staff or were they cutting down, cutting down and cutting down?

Barry Quinton:

There was a full complement of staff, but over the years it was cutback quite drastically and at one time people had to retire at the retirement age.

But unfortunately that didn't work and of course some of them were asked to come back because they couldn't get to fill mainly the vacancies in the afternoon. Evenings wasn't a great problem, but as I say the afternoons were.

Interviewer:

And how long did that period of your life go on for then – the bit before you came to, say, the Benevolent Fund ... there may be something else in between, I don't know?

Barry Quinton:

Well there was, there was NATKE in between!

Yes, I went back to Temple Fortune in 1968 because by then the Company decided to put live shows on so we did a lot of live shows.

We were predominantly live shows and television work with the BBC because at that time the BBC were converting their studios to colour, so a lot of the entertainment shows were put out to various theatres and we were one of them that was lucky to have TV there.

And I happened to work on the fortieth anniversary of the Ralph Reader Gang Show which had the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and Lord Mountbatten there whilst it was being televised for later transmission. That was the highlight.

Interviewer:

And that was the place that you said was an old theatre anyway?

Barry Quinton:

It was an old theatre which had a lot of money spent on it by the Rank Organisation to convert it back to a live theatre. So it started its life as a live theatre and unfortunately ended its life as a live theatre.

Interviewer:

And is there anything left of the Orpheum or is ...

Barry Quinton:

No it's gone completely. It now stands, Jewish flats stand on the site, but there's no record to say what was there although I do have a personal copy of the British Movietone insert that covered the fortieth anniversary of the Gang Show.

Interviewer:

Right. Okay. And then what happened to you after ...

Barry Quinton:

After the live shows ceased I then went to the Walt Disney Company in Pall Mall and I worked my way up to the Print Manager for about three or four years I was there and then I became Training Officer with NATKE, one of the forerunners to BECTU in February 1976.

Interviewer:

And where was that headquartered?

Barry Quinton:

We were based then in Kennington Park Road, but for a while I operated from home which was one of the normal things that happened and we were then housed originally at King Street, Covent Garden and then we moved into offices at 125 Kennington Park Road and then we moved off then to 181-185 Wardour Street when we amalgamated with the ABS to form the ETA.

Interviewer:

And did you look after a particular area, a particular discipline, a particular group of crafts or were you general?

Barry Quinton:

No, I started off on the recruitment in London and the South-East England and then I worked my way up to be in charge of the Cinema Division which covered all grades of Cinema employees except for management which had their own Trade Union at that time.

Interviewer:

I see. And how many years did that go on for? How long were you with NATKE?

Barry Quinton:

I was with NATKE for about 14 years.

Interviewer:

So, was that then followed by the Benevolent Fund?

Barry Quinton:

Not quite, no, as I say, I left just prior to the amalgamation of BECTU and then not long after I spent some time out of the industry although I was still a member of the Union and still called upon at times just to give a little bit of information on anything that may have participated in my time and then after that I became a Welfare Officer, or Visitor, for the CTBF.

Interviewer:

Ah, right.

Barry Quinton:

And my area covers East and West Sussex, on the coast.

Interviewer:

So you're still doing that?

Barry Quinton:

I'm still doing that currently today, yes. And believe it or not I'm still actually visiting people who I looked after when they were Union members.

Interviewer:

Interesting. So, were you ever in an office, as it were, for the Benevolent Fund? I mean is there an office within the organization?

Barry Quinton:

Yes. The office is at 22 Golden Square in London. I worked from home down in Worthing.

Interviewer:

Right. I think we'll leave the ???? shows. I mean we'll get together with somebody else – okay.

Now, there must be some happy memories as well as others for when you were working for the Benevolent Fund?

Can you remember any of those, sort of situations where you were pleased with what you'd achieved, say?

Barry Quinton:

Well yes. I mean, most of the people who I go to see, a number of them I took over so they were already beneficiaries of the organization and other ones I go to see who I've never seen before and we try to help them in exactly whatever it is they are trying to get help with, whether it's financially, whether it's trying to get something towards a fridge or a freezer, or a washing machine and those type of things that you're happy at the end of the day when suddenly they think they're going to pay for half of it and the Fund pays for the whole amount of it.

Interviewer:

Good. Now, looking back over your life, can you say where you were happiest or where there was, you know the best bit of it?

Barry Quinton:

I think the best bit of it to a degree was working at the Odeon Golders Green with the live shows of course.

I mean, you know, the amount of stars that we worked with, from famous people like Artur Rubenstein, right down to the Gang Show, pantomime, London Festival Ballet - I mean they were a happy seven or eight years. They were good times.

Interviewer:

It was a big stage as I remember.

Barry Quinton:

It was a very large stage yes and it seated 2,343 people, although the local Council gentleman says there's more seats, but we could never ever find – that's exactly how many we were licensed for.

Interviewer:

Wasn't there a rival in the Golders Green Hippodrome?

Barry Quinton:

There was indeed. We took over from the Hippodrome which was owned by Mecca who decided to pull out from live shows hence the Rank Organisation decided to move some of them down to their sister which was called the Odeon Temple Fortune but they renamed it the Odeon Golders Green which foxed a lot of the people because technically it wasn't in Golders Green.

Interviewer:

Understood. It's like Elstree and Borehamwood?

Barry Quinton:

Correct. Yes, yes.

Interviewer:

Right. Okay. Any more memories of those live shows and that big theatre?

Barry Quinton:

Well yes I suppose, I mean, we had Freddie and the Dreamers on the stage for a Christmas pantomime. He went off home on New Year's Eve and never came back again because he had an accident whilst traveling back to the theatre for the New Year's Day show and that was the end of him unfortunately.

Interviewer:

What happened? Did he have an accident?

Barry Quinton:

He had an accident, a car accident and he was actually written out of the show from then on although he didn't suffer badly, he just wasn't able to continue the (??? edit/cut off).

Interviewer:

And what was your contribution to the live shows then in those years?

Barry Quinton:

Well basically I and a gentleman called Sid Prior who's no longer with us, we were on the house side of it so therefore we were in charge of the actual front of house as well as backstage on various other shows, but as I say it was a good time had by all basically.

And another memory was that Mike Yarwood, the comedian, while he was with us, his wife gave birth to their first child.

Interviewer:

And who took the news?

Barry Quinton:

Well, we were all told before the actual performance started that she'd given birth, if my memory serves me right, I think it was to a little girl.

Interviewer:

Right. So, but that was happening, what you just described about, those big theatres and Odeons, was happening all over the country wasn't it?

I mean, were you aware of the sort of overall management of the Odeon circuit or, you know, the casualties and the gradual diminishment ...

Barry Quinton:

Oh yes, you always seemed to know when there were closures, mainly because whatever was in the cinema, whatever equipment, or whatever other stuff, was always filed out to other cinemas for making use of.

Interviewer:

So you got another fifty seats if you wanted ...

Barry Quinton:

Well, that's right, you see things would be stored in our basement for transmission of, or should I say, for transferring somewhere else. There was always stores of stuff and at one stage it came to too many because so many cinemas were closing and, apart from taking the seats out, everything else seemed to be left.

Interviewer:

And so many buildings disappeared.

Barry Quinton:

Yes, a lot of them disappeared. The only one which is still standing that I worked in today was my first one. Although it doesn't look much like a cinema from the front, it does from the sides and that's been used for a number of different retail outlets.

Interviewer:

Yes, there's one near where I was born and grew up. I was born and brought up in Hayes but next door is Southall and there is the most extraordinary sort of Chinese pagoda-like Gaumont which was a Gaumont Cinema when I was a kid and then it sort of almost fell down and then it became an Indian carpet store and a sort of multi-use marketplace and now I think, in fact I'm pretty sure, it's been restored and it's now back to 'Bollywood' movies, you know it's now a cinema again because there's an enormous Indian population in Southall so you know Bollywood movies have taken over the Gaumont.

Barry Quinton:

Oh yes. Yes, a lot of Indian cinema companies took over a number of Odeon and Gaumont cinemas over the years. I mean Southall was well known, Wembley was another one, there was one also at Edgware and I think there is still one today at what was the old ABC Harrow, there's still an Indian company that runs it but I do think they show general release films as well as their own product.