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Tommy Cannon and Bobby Ball – interview transcript

Interviewer: Sue Barbour

19 December 2008

Comedy double-act. Agents; audience; Batley Variety Club; Cabaret Clubs; costume; digs; Charlie Drake; magicians; Stan Moore's trio; Night Clubs; pantomime; television (LWT); touring; Working Men's Clubs.

Tommy Cannon (TC:) Bobby Ball (BB:)

Interviewer: Sue Barbour (SB:)

SB: This is Sue Barbour from the University of Sheffield interviewing Tommy and Bobby, better known as Cannon and Ball. First of all, I need to ask you both if you are in agreement with using this interview for the British Library Theatre Project and also so that future generations will learn about Variety?

BB: Yes.

TC: No problem.

SB: OK, that's great. First of all, Bobby, I'd like to ask you...Where were you born and did you come from a show business family? Or how did you get interested in entertainment?

BB: I was born in a village, outside of Oldham in Lancashire, called Shaw and no, I don't come from a show business family... well, I say that but my ancestor's were show people...they used to do the fairgrounds.

SB: Oh wow!

BB: With boxing booths and they used to have sideshows in those days and my family was involved with that. Then my father left it all alone and I was brought up... normal... in a normal environment. My mother used to work in a Cotton Mill and there was a show on the radio in those days called Worker's Playtime.

SB: Yes.

BB: A great show which went round all the factories of England, on radio and I got up and sang on this show and from then on.... I did it - from being a kid. So, I did it from being a child and we used to do the Stoll Moss theatres and our first gig was with a lady called Phyllis Dixie, who was a fan dancer.

SB: and a famous one too!

BB: Very famous. You couldn't stand 'nude' in those days, they had to be covered up with a fan and me and my sister were a double act and we travelled all over the country and we had a license from the Government.

SB: And how old were you then?

BB: Oh, I started when I was about six.

SB: Really? And was your sister older?

BB: My sister was two years older. We were called Bobby and Mavis. "Young and Happy!".

SB: Ah!

BB: That was the bill matter. When I say bill matter....You know what the bill matter is? It's what they put...

SB: Yes.

BB: ...on a show bill and that was our thing. And when I got to be fifteen, I thought it was quite soft to be in show business and all that. And I was bringing more money in, when I was twelve, than my father because I was working regularly at this show business and I had time off school to go and do shows....and I packed it in and just sang at weekends in the pubs and that was it. And then I met Tom and things went from that.

SB: Oh right. Now, Tommy, can I ask you how you started?

TC: By accident! Sheer accident. Apart from the fact that I used to... when I played soccer for the lads and if we won anything we'd go and have a day trip to Blackpool, or

wherever it might be and nine times out of ten the lads would have said, "Go on, get up and give us a song" but I'd have to have a couple of pints first before I had the Dutch courage - before I'd go up and sing and so, I mean, I used to do all sorts...I suppose, I remember myself as a bit of an Elvis fan.... and I always remember myself getting a brush and standing in front of the mirror [SB: laughs]and thinking I was Elvis, you know, and so, yes, basically, I don't think I had aspirations to go into show business, but I certainly wanted to be a Sportsman... I wouldn't necessarily say 'famous' because Sportsmen in those days weren't over famous like they are today and then I went for a job at Boden Trailers in Shaw and Bob was already working there and he was the first person that spoke to me. He was late, that particular morning, coming into work and I was stood, like all newcomers, by the clock waiting to be assigned to some sort of job and he was the first person that came in and he said "Hiya Mate, how are you doing" and that was it. That was our first meeting and then... from then on like the rest is history. You know, he suddenly said to me, out of the blue "Do you fancy making a double act?"

BB: But before that we started as a trio.

TC: A trio. We had a trio, oh ey, Stan Moor's trio.

BB: I said to Tommy one day, I said, "Get some drums" and I'll teach you to drum and he went and bought a kit of drums. He had no money and he bought them on H.P. [Hire purchase]. So he was keen. So I taught him to drum, basically.

SB: How did you know that he could do anything? Entertainment wise?

BB: I didn't know, I just....

SB: Oh, you didn't know, you just...

BB: I just.... We were just mates. You didn't have any fear of anything then, did you?

SB: No.

BB: So, we had this pianist who worked at the factory and he was a great pianist and we said, "Let's make a trio!" so I sang, Tommy was on drums and he was... and we did weddings and stuff.

SB: Oh, really?

TC: Yes.

BB: Yes and then....we were having a good time and then the pianist said, "I'm not doing any more, I'm leaving" so we said "O.K". "There's just me and you so let's just sing Tom"

TC: Yeh, because it was a gig that was away and he said, "I can't do it and be away from home".

BB: That's it!

TC: I said "O.K. It's no use you being with us then because if we do get two or three gigs away from home, what are we going to do?". So, we ended up just being singers and that was like - well, we had a few names - but that was the beginning of 'Cannon and Ball'.

SB: That was in the sixties, was it?

TC: Early sixties.

SB: What other names did you have?

BB: Shirrell [?] Brothers.

TC: Harper Brothers.

BB: Bobby and Stevie Rhythm.

SB: [laugh] [All laugh].

TC: That wasn't a good one, that one, I can tell you! We had blazers. I had....

BB: Black blazers.

TC: He had BR on his and everybody said, "Do you work for British Rail?" [All laugh]. And I had SR and they thought it was toothpaste! [All laugh]. They said "What! Are you a toothpaste advert!". Oh! So we got rid of the blazers.

BB: We got rid of them! [All laugh]. And we started to get a lot of work in Working Men's Clubs, which was the starting place.

SB: So you did work... you did travel a little bit, did you?

TC: Yes, oh yes.

BB: Yeh, yeh.

TC: I mean, in those days... travelling... when you went from Lancashire to Yorkshire was a big journey, you know what I mean?

SB: Yes. Yeh.

TC: So..

BB: There weren't the motorways then.

SB: No.

TC: There weren't the motorways.

SB: So, how did you travel?

TC: Car.

BB: By car.

TC: We had a car, which wasn't the best car in the world.

BB: But it made it!

TC: Which got us around.

BB: We went to Wales once and... Tommy had the cars and we went once in this car to Wales once for a weekend and coming back, the gears all got mixed up and so if you went into 'first' it might go into 'reverse' and he couldn't work it out so we thought "Oh!" He said "I'm going to put it in gear now, so get ready!"

TC: So he got ready!

BB: We thought, "If we're going to get home..." We got home...

TC: The battery was slowing down. It was a nightmare.

BB: So it was pretty rough doing that but it was good grounding for us.

SB: So you tried to get home every night, did you?

TC: Yes.

BB: Yes.

TC: Yes, I mean, as much as we could. I mean, sometimes it was impossible but we did try to get home. I mean, now... In those days it took you hours to get anywhere.

BB: There was a big circuit of Working Men's Clubs. You could go up to the North East and do, like, twelve weeks up there.

SB: Mmm.

BB: And then down to South Wales and do twelve weeks and then Yorkshire. It was massive and then... but there were also a lot of 'Pro digs' then.

SB: Yes.

BB: That only 'Pro's' went in.

SB: Do you remember any of the digs?

BB: Oh, yeh! There was.... Her in Wales, what was she called? [Pause]. [Welsh accent] Tommeeee, Bobbeeee! [SB: laughs].

TC: Oh, I know.

BB: She always shouted "Tommeeee, Bobbeeee!".

TC: and we knew another one in Scotland and she used to come down and serve you porridge with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth!

BB: Ash in the porridge!

TC; Ash would drop into the porridge! And there was Roker Lodge.

BB: Roker Lodge, in Sunderland.

TC: You know that one?

SB: I've stayed there. [All laugh].

BB: We always got the annex so we were alright. But in the morning for breakfast it was like a mad dash. Everybody...agh!

TC: Everybody used to fly into the kitchen for breakfast.

BB: Yes, so that was great. We did all them and then

SB: and in the digs did you meet the other acts?

BB: Oh yes.

SB: So you became friendly with...

BB: Yes, all the other acts and we used to meet up at... we used to see each other on the road. We used to meet up; you got friendly.... lots of acts.

TC: Yes. We had fabulous digs at... nobody but 'Pro's' stayed in it and it was facing Cardiff Arms Park.

BB: Ah, that one, yes.

TC: And on that particular week... everyone was doing Working Men's Clubs and that particular week, I think there was about eight magicians and me and Bob. And it was an absolute nightmare.

BB: One was Paul Daniels.

TC: Yes, one was Paul Daniels.... Melvyn, the Chicken Man. He had a chicken that he said could talk.

BB: Leslie Melville.

TC: Leslie Melville, who we saw only a couple of weeks ago, didn't we?

BB: We did. Les. Yes.

TC: And it was a nightmare. Your boiled egg would be there one minute and then they'd make it disappear. [All laugh]. Ahh!

BB: Oh. And no animals were allowed in, so Melvyn hid the hen under the bed! And the woman would come round and shout.... Wouldn't he?

TC: Yeh. Ohh.

BB: We did loads of them. And they were great grounding for us.

SB: Yes.

BB: And of course, you learned, you couldn't go on and be blue.

SB: No.

BB: If you offended anybody....

TC: You would be paid off!

BB: Oh yes.

TC: There was no chance of being blue. You were out the door!

SB: Yes. And what about the agent wise... did you work for a specific agent?

BB: Yes. We used quite a few. We worked for ATS if we did Yorkshire.

TC: ATS in Yorkshire, yes.

BB: And...

TC: I forget that nice couple that were down in South Wales. Her husband died really young.

BB: Ey, nice.

TC: England, she was called.

BB: Joan England!

TC: Joan England we worked for in South Wales. Lovely couple and sad times for them.

BB: Beverley Artists, we worked for.

SB: Oh yes.

TC: Beverley Artists, we worked for in the Sunderland area and everything...

BB: There were a Scottish fella who used to take us.

TC: Scottish agent, we worked for as well and I can't think what the heck his.... Oh....

SB: In where?

TC: and BB: In Scotland.

BB: I can't think...

TC: Can't think what he was called. And then we started doing Night Clubs, Cabaret Clubs.

SB: Yes. So when you started working together, it was the what.... 60s?

TC: Yes. 60s.

BB: Yes. About '65. '66.

TC: About '65. Yes.

BB: We went on Opportunity Knocks and came last!

SB: Oh did you?

TC: Yeh, we came last! Ey.

BB: Terrible! [laugh]

SB: Were you Cannon and Ball then?

BB: Yeh. Well what we did. No, we

TC: No.

BB: When we auditioned we were The Harper Brothers, and we were a singing act but in that time we transformed into a comedy act...

SB: Oh right.

BB: So they asked us two years later to go on, you see, so by that time we'd gone comedy. So we did the comedy – Oh, it was bad.

SB: Really.

TC: Yes.

BB: We had two gigs in Wales got cancelled! [BB laughs]

SB: Really? [SB laughs].

TC: We lost more work than we gained! [All laugh].

SB: You didn't!

BB: But it were good, we learned and we did all that for years – the Working Men's Clubs.

TC: But it was good experience because I think that's the trouble today with a lot of the modern day comedians. I think, if you ask them to do a pantomime, I think they'd be lost.

SB: Mmm.

TC: I don't think they'd be able to handle it, you know.

BB: We had such a diverse type of work. 'Cos the Working Men's... every one was totally different.

SB: Oh yes.

BB: That's why it was diverse. You get the Comedy Clubs, they're not diverse... 'cos they're all doing this one thing but in a Working Men's you had to please them, there's no, you know– and you learned your craft – and then we went up into Cabaret Clubs.

SB: and did you think that was.... the Cabaret Clubs were like a step up?

BB: Oh big time.

TB: No, Massive step up.

BB: Massive step up.....

TC: Massive step up.

BB: Massive step up.... because you got a week's work, not one night. Because you got a week's work. You had bands behind you. Proper bands, you had proper stage lighting.

SB: Yes.

BB: and everyone had suits on, they were all dressed right. There were no pies!...You know. So it was a step up and your money went up.

TC: Money went up and you couldn't take ordinary sheet music in. It had to be transposed music. Laid out proper otherwise they wouldn't play it.

BB: Sure....and you only did one spot! In the Working Men's you did three or four. You got into a Cabaret Club you'd only got one spot to do.

SB: Now, how did you go about getting the music?

BB: You got a pianist.

SB: But I mean when you moved to the club and they said you want band parts,

BB: Band parts? Well, he booked in that three months down the line...

SB: Oh right.

BB: "Oh right, we'll go and get our music done".

TC: So you'd take the copies - didn't we? And say "We want... this, this and this." and they used to do it for us.

BB: and the musicians would always say "Oh this is written wrong...." It never was but they just had to put their stamp on it, say this is wrong, you know.

TC: They always used to pencil it, didn't they?

BB: But the Night Clubs for us.... We built such a following in the Night Clubs... because nobody realises that in the Fiesta's and Bailey's, they used to have.... Stevie Wonder did them...

TC: Sammy Davis came to Batley.

BB: Bette Davis, Shirley Bassey. They had massive, massive names.

TC: It was THE place to entertain.

BB: So we started to build up and what happened was that the old...not Variety... The Good Old Day type, Music Hall... they couldn't do this ... these clubs, you see.

SB: Mmm.

BB: But... it was the new genre. And we ended up after the 70s... we were getting two grand (£2000) a week in Night Clubs.

TC: And that was a lot of money.

BB: Big stars were coming in and we were filling them just the same because people knew us in the Night Clubs. Nowhere outside the Night Clubs - They didn't know us.

SB: So when you started in the Theatre Clubs, Cabaret Clubs, did you start off as... not Top of the Bill?

BB: Oh yes.

TC: Oh sure.

BB: Not Top of the Bill. First on!

TC: We went to Batley Variety Club, right....

SB: Oh, did you?

BB: In fact, can I just stop you and tell you the story that turned us to comedy. He turned us to comedy [Points to TC:]

TC: I turned us to comedy at the Batley Variety Club. Jimmy Corrigan who owned it... Frankie Vaughn was Topping the Bill and we went there and we were doing a song, one joke, a song, one joke, a song, one joke, a song for half an hour so in that time we probably did about five songs, so we got along thinking everything's fine. First night, Joe, the guy who owned the place [Jimmy Corrigan] come back, he said, "Excuse me, boys, what are you doing?". I said, "I'm sorry", 'cos we were really nervous because it was a massive date for me and Bob. I said, " Oh, we're doing the act". He said, "You can't do that, son". I said, "What do you mean, we can't do it?". He said, "I've got a singer Topping the Bill, Frankie Vaughn". He said, "You can't sing". He said, "You're

booked as the comics!". You know what they did? They made us go on first. They got another comic in called.... Brian Marshall....

BB: Brian Marshall.

SB: Oh Brian! [laugh].

TC: Brian. Brian took our spot, which absolutely deflated us and I said to Bob. "Right, from now on, that's it. We open with a song, we do a load of comedy and we finish with a song".

BB: He actually said, "We've got to make our mind up "are we singing or are we doing comedy?".

TC: Ey, We did.

BB: "We're doing comedy", and that's what we did.

TC: I said, "Right", and we changed from Batley Variety Club after that week we actually changed.

[Pause for radio microphone check for show].

SB: Right, so Batley....

TC: Mmm. They were clever Batley because what they'd do is they'd probably have Shirley Bassey, they'd have Sammy Davis and in between that they'd have somebody like me and Bob. But we were doing... we were that popular.... We were doing the same amount of business but they were only paying us like... threepence compared to the big stars.

SB: Yes.

BB: Or The Black Abbots.

TC: Or The Black Abbots were another....

BB: All these people, you know...

TC: That's right. It could change....The Grumble [weeds]...

BB: Yeh, but we could have done that the rest of our lives and then we were doing this and we were doing very, very well, always Top of the Bill and then the Management turned round and to us and said...this is where it changed.... They said, "Do you want to do a pantomime?" and we said, "Oh, we'd love to do that?" "With Charlie Drake.... Bradford". "We'd love to do that". We'd never done a theatre in all our lives, right?..... "It's £125 a week". "Really?" "Between Ya!" [SB laugh] and we're making two grand! Oh, we said, "We'll do it" and that's what we went for. We dropped our money right down to that, to do pantomime, right?

TC: Yeh.

BB: And we walked into the rehearsal room in London and the Villain's in the corner – an actor, it was – I can't remember his name and he's rehearsing his lines like that "Ahhhh" in a corner on his own and he [Tommy] said, "Look at that, he's talking to himself" and we didn't know he was rehearsing! [SB laughs].

TC: I know.

BB: We were so green, I can't begin to tell you.

SB: Really?

TC: Ohh.

BB: Green. We were upstaging. Doing all sorts of things. Got shouted at by Charlie Drake... but he looked after us, did Charlie...So we went on...at Bradford...walked like that and no one was talking!... There were no glasses clinking. It was just a quietness, it was a wall. It frightened us to death.

TC: Frightened us to death.

BB: Totally different era but we got it. We did it. And that was the start of us in theatres.

SB: Well, Bradford was a good place to start.

TC: Yes, yes.

SB: Because it's one of the top pantomimes.

BB: That's right. So we were the bottom of the bill and of course, every time we did a gag it got took off us 'cos we were the fourth comics on the bill. Right?

TC: Yes. And I'll tell you there was a legend on as well as Charlie - Nat Jackley.

SB: Oh Nat Jackley. Yes.

TC: Oh, what a...

BB: They said John Cleese was a master of funny walks. It all came from Nat Jackley.

TC: Nat Jackley was funny.

BB: I mean you might know Sue, it might have been before him, I don't know.

SB: No, I don't know but he... his father was in the business too.

TC: Ahh.

BB: OK....but that's where it came from. And we started there and he took us in, Charlie Drake. Charles - we used to call him Charles- "Could you come into the dressing room?" and if the Top of the Bill asks you into the dressing room.... Oh, it was total respect time that. We stood outside the door [knocks] "Come in" - walked in - thought we'd done something wrong - "Sit down" So, we sat down. "I'd like to talk to you about your double act, boys". We said "Yes, Mr. Drake". He said, " 'Cos I was in a double act". And he was, 'Mick and Montmorency'.

SB: [laughs] Oh.

BB: They were, Mick and Montmorency. Charlie and this other fella [Jack Edwardes] and I'll tell you something else about Charles Drake. Did you know he was a bouncer at Butlin's?

SB: [laughs] No.

BB: In the Pig and Whistle.

TC: He was. A Jujitsu expert.

BB: A Jujitsu expert.

SB: Wow.

BB: Amazing isn't it? So he sat there and he said you need to do this and you need to do that and you need to do this and he really helped us, didn't he Tom?

TC: Yes.

BB: And then we started doing pantomimes and we went from that and it just went on and on and then we started doing... and it was at Heart of the Midlands.

TC: Well, we were discovered in Heart of the - Well... not 'discovered' but - it was strange how it all worked out because the lad that was looking after us in those days, is now no longer in the business at all, but he was looking after us and he rang us and said, "While you're at the Heart of the Midlands, the Head of Light Entertainment is coming to see you". He said, "I've fixed it all up, I've been down there to the LWT offices", etc. etc. "and they're coming to see you". Then we got word that he wasn't coming and this lad, left his office, went down to LWT, knocked on the door and said "I'm sorry, you can't do this to these lads" He said, " because I've promised that you're going to go and see them". He said, "I've put my neck on the line". He said, "You've got to come and see them". He literally escorted him to come and see us and that particular night, when he came to see us, we got a standing ovation!

BB: Yes, it was lovely.

TC: And he couldn't refuse....

SB: Well, that's fantastic.

TC: Yes.

BB: Isn't that an amazing story?

SB: That is fantastic.

TC: It's so lovely.

BB: It's true, that's what happened.

TC: And he isn't in the business any more, bless him.

BB: And he put us on the Bruce Forsyth 'Big Night Out' it was called. It was a two hour show, but they couldn't get it right - but every week it was in the TV Times, me and Tommy, 'Cannon and Ball' because we did a little sketch in it every week - and of course they didn't show us because they were mixing about and the press said "Who on earth are these 'Cannon and Ball', they're always in the press but we never see 'em", and Michael Grade saw it, what we'd done and said, "Give them their own series". So they gave us our own series and we recorded our own series and a week before we were due to go out, all the technicians went on strike so we got - They called us 'Cannon and Blackout' - we got so much publicity you can't believe!

SB: [laughs].

BB: So it really worked for us, so...

SB: Yes.

BB: So it just went from there, you know.

SB: Mmmm.

BB: We've been Topping Bills now for a long time.

SB: Yes. Yeh. Fantastic.

TC:

BB: Brilliant. It's been brilliant. Like you say, doing Variety, sadly, we're the last. That's the sad thing of it.

SB: Mmm.

BB: and it's a great profession. Variety's family. It's for families, you know and it's a great shame that we're going to lose that, I think.

TC: I think it will come back. I think everything comes back. Your life's a circle. It starts somewhere and keeps going round and round and round and I think, someone somewhere will look at something and go "Wow! That was a good show".

SB: Yes.

TC: "Let's put that on"

SB: Yes.

TC: It will, you see. It will happen. It might not be in our time but it will happen.

SB: Yes.

TC; It will happen, it always does.

SB: What I wanted to ask you, as well, was about family. When you, obviously, got married, had children. Did you try and get home every night or did you....what happened when you did a season? Did you take the family with you? Did you....

BB: Ah!

SB: Did they stay at home?

BB: The seasons then used to last twenty-one weeks. So what you would do with your kids...it all revolved around school holidays. So, if you're doing Bournemouth, you couldn't get back up to Oldham, right? So you would rent a house. And then your family would get all the kit and caboodle and all the kids and they'd all come down en block and have school holidays and then all en block back and we'd just finished pantomime and go back home. That's how you used to do it. See, our kids were like, brought up in show business.

TC: It was like eight weeks of school holiday they were with us and unfortunately after that... no, they couldn't be with us...no. Well, not if we were in Bournemouth or Torquay or somewhere like that but yeh....

SB: and before you started earning good money, although you did quite.... early, in the clubs and everything

TC: Sure.

SB: But, I mean, did you find it an expense because you're running two homes, you know, obviously, your family was at home and you were paying all those bills....

BB: Oh yes.

SB: and then you had the bills of wherever you were.

BB: Yeh, yeh, it was. We used to have to get cheap as.... as cheap as we could. If we got a house, we got one house between us, like in Guernsey,

TC: Jersey....Guernsey, it was, we had a one up and one down.

BB: I had the top.

TC: He had the top and I had the.... Bottom. He had the top.

BB: You had the bottom and I had the top. That's how we did it.

SB: Oh, really?

TC: Yes.

BB: So we shared the rent.

SB: So it was kind of economical?

TC: Yes. But in Working Men's days both Bob and I smoked, to our regret. We've both stopped now but we did smoke and there were times when we we'd finished in a Working Men's Club, that we would be walking out, through the main hall after everybody had gone and we'd be looking in the ashtrays to see whether there were any part- burned cigarettes.

SB: Really?

TC: Yeh, pick 'em out the ash tray and put 'em in our pockets and then when we got in the car we'd be lighting these little bits of cigarettes [all laugh] off the end of us nose, because we just didn't have any money, we just didn't.

SB: No.

BB: I remember the first date I took my wife on. I said, "Can I take you out for dinner?" She said, "Yes". All I could afford was one meal. I said, "What do you want?". She

ordered a meal and said... "What are you having?" "I said, "I'm not hungry, me! Don't want anything" - and I couldn't afford two meals.

SB: Really?

BB: And I had a blue jacket on. Do you remember that blue double-breasted jacket? And it had a little hole here, on the shoulder, and my wife kept thinking it was a piece of dirt or something. Then she realised it was a hole.... and she wouldn't say nothing [laugh]...'cos we had no money! But that was the business. You didn't do the business for the money. The minute you say, in this business, you do it for the money, you're dead - you don't do it for the money.

SB: At what point did you give up your jobs in the factory... was that quite early on?

TC: Well, we were, first and foremost...

BB: Oh, I know why we did that.

TC: ...we got into loads of trouble because we used to do what they call 'Night Shift' and the night shift obviously paid more money. The problem with doing the night shift, if a gig came in, when we were part-time, we couldn't do the blinkin' gig, see, that was the problem. So we tried to skive off and as luck would have it, we had a lad who was there who wasn't too bad, was he?....Ronnie.

BB: Ronnie Wiltshire.

TC:sort of, let us get away to do the gigs etc. and what have you. And while we were welding there, Bob's cousin, Wally, came in; he came walking in, in a cashmere overcoat.

BB: I bet you've forgot why we went Pro.

TC: Why we went Pro? Why did we go Pro?

BB: You'll like this.

TC: Go on!

BB: Me and him, went out with the lads one Friday night - so we were doing clubs and working at the weekend, right? went out on Friday night to Stockport, to the Football Club...

TC: I know, Oh ey! Yeh, yeh, yeh.

BB: And we got up singing. Having a bit of a laugh....And there was a bloke there with sunglasses on, in the middle of the 60s, big Sovereigns, loads of gold. He said, "I like you two lads". We said, "Yes?" "Go back, pack your jobs in and come and sign a contract with me in London". "London, Wow! Never been to L...Wow". He said, "I'm going to manage you", and that's what we did. [All laugh]. We went down to London and signed this contract. We went back and said, "We're packing our jobs in". They said, "OK, give us two weeks notice" which is what we did. We packed in and he didn't get us one piece of work! And we had families to feed and He [Tommy] had to get us work with pointing chimneys...

TC: I found us work pointing chimney's, plastering walls...

BB: Looking after dog kennels.

TC: All sorts. And he got us one gig – double, up in the North East – They're not around now, those places but he got us a gig.

SB: Who was that?

BB: I can't remember.

TC: And I'll tell you. His sister was a famous jazz singer.

SB: Really?

TC: Ro, Ro.....I can't think of her name. I don't think she's probably be in the business now but she was a famous jazz singer. All over the world, she was known.

BB: But he didn't get us anything.

TC: He didn't get us a thing after that. We didn't get anything at all.

BB: We slowly worked. And we couldn't go back and say, "Hey, it's not worked" because of face, so we just kept doing.... and slowly the work started to built and build and build.

SB: I mean, did you sign as sole agency agreement with him?

TC: Yes.

BB: Yes, I think so. Yes. But we couldn't do it.

TC: It was a six-month thing. That's all. You know, but it didn't even last two weeks!

BB: So then it built and built and built. That's why we went Pro. 'Cos we were conned into going Pro.

SB: So what happened about his cousin, Wally? And his cashmere coat? [laugh].

BB: Wally.

TC: Well, Wally came in to see us - We didn't turn Pro with Wally - but, Wally came in to see us and we were welding, in this factory and he came in and he looked an absolute million dollars – You know, Comedian – and he's like... He's got this cash...and I'm thinking..

BB: "What are you doing here?"

TC: And he goes, "What are you doing here? Welding!" he said, "You're too talented, you two", he said, " to be doing this". I said, "We've got to earn a living, Wally". He said,

"Look, tell you what I've done. I've got you a one-weekend booking. South Wales. Friday, Saturday, Sunday lunch, Sunday night. Come back. If it doesn't work out, you come back, you're all right". We went in the car that broke down on the way there, we got paid off at all four...no, all.... There were Saturday....Friday, Saturday... Right, we did manage one gig out of it all and all the rest of the clubs paid us off! So we made less money that we would have done if we'd have stopped at the blinkin' factory welding, so that didn't pay off well.

BB: It still didn't stop us. We still carried on.

TC: It still didn't stop us, we still carried on! [All laugh].

SB: But you still enjoyed it? Did you?

BB: Yes, we love it. We love this... show biz. [Knock at door] Come in!

[Stop recording].

SB: And just before we finish, I wanted to ask you what you've enjoyed most in your careers? Where you've enjoyed working? Or who with? Or, you know... do you remember....

BB: Yeh, I think, to be honest with you, I think, we've enjoyed it all because we've had such a diverse career, me and Tom. And I think everybody we've met, we've learned something off, you know. 'Cos it's a strange business this...but I don't think we'd ever do anything else. I don't think we could.

SB: No.

BB: You know, people say, "Why don't you retire?" But then again, what would you do, if you retire?

TC: So what would you do? What would you do, if you retire? Sit in your garden and just, sort of, curl up and die?

BB: Yeh, and as long as people want us, we'll keep doing it. We've loved every minute of it.

SB: Mmm.

BB: Every minute, Sue.

SB: Mmm. And you said Charlie Drake helped you, a lot?

BB: Charlie helped us.

TC: I mean, there's been, I suppose, there's been certain people who have helped us. David Bell was one of our best.... motivators, if you like. He used to be Head of Light Entertainment when Bob and I were at LWT and he would come on the shop floor and he would say, "Right, do you know your lines, now, Boys?" and we would say, "Well, yes" and he'd say, "OK, well, do it!" so, we'd do the line for a particular opening routine which would probably be three minutes and he'd say, "Right, now what I want you to do... is do it..." - He used to always say to us, "Fast is funny, especially for television". He said, " You can't do it like you're in a night club, where you're bringing

your audience into it", he said " Because you're looking down a television tube", he said "And people, at home, are seeing you, up here, like this", he said "So, fast is funny" - so, he use to make us do the script in double time, you know.... I mean, obviously, we didn't do it in double time when we did it but....it actually put us on our toes and made us....

BB: We learned it was called 'Quick reading'

TC: Quick reading and every rehearsal we did, he used to make us do it.

BB: And I remember at Sheffield Fiesta, there was a knock on the door....we were supporting.... and we opened the door ...and Dave Allen was there, we were supporting Dave Allen

TC: Dave Allen, yes.

BB: And he come into our dressing room. Wow! And he said, "It's lovely to sit with you because I started as a double act" Dave Allen!

SB: It's amazing how many people started as

BB: It is.

TC: And poor Jack Douglas, who just died, was a double act.

BB: Ay, poor Jack .

TC: With Joe

SB: Yes, with Joe

TC: With Baker. Joe Baker.

BB: Ay, so we've learned off everybody and we're still learning. I think, we still do.

TC: You've got to in this business; you can't just think that you know it all. I don't think anybody knows it all. Nobody does.

SB: Well, thank you very much for talking to me.

BB: You're welcome, lass.

SB: I've really enjoyed it.

BB: Enjoyed it.

TC: Yes, thanks, love.

BB: Enjoyed it.