Alan Lawson, Cameraman

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Interviewer, Arthur Graham

Arthur Graham: Where and when were you born?
Alan Lawson: I was born in Gidea Park, a suburb of Romford in July 1912, we moved to London 3 years later.
Arthur Graham: Whereabouts?
Alan Lawson: Hampstead Garden Suburb where I more or less lived ever since.
Arthur Graham: What kind of schooling did you receive?
Alan Lawson: I went to a small kindergarten for about a term which my father was very fed up about and then I went to the ordinary primary school and from there I went to what is now, then was called the County School Hendon. I think it was Hendon County Grammar School. Something like a grammar school I suppose. There were scholarships and entrance exams, I took the scholarship which I didn't get. I took the entrance exam which I didn't get because I had a brother and a sister at the school they reluctantly took me.
Arthur Graham: This was the type of school which took you onto matriculation.
Alan Lawson: Yes, which I didn't get actually.
Arthur Graham: Did you receive any specialised training, did you go to technical college.
Alan Lawson: The only specialised training I had was I had aspirations of being a kind of Bobby Howes so I learned tap and soft shoe dancing with a very well know coach called Matheson Jones who had little school in the Vermalton Pub in Great Portland St and he used to coach Cecily Courtnidge and Jack Hulbert and people like that in his spare time and I was there and that was where I started hopefully to blossom into a Bobby Howes which unfortunately did not come about.
Arthur Graham: Was this while you were still at school.
Alan Lawson: I was still at school.
Arthur Graham: So it was part time. What decided you to go into the film business.
Alan Lawson: My sister was on the stage, she was a ballet dancer and I think when I was due to leave school which would have been July 1928 I think she'd had almost one solid year unemployment and I thought I did not want to go on to be unemployed on the stage and so my father thought it might be a good idea to look elsewhere and he suggested perhaps I should look at the film business.
Arthur Graham: You've asked the next question I was going to ask, what was the reaction of your parents and did they have any connection with the film business.
Alan Lawson: Well my father was the director of publicity for I think at that time Universal Films and he'd been working in the film business since 1917. My mother before the family came on the scene had been a concert singer, she was a contralto, so we had show-business connections and it continued on.
Arthur Graham: Where did you get your first job?
Alan Lawson: I tried for a job up at Elstree. I was sent to see Walter Mycroft and he said when you've got a year's experience and we'll give you a job, which was the usual thing and still

happens I think. And my father then remembered that Maurice Elvey who was quite a friend of him, owed him a return kindness because my father had given him introductions when he went to Tiffany Stahl and he made some films for Tiffany Stahl and my father sent me to see Maurice Elvey and Maurice Elvey said I'll pass you on to L'Estrange Fawcett who was the production manager. And L'Estrange Fawcett said you've come at the right moment, there was movement going on at the camera department, I think David Lean had gone out of the camera department and everybody had moved up one and there was room for the boy and I was employed for £1 a week starting in 1928.
Arthur Graham: Now you've mentioned various names who are well known like Maurice Elvey, who was Walter Mycroft.
Alan Lawson: Walter Mycroft as far as I can remember was production superviser, manager up at BIP. He was quite a powerful little man. He was a little man. I think people used to be quite a bit scared of him.
Arthur Graham: You were living in Hampstead Garden Suburb, how did you get to and from work.
Alan Lawson: I have a feeling it was mostly by tube. Golders Green change at Tottenham Court Rd on the Central Line. Occasionally I think there was a bus that went to the Bush. Certainly I can remember travelling on the tube.
Arthur Graham: Did it take you long.
Alan Lawson: I had to walk to Golders Green, I suppose the walk to Golders Green would be about 20 minutes and I suppose it would be about three quarter of an hour onto the tube.
Arthur Graham: And that was added onto your working day.
Alan Lawson: Yes.
Arthur Graham: What was your job and what were your duties.
Alan Lawson: When I first started my duties were nil, they wouldn't let me do anything. They wouldn't even let me carry the camera cases for the first fortnight I wasn't allowed to do a blooming thing, and for the first fortnight they were on location and they'd leave me behind. I felt very unwanted and very miserable. However there was an old camera in the camera room, it was an old Bell and Howell and it was not the type of clapper gate that you had the clips for but you had to undo two scripts to take it out. And it was known as the Ideal, I think because it had come from Ideal pictures. There was that and I examined that thoroughly and got to understand it a little bit. There was also a tiny little camera called the Sept which I think was cartridge loading and I think you had 25 ft and you could do single frame on it or you could do constant running on it. There was also an old Debrie with wooden sides, those were the things I looked at and played with for the first fortnight till they realised I was there and I could hold up a number board. After the first fortnight I was allowed to holdup a number board. And after I'd been there for about a month we went away on proper location and what a time that was. It was really like one enormous playground, absolutely incredible. There was Cyril McLaglen, Alf Goddard, Benita Hume, Cyril McLaglen and Alf Goddard were the chief villains really and we'd only been in the hotel for about half an hour and there were apple pies in the beds in every room, they'd gone through the place like a dose of salts. And that was the whole tenor of the location. We had some very strange characters, some of which disappeared, there was an assistant director called Newman disappeared, and there was a script writer called Bettison, I always remember him, very gentle and he was was known as Betty poor chap, and there was Chan Balcon, who was

representing Gainsborough, the film was *Balaclava* and was being made for Gainsborough, and also Samuels, P.C. Samuels, also from Gainsborough, and they were the butt of everybody's wit. But it was an amazing experience. We were using the army as extras. They were doing the charges, apart from our two principals, Cyril McLaglen who did his own riding, and Harold Huth who also did his own riding. I think we were down there it must have been about a month.
Arthur Graham: Where was this,
Alan Lawson: Long Valley Aldershot. And the troops were raw recruits really, and the thing was if they fell off their horse the horse used to go straight back to barracks and the poor recruits would have to huff it back. On that we did have some extra cameramen. There was Leslie Rowson, Simeon Rowson's son, and dear old Joe Rosenthal, he came down. Billy Shenton also came down and did some extra scenes, or some extra camerawork. We also did some experimental sound recording with British Acoustics but it was a full width track and the picture camera had it's two back legs in a special kind of booth in the sound van and it was attached by a cable, flexible drive straight from the sound camera to the picture camera. So it was very inflexible, you couldn't pan very far, you certainly couldn't tilt.
Anyway we did one or two experimental scenes of charges and things like that and the sound recordist was A. W. Watkins, and his assistant was Stan Jolly. And there was a Dr. Colby I think his name was and a chap who stayed with British Acoustic for years and years, called Bacon, I can't remember his Christian name. Anyway we did dabble with sound in 1928. Eventually *Balaclava*, I think they kept all the spectacle stuff which had been shot at Long Valley but the other sequences I think they reshot with sound and I think Basil Emmott was the cameraman on that. Percy Strong had been the cameraman on the sound version.
Arthur Graham: From those remarks do I understand that the film started off as a silent one
Alan Lawson: Oh yes
Arthur Graham: And switched over to sound.
Alan Lawson: We didn't do the sound version of it at all. It was, Gainsborough took it back and then they completed it off. After that silent film I then went to work on another one called Devil's Maze directed by a chap called Gareth Gundrey who I think was originally a scriptwriter and the cameraman on that was a Baron Went de Mi lion with Ching Mountenay as his assistant, Ching was still in the camera department in those days. An interesting thing about how Ching used to get his name Ching. When he used to make an entrance into a room, he used to say tarah ching and that's how he became Ching Mojntemeny. But Ventney, he was a very strange character, there's a wonderful story about Ventney who was very egotistical. A long time after the war I was in Rome and I was a guest of RAI television people there film department and I told them I'd worked for Ventney and they said that's rather funny because during the war when the Americans were approaching Rome he'd told all his colleagues in the film business that the first person they'll ask for is me and he said the joke was they did, but that's digressing. Devil's Maze was made as a silent and after Devil's Maze we then made High Treason, that was the first sound film made at the Bush. Maurice Elvey was the director, Jameson Thomas and Benita Hume, Humberston Wright and the rest of the Gaumont repertory company were in that. I was still, I think by that time I'd been upgraded, I was no longer the number boy, 1 was the first assistant, I think I was working to Sid Bonnet, Percy Strong was the lighting cameraman.
Arthur Graham: You say you were a number boy when you started, what exactly did you have to do?

Alan Lawson: Putting up the number for the scene, writing out the camera sheets, loading the magazines and unloading the magazines and taking the stuff down to the lab, that was the general duties. We had our own labs and that was where I first met Bill Girdlestone and I think it is very important that it should be understood, it was not Gaumont British it was the Gaumont Film Company, it wasn't Gaumont British until the Ostrers bought into it and then it became Gaumont British. I was there in the Gaumont days and I think the Ostrers had in fact bought in when I was there because on Devil's Maze the leading girl, Renee Clamer who I think was a girl friend of one of the Ostrers. This was where I met Bill Girdlestone and he imprinted on my memory that camera sheets must be made clearly and he explained why, he explained if I didn't make them clear and he went and tore through the wrong shot, throw away the wrong piece, I'd be in trouble and he'd be in trouble, I got to know Bill quite well. He was, he would let you watch him at work, not that you could see much in those days because by this time we were on Panchromatic film and there wasn't a great deal you could see down in the labs, but that was the duties of the camera assistant.
Arthur Graham: At that time the studios hadn't been rebuilt.
Alan Lawson: Only the big stage, that had been soundproofed. The silent version of Devil's Maze and High Treason, I think it was Julian Wylie's master carpenter did the sound proofing of the big stage. The small stage, the glass studio was still a glass studio when I left. We used to shoot in there at night because it was quieter at night apart from the sparrows up in the roof.
Arthur Graham: What was the working day and the length of the working week?
Alan Lawson: At first they were very strict about keeping me, I wasn't allowed to work after six which I was very disappointed about because they said it was the Factory Act or something like that because I was 16 and a bit. But ultimately I persuaded my father, I don't think I had to persuade him, I got my father to send a letter saying he had no objection to my working with the rest of the crew so eventually I did. In those days I don't think apart from exceptional circumstances we did long hours. If we were working in the old glass studio working at night then I think we got in at 8 o'clock or something in the evening and we'd continue to something like 6 o'clock in the morning and you've have the equivalent break that you had before. We didn't get paid extra for it, I should imagine the electricians and chippies got paid more, I wouldn't be sure about that.
Arthur Graham: Could you give us a run down of your career and progress in the film industry and the positions you held in the film industry.
Alan Lawson: While I was at the Bush I did quite a bit of first assistant and then after that I was allowed to do a bit of operating. Bill Shenton allowed me to operate but strictly on the understanding that if I felt it was to difficult to do I'd tell him and he'd do it. I learnt a lot from Bill Shenton, I learned a lot from Sid Bonnet whom I was very fond of who was quite a character. From there, when I went and asked for a raise, Habberfield, I think it was Bill Habberfield who had a daughter who was eventually in the cutting room at Ealing, said if you're not satisfied you can always leave which I think was the usual answer, reply anyone got from someone like Bill Habberfield, then ultimately I think they have me a 5s. rise so I was getting £l 5s. Ultimately I was working on a film which was *Greek Street*, Sinclair Hill directed for Gaumont and I got to know Sinclair Hill quite well on that film and I also got to know Desmond Dickinson who was the cameraman on that and eventually I got a bit fed up with this 25 bob because I was doing quite a lot of work and I think Sinclair Hill came over one day and I was

talking to him and saying I was fed up with Gaumont and he said why don't you come and work for us. We're going to open up the studio, we've got the new sound system. So I went and saw them and they offered me £3 a week. So I immediately went back to the Bush and handed in my notice and they said why are you leaving and I said I'm going to a better job, they're going to pay me £3 a week and I was immediately given a raise up to £2, they said think again and stay with us but I decided I'd had enough of that and I went to Stolls and I worked on, I was on second camera at Stolls, Jerry Gibbs was on first camera with Desmond Dickinson and I think the other member of the camera department was Ted Chand and that was the camera department. I stayed with Stolls until 1932 when they really became just a bricks studio with no crew at all and I left there and went to Ealing. Although I had in fact worked out from Stoll's, I'd been loaned out to various people. I'd worked for Reggie Fogwell up at Blackwell studios, I'd worked for G B Samuelson out at Worton Hall. I'd also worked up at B&D for a day on one of the Ralph Lynn-Tom Walls films. I can't remember what it was but I can remember Freddie Young and I can remember Cyril Bristow from that day. I didn't meet Freddie Young again until 1936 and that was at an ACTT lecture which I gave. I then went to Ealing and I worked on some films they used three cameras and I worked on the third camera as operator. That was on the first two films. Then after that somehow or other Dean decided I was quite a reasonable person to have around and I was offered a contract with all sorts of options and to a chap of my age at that particular time was absolutely wonderful and I took it home and showed it to my brother who was a barrister and also a legal adviser for ACT and he said it wasn't worth the paper it was written on. Nevertheless I signed it. I then suddenly jumped to £10 a week. I was first operator to Bob Martin. I operated on several films with Bob and then I got a lighting break with a film called Fortune's Fool, Norman Walker was the director. Then I. started on my second film lighting but I was in dead trouble because ACT, NATKE and ETU had come to an agreement where one of the unions was weak the other two would help. Ealing was one of those studios. We were quite strong, NATKE was quite strong, ETU were not strong. In fact the chief electrician, sorry I mean chief engineer, Stan Lovell, I think the ETU had got out of BIP for some reason and he didn't like the ETU and the NATKE organiser, I can't remember what his name was, and myself got him in and a meeting was called in the carpenter's shop which was safe ground. But I think it was the charge hand told the management and they laid trip wires for me and sure enough I fell flat on my face one day and I was out. The film was taken over by Bob Leprill and I found when I tried to get a job I met a brick wall. But fortunately one day I bumped into Philip Daughty who'd been the sound recordist on *Three Men in a Boat* and Ealing and he said to me what at you doing. I said I've fallen fowl with Dean. He'd also fallen fowl of Dean and he said oh you ought to go and see dear old AGD West who'd been head of the sound department at Ealing who'd also fallen fowl of Dean and I said what's he doing. He's with Baird Television, he's looking for somebody for some photographic process they're into. I went to see West and he greeted me like a long lost brother which is rather nice suddenly to find you weren't a leper after all. He said you realise we can't pay you as much as you've been getting. I can't remember what they paid me, it was something like £12 a week. So I went into Baird Television on Long Acre where we started a process called the intermediate film process. This is a film camera on top of a processing machine. As it was very experimental we started off on 9.5, we got the pictures on it alright but our great problem was sound recording. We knew we couldn't use disks because you wouldn't be able to synchronise it properly. So we first started doing a hill and dale recording on

a loop of film actually using 9.5 but all that happened was that threads of whiskers of film came off, no sound. That was scrapped. We then started using the Blattnerphone tape but that going at high speed is highly dangerous because if it breaks it just spews out all over the place. So that was scrapped. So we postponed the idea of sound recording until we got a bit more perfection on our processing side, there was a lot of experimentation. We did a lot of experimenting with film stocks. We used to have our stocks from Sealot, the Ilford stock, and we always found at Ilford they'd produce an emulsion which was perfect, we'd say that's lovely and we'd say we'll have that again, but you never got the same emulsion twice. And so we were continually having to make adjustments. I remember I bumped into Desmond Dickinson who was a life friend of mine and I explained to him my problems and he suggested one stock you want is background X, So I went to west and said can we experiment with this background X because I've been told it is everything we want. So we got onto Kodak and asked if they would split it for us because we were using split 35 and they said yes they could. Then we did our test with that and it was perfect. At the same time we had been experimenting with glow tube recording on the end of the film, between the sprocket hole and the end of the film, and we got reasonable results we thought, so then we asked Kodak not to edge number and no Kodak logos on the side so we had completely clear film between the perforation hole and the edge of the film. And we were getting reasonable sound but we had to streamline the equipment a bit and one of the big trouble was that you were scanning your film, both picture and sound under water, because the processing, the actual development time was somewhere around 7 seconds, we were using developer, you have a very short wash for about 5 seconds and I think it was a 15 second fix cyanide and then another very short wash and then straight into the picture gate and the sound gate. Well you used to get carry over air bubbles and if if was a carry over air bubble in the sound gate you got the motor budging effect, just blowing raspberries at you. You sometimes could get rid of that by blowing it out, sometimes by hitting it, sometimes you just couldn't get rid of it at all. But the picture quality, we very rarely did get an air bubble in the picture gate, so the picture quality was first class and when you could get the sound off it was quite reasonable, it was a film camera on top of a processing machine, the room we had it at Alexandra Palace, when we installed the equipment at Alexandra Palace had kind of 3 positions. You had an arc, you had one set on your extreme left, you had a set in front of you and you had another set on your extreme right and you could pan from one to the other, ad lib until ready. You had, we had 4 full lenses on the turret, there was a Vinten H, you had four lenses on the turret and the only way you could change you size of shot was by swinging the turret which meant the picture would disappear from the top of the screen and you would come in the bottom. I suppose it was a form of wipe but a rather crude form of wipe. We were at Alexandra Palace until the BBC rightly decided enough was enough and they signed an agreement with ME us use the Metron and I found myself out of work.

Arthur Graham: What date was this?

Alan Lawson: This would be March 1937 and I started looking for work and ACT decided to sent a delegation to the May celebrations to Russia and Thorold Dickinson and I became the two delegates. We paid our own fare to Leningrad, on the boat and back, and all the hospitality was provided by the Soviet trade unions. While I was in Moscow, I received a telegram from the BBC offering me a job and this gave me enormous satisfaction, I hardly stopped laughing about it. When I got back to London I went to see a man called Stratton, I think his my was William Stratton. My father knew him, I think he'd been manager at HMV Recording Studios and he was

in charge of the contracts department at the BBC. He said they would very much like me to join the staff of the BBC. I asked what the job was and he said it's called assistant engineer. I said what's the job and he said to be a film cameraman, I said that's not an assistant engineer, that's a cameraman, a film cameraman. He said we don't have cameramen in the BBC we only have engineers or assistant engineers. I then enquired about money but then I realised they didn't use money as a means of barter so I turned it down. I've just suddenly realised in the meantime between falling out of work with Baird and going to Russia the BBC decided to make a demonstration film, Dallas Bower who'd I'd known from the Stoll days as sound recordist at Stoll was one of the drama producers in the prewar television service had been given the job of making this demonstration film which would be shown in the morning for the traders to show potential customer what kind of programmes they'd get on television. So Dallas asked me if I would be the lighting cameraman and I accepted very happily and we filmed I think in about a fortnight filming which I really enjoyed, we filmed at Alexandra Palace, at Stoll studios, we shot in the Sadler's Wells Theatre with the Sadler's Wells ballet company, we were doing *Facade* and we were told we could go in after the matinee which was about 5 o'clock but we had to be clear by 7 o'clock. That meant I had MacDonald of Mole-Richardson's with a couple of generators outside, getting all the lights in, setting it up, shooting it and getting out in two hours, we were out I think at quarter to 7 and we'd done it all in one take and one or two cut ins. It was a film I thoroughly enjoyed because it was an enormous variety of material and then after that I went to Russia. Dallas Bower had probably asked, I never asked him if it was him, that I should be offered a job. I turned down the offer of whatever it was because it wasn't a means of barter. I then started freelancing again and worked with Eric Cross on the Laughter of the Adventurers, Roy Kellino directed the film, I don't think it was a particularly happy film for Eric. Roy Kellino could not forget he'd been a cameraman and there was a bit of trouble. Then I started quite a lot of work down at Shepperton as a camera operator with Glendenning on quota quickies which took me through until I went to Spain with Sid Cole, Ivor Montagu, Ray Pitt and Phil Leacock, you and I went as cameramen, and Sid and Thorold as directors and Phil and Ray as editors. We were there about 3 months and we saw the road rapidly going to be cut between Madrid and Barcelona and we came back to Barcelona, I stayed on to do newsreels coverage hopefully with the hired equipment we had and you and the rest came home. I stayed there until July of 38 when it was my visa or the authorisation from the British government expired and I couldn't afford to pay the equipment hire any more because none of the stuff I shot was taken by any of the newsreels, they wouldn't take our stuff for reasons of their own I suppose so I had to come home. But I wanted to come back and if I could get back I had a job as a stills photographer with the Sub Secretariat in Barcelona. And while I was back I went to see Charles Duff who edited a paper called Spain today who agreed to sponsor me so I got an authorisation from the British government to go as their photographer and I then had to go to Paris to get a visa from the Spanish government and I was back in Barcelona in late July working as a stills man. There was a film company in Barcelona called Film Popola who were making foreign versions of what Spain was like and they hadn't got anything to look after the English version which was called Spain Today and they asked the Secretariat if I could be released to take charge of this operation. So I was kind of scriptwriter and commentator, a job I hated and I can remember writing the commentary and speaking it and I could never get the commentary shot on, it's not my nature to do that sort of thing. Anyway I produced.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

I don't know what happened to these completed productions. I believe some of them were shipped to Mexico to go on to the States but whether they did or not I don't know and then after that I got involved with running refugees up to the frontier with a 3 ton Bedford truck which had come into Spain from the Printers' Anti Fascist Movement and I'd taken it over. I think I'd taken this lorry over at Gerona and I made dumps of food in various parts, up in the North there and I was running refugees out. And I made the frontier I think, my final trip to the frontier was made about 3 hours before the fall of the Republic and I remained down there for about 3 weeks going round the refugee camps getting out people whose lives would be in danger. And getting them away. Then I came back to the UK and started freelancing again At that time there was a shorts producer called Widgey Newman and Act wasn't at all sure about Widgey Newman, so I was kind of, it was suggested to be that I should try and get myself a job with Widgey Newman so they could find out more about Widgey Newman's operation. So I got an introduction to Widgey Newman who, an extraordinary character really, I got on with him very well. He said how much did I want for doing the job. I named a figure and he said it was a five day job. He said no I'll tell you what we'll do, if we finish it in 4 days I'll give you a bonus and it would have meant that I would have got £2 more than I was asking for. So I thought I'll take it on just to see how he behaves. He was a remarkably generous man. Very pedestrian producer, director. He was a producer-director. At lunch time he bought all the unit their meals. At tea time the same thing would happen, so you couldn't really complain about someone like that. We did finish in 4 days and he paid me what he said he would pay me which was £2 more than I reckoned I. was going to get, plus having had all the meals bought. I think I worked on a couple of films with him and the camera man was Jack Miller, he was one of these Wardour St cameraman who dabbled in this that and the other. He'd done a bit of newsreel camerawork, advertising films, he did anything which came along, he wasn't bad. Then after that I went on to *Arsenal Murder Mystery* with Thorold Dickinson and Desmond Dickinson and John Dennis was the sound recordist and Percy Dayton the boom man. Kelly was the production manager and a chap called Dixon was the assistant director who was larger than life. He was a great wag, I can always remember him at the Arsenal Stadium taking his jacket off and he had a shirt which had been made out of a union Jack. This sort of extroverted character. Anyway we worked on that film at Denham. That was, it wasn't a happy studio to work in, I didn't like working there, not long before we started that film ACT had come to an agreement with Denham for a 60 hour week and part of that agreement was if we were going to work late they told us by half past four, so we could ring home and say we were not going to be home till late. In that event we broke at seven for an hour for supper, back at 8 till we finished. Somlo was the producer of this picture and they always tried to evade this. Thorold who was then one of the vice presidents, he was the director and he was in a very difficult position, poor chap, and I'd say are we working late, I think we are, are we, I haven't been told, nobody told anybody anything in which case we would finish at 7. I think Kelly came on the set and said we're going to work late tonight. I said no we're not, the agreement's half past four. He was creating. I said no, the agreement's the agreement and we're sticking by that. He stormed of the floor and said right we'll break at 1.

And we finished at 7 that night. The next day he came on the floor at 4 and said we're working

late tonight. I said OK. At 7 o'clock we broke for supper. We went into the canteen who weren't ready and it was awful food in that canteen unless you went into the expensive one so the next night we said we were fed up with the canteen food and we went into Uxbridge, and that was fatal and I think we got back from Uxbridge about quarter past 8, half past 8, and by the time the studio had settled down it was half past 9 and they soon saw that was very counterproductive and I think they tried 3 or 4 times, then they gave up and we used to finish at 7 o'clock. So in a way we had a little of a victory on that, but it wasn't a happy studio I don't think. I was an outsider I suppose and I was looked on as an outsider. It was very clammy down there. What was his name, the man in charge of the camera department down there.

Arthur Graham: Bert Easy

Alan Lawson: He did not look kindly on foreigners and I was a foreigner. Anyway after the *Arsenal Murder Mystery* which finished in September, war broke out and I became an ambulance driver. But again unfortunately I was working in the Borough of Finchley which is perhaps not the most forward thinking boroughs and being a trade unionist I thought it was high time we organised the transport and general workers. And so another ambulance driver, who in fact was a London taxi driver, he and I started organising transport and general. We got sorted out and again I found myself out of work. So for a little while I went and worked at Merton Park on the shorts and then one day George Elvin called me up and I came up to see him and also in the office was a chap called Roy Stocks and he said the War Office want to start a film unit, would you go and see Major Horton at the War Office. So I went to see Major Horton at the War Office who was the most delightful person and he confirmed that the army was setting up a film unit and they wanted skilled technicians. I did explain to him I'm going for my medical tomorrow. so he said when you've had y our medical you say to the officer you're to be reserved for the Army Film Unit as a cinematographer which I did. The bloke almost went puce in the face. He said we don't want cameramen, we want soldiers. So with that I went away with a flea in my ear, rang up Popa Horton the next day and he said as soon as you're got your regimental number you're to get in touch with me, which I did. I'd been drafted to the Royal Engineers Chemical Warfare. My base was to be Barton Stacy which isn't far from Handover, 1 think Long Parish was the actual address. I was doing basic training and it was there I had an accident and I had a deranged internal something with the knee and I went into hospital. I was in hospital from December to the end of January and came home on sick leave. I went in fear and trepidation up to see Papa Horton, he was known later by us to explain what had happened. He took down all the details and said when you go back to this holding company you tell the CO that he's to hold you there till we call you. I did that and the CO, a very nice man, instructed everyone that I was to stay until summoned and three weeks later I was summoned and I went to Cadogan Sq where I saw Colonel McCormack who was I think the Colonel in charge of our section. I'm not sure where he fitted in. It was a PR branch of some kind. And he, in fact was from the guards or something, a very small and dapper little man, very friendly and he said now you're a sergeant. Dave MacDonald was our immediate CO. Already in the unit was Harry Rignold, Jerry Massey Collier, Gerald KeJCn and Walter Tennyson Danecourt. That was the unit. The day after I arrived, Alf Black arrived, he was, I think a bombardier in artillery, he was major sergeant. I think it was about 3 days later Alf and I were in what you'd call the camera room and Dave MacDonald camein and said good morning men, Alf and I looked behind us to see who was behind us but it was just Alf and myself, then the next people to arrive was Bob Verral, he came

in as a sergeant, and Hugh Stewart came in, he was a lieutenant I think. I think the next one to arrive was Bob Carrick, then came Alec Bryce, Bryan Langley, I never actually met Bryan Langley in London. The first time I met Brian Langley was out in Calcutta which was ages later. Then Alec Bryce arrived, he came in as a lieutenant and we went on the famous exercise which sorted out the men from the boys and the bowler hats which went flying after that was nobody's business. Not in the Army Film Unit but the Army. That was when Montgomery came up to the bumper exercise, that's when he shone out and he never looked back from that moment on. A little later I was going to be commissioned and I was sent to OTU board and they wanted to send me on a training course to be an officer. And I said I didn't think my unit could afford to lose me and again I got a very strange answer out of them, the War's not going to be lost because you've been sent on an OTU. However I went back and reported I think to Colonel McCormack and he said rubbish we're going to stop that.

I became an officer then and I was put in charge of training and I ran the training course for battle cameramen which was most of It was done of the heath extension, my next of the woods. The boys used to march out from Marylebone Station, the transit camp, whatever the hotel was called, they used to march out every day. Joe West was sergeant in charge of them, he was on the course. I ran the two courses and again I fell fowl because I selected certain people and this would be for the North African landings, I can't remember what the unit of the film unit was but it was the North African trip, and Hugh Stewart was the officer in charge and they turned down 4 of the people I'd chosen and I though enough was enough and I asked to go back to ordinary duties. We were making shorts then and things like that. We did man wounded, date with a gun, we were working on a film called People's Army down there, and that was just before the North African landings, I think the unit we were using, I think it was the Shropshire and they got decimated and they had to scrap the whole of the production because they were featured, very much so, in that film. Gerry Kean was the director of that. That was that. I then did various coverage of various kinds of things including a research film of marching feet. I always remember this. We had a high speed Debrie. We had soldiers in boots marching round in a circle and we were turning the camera round in a circle so you could examine the fall of the foot which was funny, I can't remember where it was done. After that

Arthur Graham: What year was this?

Alan Lawson: This would be '43. There were two Johnsons, Norman Johnson and another Johnson. Norman Johnson was the sergeant film cameraman and the other Johnson was a still photographer. We were sent up to Glasgow and went aboard a boat in the Gairloch and it was a closed boat and we say an enormous convoy assembling, the next morning we were still there and so was the convoy and it was even bigger. The next morning after that, we got up on deck, this was in July, it was before the North African landing, we got up in the morning and there was no convoy, it had gone and we were still there, we then thought this is very off. We looked around to see what kind of unit we had on board. Urquhart was the brigadier, he was officer on charge, we had a regimental band, we had some RE geologists on board, a bevy of signalmen on board, we hadn't a clue. And the war correspondent was a chap called Sayle from I think the Daily Telegraph. We were on this blooming boat, anchored in the Gairloch, in the height of summer, it was an absolute steamer for 3 weeks, we were taken off onto a small island for a'bit of exercise and then put back on our boat. On that night they announced we would be going on

shore for embarkation leave, so back we go on 3 weeks embarkation leave and I report to Pinewood and explain, they say you must do as you're told, so I went to the war office and explained to them and said look it!s ridiculous, it can't be anything, you must do as you're told, you must take 3 weeks leave and report back to Glasgow which I did after 3 weeks with Johnson and this other lad only to be told to return to Pinewood. I worked on bits of Desert Victory which we shot at Pinewood. After that we were lining up to do this invasion film and John Boulting was working with Dave MacDonald on that. I had a lot. I was the cameraman assigned to it and Dave MacDonald and John Boulting went out one Sunday with Dave's driver, a chap called Richardson and when they came back in the evening I was summoned to Dave's office and told we want you to take the car tomorrow and Richardson and you're to go and film the places we went to day. That's all they'd tell me. When I set out on the Monday I said to Rich where are we going first and he said Hogg's Back, we went up to Hogg's Back and there was nothing there. I said to Rich is this what you saw yesterday, he said god no, the place was full of hoof tracks, there wasn't a thing there, I said oh dear, where do we go now. I think we went from Hogg's Back to Advance Army HQ which was tucked away in the woods somewhere. Again there was nothing there, it was all gone other than a couple of rearguard, there were a couple of caravans left, we then went to Waterlooville, again there were about half a dozen ducks, jeeps with earlycons on, I filmed that. I hadn't filmed anything till then. I eventually got back and I went straight into the mess and Dave was there with Roy and they raised their sums to me and I raised down my thumbs and I was immediately summoned to the office. They said what do you mean. I said I went to the Hog's Back, they said what did you see, I said nothing, it's all gone. They didn't believe me, they said what about Advance Army HQ, I said there were 2 caravans, rubbish. Then Waterloovilie, I explained to them again and they didn't believe me and I called in the driver. I was absolutely livid. Absolutely disgraceful behaviour. This was Boulting. I'd fallen out with Boulting a little bit before. He was not the pleasantist of men to work with. After that I'd got taken off that and there was a kind of a lull and the next thing which happened was that Carol Reed suddenly appeared on the scene with Garson Kanin and Carol Reed whom I'd known from the Ealing days welcomed me like a long lost brother and I worked with him for a few days. I got my own self respect back. I felt at least I knew what I was doing. Anything he wanted I would do for him or improve on and the same with Garson Kanin and that was fine. Then Dave was sent out to do special sequences for the forthcoming Burma Victory and I went with him on that assignment. I'm trying to think who went with us, Godfrey Grayson, he was I think production manager or assistant director. He and myself and a chap called John Burn, a name something like John Burn, no Doone, I think he was a script writer. We went out to do Burma Victory and we were out in Burma quite some time. Gradually went down the road and we came out after the fall of Mandalay, came back to England. The next thing I did as far as I can remember, I went out with the liberation troops for Norway and that was quite an experience. We left Great Dunmo one night, VE Day had happened but no British troops had arrived in Norway. We went out from Great Dunmo, I think I was in a Stirling Then we had a still photographer who was a lieutenant, he'd worked for the Times, I can't remember his name, and I think Boulting was also, but he wasn't in my party. We took off and I think the airlift was 1,000 troops and we arrived the next morning, we eventually got down, the cloud had closed in and the final total of British troops there was 100 and the place was still with Germans. They'd laid on I think 3 trains to take the troops down to Oslo, again Urquhart was the officer in charge and they decided to leave 35

troops at the Airport and guard it and keep the Germans in control. And the other 65 of us peppered one train to make it look full and we came down to Oslo and at Oslo I got out with Dick Leatherbarrett to start filming and Urquhart said you're in charge of the baggage party and those are your men and pointed to Dick Leatherbarrow, a couple of signalsmen and myself and the still photographer. But I said sir. And he said that is an order and we didn't do any filming at all.

65 British troops liberated Oslo. And that night who should fly in but dear Sid Bonnett whom I hadn't seen since about 1935 and he was covering for Gaumont News I think. And after a week we came out. I came back to Bitewood and then they decided to post me out to Burma. And we arrived on Karachi on VJ days. We then went down, to a famous transit camp not very far from Bombay, I can't remember what it was called. At Bombay again we were in another transit camp and after the usual army balls up we were posted to our proper rightful place, which was Saxitroops, in fact we were posted to Candy and from Candy we went on to Rangoon and I looked after the unit in Rangoon until February of 46 when I came home. While I was in Rangoon, a signal had come from Reeve Van Struther who had been the adjutant of the Army Film Unit who had been demobbed and was working for the BBC or was about to be demobbed and he sent a signal asking if I would be interested in a permanent job with the BBC in television. They sat on this blooming signal for three weeks. So I made Knight get a priority signal back to say yes I was. So when I got back to England I think at the end of February, we came by ship. I went to see the BBC. The first thing they said was before you start with us we're going to make the new demonstration film and we'd like you to photograph it, Marcus Cooper films.

Arthur Graham: Before we leave the war years,you've made a reference to Pinewood, how did that get involved with the Army Film Unit?

Alan Lawson: First of all we were based in Cadogan Sq, the Army Film Unit, then we got moved to the War Office where we had a top, I think it was on the top floor. We shared rooms with a delightful stills cameraman Captain Consoley, he was very famous pioneer of infra red photography, he'd worked for the *Times*, he had a tin leg, he'd lost his leg in the First World War, He was a lovely man, a real gentleman. Also with us in that same room was a very famous, or became a very famous poster artist, Abraham Gaines, who's job was to make posters for the army. He was in the artillery and I think he was a lance bombardier. And poor old Gamsey used to go and see brigadiers and people like this and try to discuss with brigadiers ideas for posters. And these brigadiers were regular army people and they took a dim view of this lance bombardier not standing to attention when he was talking, when he was trying to put over ideas, ultimately he was made a sergeant and later on became a lieutenant but he produced the most wonderful posters during the war. From there we went to Curzon St where we also did run, the second camera course was run from there. The chaps used to march up from Marylebone Hotel and then they decided as the Crown Film Unit was going to Pinewood and there was more room than they wanted, it would be a good idea if the RAF Film Unit and the Army Film Unit joined forces and we used the same facilities. Because the RAF Unit was shooting stuff in the studios there, the Crown Film Unit was shooting stuff in the film studios there, the Army Film Unit was shooting stuff in the film studios there. I think the RAF Unit did more studio shooting than we did and the Crown did quite a lot. That's how the Army Film Unit came down to be in Pinewood.

Ultimately they ran the courses down there too.
Arthur Graham: Obviously you did not have any great difficulty getting started after the war was over so what happened your career then.
Alan Lawson: I started off as the film cameraman in the film department. They then decided to start a television newsreel so I was responsible for hiring, not hiring, finding the cameramen and putting them up for their various boards. I was also responsible for getting camera equipment. I was also responsible for the film stock as well. Then I wasn't, newsreels is a foreign land to me, it's a very specialised job,it's not my forte, it never has been, I'm one of these people who likes a script, I find it very difficult to shot off the cuff, I find it very difficult. That in fact is the art of newsreel coverage to be able to go straight to the heart of the story and be as economical as possible which isn't me. So I was very happy when I got shot of the newsreel side of it, there was too much work coming in from the drama department, shooting sequences for television drama and television documentaries for me also to do the newsreels, I was very happy about that. I worked on all kinds of stuff. I think one of the most interesting things was we had a chap called Bill Micklin who'd been in AKS during the war. His father had been in the theatres as a prop man, he himself was a prop man, he'd gone into films up at BIP, I think his brother was also in the prop department at BIP, he'd gone into AKS during the war and had come and join the BBC after the War. So really and truthfully, Bill Micklin and myself were the only two people who knew anything about film studio work. Royston Morley was doing a play, Man of Tomorrow I think it was and it was a story about French resistance unit which had been wiped out. They came back to life again and we shot at- Bushey Studios the massacre of the- unit. Then everybody had to freeze, you marked the position where they were, put down blank carpets and start all over again, only Bill Micklin and myself knew what we were doing. The result in the end, these ghost figures rising up and becoming solid was quite effective. So I worked with a lot of the drama producers, then they started doing documentaries and I worked with Ian Atkins and Duncan Ross and the Magistrates Court series. Carol Doncaster who was the young woman who came in she started the series made by hand and I did all the film shooting for her on that. That was quite an experience because we filmed up at the stain glass place near Whetstone, near Kodak, we also did gold beating, gold leaf work, we did book binding, we did violin making, all these kind of things, marbling, I shot all the factory stuff and the studio stuff was done life up at Alexandra Palace so I got an enormous variety of stuff there, and after that, for the 1952 exhibition, John Reed had the idea of wanting to make a film about the Henry Moore piece which had been commissioned for the 1952 exhibition. And we went out to see Henry Moore, funnily enough I'd men Henry Moore when I was a very young teenager, I'd known people in his group, there were the Hepworths, the Skepies and the Nicholsons, they were all in that group. I had in fact met them. We went and talked to Henry Moore and he wasn't at all keen. And I said why and he said you're put lights where I don't want them. I said no I won't, you tell me how you visualise it and that's how it will be filmed. So I said look, we'll come up and do some tests and you can see. We went up and shot some tests and he came down and saw the rushes and he was extremely happy.

That was fine and so we made this film with Henry Moore which in fact got an award at the Venice Film Festival, I'm saying the film itself not the photography. That was a great experience that. Then after that because one decides one has to get on, the thing that you're good at you stop

doing and you do something you've never done before. I then became the under manager of the film department, at the Bush and planned the work of the film department. Then we were moved to Ealing and I was given an assistant and there was an enormous amount of filming going on in those days. And then, as within all large organisations, the politics within the politics and the faces not fitting here and there, I suddenly found that the job that I was doing ceased to exist and a grander job appeared which I didn't get. I then moved over to television enterprises where they were making, they'd started to make English as a foreign language for sales overseas with English by radio and they changed the title to English by radio and television. I was I suppose in the film sense the BBC's producers, I lined the thing up, got the money thing sorted out although it was put out to tender, it was contracted out the actual shooting but I was the BBC's actual representative and remained on that and again English by Radio and Television came under the Bush house aegis and there was a change of headship and again internal politics and English by Radio and Television took over the Management of the series themselves, so again I was out. Then I was looking after overseas demands for television coverage and finally I finished up by making gramophone records for the BBC, that's the story of my life.

Arthur Graham: When did you actually leave the BBC

Alan Lawson: Christmas 1972.

Arthur Graham: So you presumably retired.

Alan Lawson: I had a part-time job for 5 years but nothing to do with films or television, I was the Vestry Clerk at St George's Handover Sq and I think I was the first vestry clerk who was an unbeliever.

Arthur Graham: Interesting. Do go right back again to the early days of your career, in the film business before you got into television, can you tell us what the production techniques were like then, how did they change in your view over the years.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Arthur Graham: You've given us a run down of your career, perhaps you'll tell us a little of the production techniques in the film business when you entered the industry.

Alan Lawson: I suppose the first film I worked on *Balaclava* would be the odd man out because that had a very large crew, on the assistant director's side was Elvey's brother Fred Merrick and this chap Newman. There was Bettinson although officially he was on the script he was also a second, third assistant director. There was Jeff Boothby and David Lean in charge of the costumes which was an unusual thing to have but because of the enormous number of costumes involved you had to have somebody responsible and the camera crew was large because it was a spectacle. That film was started in September and we didn't finish it till December of 1928 which was quite a long run and there was a lot of location shooting on that. All the cameras with the exception of the experimental sequences we did with sound were hand turned except Leslie Rowson had his own Debrie which had a variable speed motor on - I think he would have been incapable of turning the camera at speed, he was a very languid camera. But all the other cameras were hand turned. That was a technique one had to learn and I always remember Percy Strong telling me you're not grinding an organ because it was a very difficult thing to do to turn a camera at a constant speed of 16 frames per second. That in fact was a kind of a spectacle so it wasn't the average run of picture making. The next one, Devil's Maze was the average run of picture making. Again turned by hand. It involved, some of the stuff we shot in the studio

particularly the close ups of horse chase. Back projection didn't exist in those days and the effect was got by a long distance cut out which was pushed across the studio floor very slowly against a sky background and in the near distance was a succession of prop men going round and round the camera breaking order so it didn't appear to be the same lot going round and round and the actress, Rene Clamer sitting on a vaulting horse on a sprung platform with a propman north and south of it jumping up and down breaking rhythm so you got a roll, then when we came to do the effects of Hayford Hobbs who was chasing after her trying to stop the horse, the same routine but again with a propman standing right in front of the cameraman throwing fullers earth into his face as the clods from the horses' hoof. That was a very crude form but on the screen it looked quite effective. Than we come into sound, of course, and we're restricted to booths, in the words of Charles Chick Sales, there were two holers and 3 holers, there was the one holer as well, you put the cameraman in this booth and you shot through the glass and you got stifled as they were long takes you did in those days. The communication to the outside world was via telephone on the outside which more often than not had black greasepaint around the earpiece so people always came away with a black ear. When we had three cameras, the cameras were always mounted on high hats on a teak plank because you couldn't get the tripods in three of them in line and I suppose you had long shot, mid shot and close shot in those, and again very long takes. I don't think we did ten minute takes but we did very long takes and consumed an enormous amount of film. In those days also the sound man's word was law. If he said he was going to have his mike there he was going to have his mike there and it was hard luck on the camera department. Percy Strong was always battling with mike shadows and this persisted for quite a long time and there was always a lot of animosity between the camera department and the sound department. I think the first boom we had, I think it was lash up, I can't remember the one at the Bush but I remember the one at Stoll's and it was an enormous great thing. But I'll stick to the Bush. Again, on the first sound film, it was a spectacle again, it was called high treason. It was based, in 1984 or something like this and there was war going on between, I can't remember who the bad guy was but Basil Gill was one of the characters, Jameson Thomas, Benita Hume was in it. I can't remember what the plot was about but they were all dressed in pre Orwellian costumes and there was a lot of model work in that. This was an air raid over London and this was done with a model over London of the Thames, I suppose it would be of the Strand area of the Thames, and the invading airships were models which were floated in little glass tanks, and they had in the gondolas they had Fuller's Earth which you gradually saw coming down as a cloud of gas. I suppose this was the idea. They also, we did have model aeroplanes which were floated on wires and this was shot at high speed. And the model, the actual model of London, the same of New York, had explosives put all round the place. The model maker was a man named Guido Baldi, an Italian, almost a musical Italian, and the boss of that department was a man called Stroppa, also Italian. The art director was Andrew Mazzei who I suppose was originally from Italy, I don't know. But tht did have quite good model work in that. It wasn't easy,it wasn't an easy film to do. We used the very large stage at the Bush. And there was one set which filled the whole of that large stage which was quite something in those days. Then after that, that production was quite a long one, we started shooting on on 18th April and finished on 1st August which was quite a long time. After that we went into what you would call parlour, bed and bath type of productions. They were lightweight stuff. After the remake of Devil's Maze there was A Sister to Assist Er which was directed by George Dewhurst but again it was quite a small unit.

They were cheap films to make. That one was shot in 14 days. Then we went onto Alf!s Button which was a bigger effort and that was directed by Kellino, Roy Kellino's father, Bill Kellino, and I think that the continuity girl on that, I'm not sure if it was Roy Killino's wife, sister or cousin, Blanche, but I can't remember what her surname was. That was quite an ambitious film because again it needed special effects, this was the genie of the lamp appearing and the genie was Harry Humberston Wright. Again it was a real extravaganza. I think Anton Dolin and his company danced that piece from Scheherazade, there were a lot of showgirls in it, one of them was Queenie Thomson who became Merle Oberon and another one was Jeanie Stewart who became Baroness de Rothschild, by a second marriage I think. Again on that one we were using both the big one and the smaller stage, and with the smaller stage as I said earlier, we could only shoot at night because of noises, and that had a tank and the big stage had a tank and the property department made a shell hole which had been filled with bran and water and when we went in the first evening the bran had fermented and the smell was absolutely frightful. The duckboards were about 2 ft off the ground on top of this great heap so that all had to be flushed away down the drains and start again. I think they used sawdust after that and not bran. That was quite an extravaganza. Then after that we did some short stuff, The Message which was Cyril Collins and Walter Blakeley was actually the cameraman on that. Again, we were using, we had a Bell and Howell in a very peculiar kind of blimp, not very effective, it was mounted on a, the camera motor was quite a powerful beast in a box which was on casters, the camera was mounted on top of the box on high hat, and a flexible drive from the motor to the camera. It was an awful piece of equipment to lug around and very inhibiting. Then after that British Acoustics produced some new camera motors which I think didn't have flexible drives and that made life a little easier but I think the blimp had to be altered and again I think we must have had microphone booms but I can't remember them and I can't remember who the boom operator was unless it was Reg Margolies who was in the sound department. The recordist was Stan Jolly. Again there was very little finesse about anything. It was shot very straight, very few tracking shots, if any,, if there were tracking shots they .were. shot, silent with a wildtrack shot afterwards. So there would be no dialogue other than cut ins. The camera dolly we used I think we borrowed it from Stolls. It was an Efa. It was triangular shape and it had on the apexes twin wheels, and they were connected, you could have either one wheel steering or three wheel steering and they were connected by a bicycle chain and the camera was in the middle. It was a very effective dolly actually. But the difficulty was that it was almost impossible to get two people on it. The operator would be on it but the poor focus would have to run along the side of it. It was quite a difficult thing to get going until we mounted a central post and you could wind that up and down and you did it with tripod legs, that was quite useful. Then we did a film which was much more ambitious with cutaway sets, this was Greek St, this was Sinclair Hill and I think the art director was Wally Murton, I'm not sure, and it was quite ambitious. There were staircase shots and all kinds of things. I think we had some Schuftan shots in that which was a ballroom and I think William Trytel and his band were the band. Slowly techniques were improving but very slow. The Bush hadn't got Mitchell's yet, they'd still got these wretched Bell and Howell's. And it wasn't until I went to Stoll that I started working with Mitchells and that's an entirely different ballgame, with a Mitchell. The Bell and Howell were inverted images, parallax was pretty ghastly on them, and with experience one got used to it. When I moved to Stolls, with these Mitchells, they had very effective blimps, Stoll made blimps and they were quite light. They

were made of bolster wood, they were double skinned, they had balsa wood, rubber and balsa wood again inside and the camera itself was mounted on a sandwich within the blimp which was lashed, that was again rubber with balsa wood again with I think lead, and life was much easier. We also had the cameras on trolleys really. You'd put the legs down or wind them up and wind up the trolleys and push the cameras around without a great deal of effort. When you shot you'd put the legs down and wind the wheels off the floor. The boom we had at Stolls was a very tall one made of wood and the sound recordist was Dallas Bower and he was the very first sound recordist I'd ever come across who listened to what the cameraman said and when he said listen I've got a terrible shadow, Dallas just skied the mike and up it went and you got rid of the mike shadow. And it was a complete change. There was a feeling of friendship between the sound department and the mike department, we were making films together, we weren't opposed to each other. That was a very enlightening experience. Also, the atmosphere on the first film was very good. Before we started filming on that first film at Stolls, Sinclair Hill who was directing the film, had a model of the set made by Louis Delaney who was the art director, and the whole of the camera department, the sound department, the production department, the four electricians, the gaffer, the prop man, we were all brought in and the whole film was gone through on this model so that when we went on the floor we shot the whole thing an absolute piece of cake. It was a joy to work on. We started on 17th September and we finished on 1st October. And it was a big set, in fact there were 2 big sets in it. And I thought what a wonderful approach, unfortunately it was never followed through a second time. I don't know why. Perhaps Sinclair Hill thought everyone knew more than he did. Then we went onto making quota quickies and there was no real technique in that at all. It was get stuck into this and the harder you worked the sooner you were out of work. Most of them took about 10, 12 days to shoot. I worked on some with Desmond Dickinson when we worked for Sammy and we did. 7 reels in 6 days which was absolute, murder.. You started at 9 o'clock and you went on till you finished. I can often remember Dick driving me home at 2 o'clock and picking me up the end morning at 8 o!clock and going back to work again. At the end of the week we really had had it, both of us. That was made at Worton Hall, That was a very strange studio. It was a very small studio. I think originally it was a conservatory and it had been converted into a silent studio. It was alleged that as they hadn't paid their electricity bill, the electricity had been cut off so there was a traction engine which drove a generator which charged the very heavy duty batteries so the electricity for your lamps came from batteries. I can remember Dick having lit a shot which was a very big shot for that kind of stage and we were ready to go and he said light them up and the charge hand said they are alight, Dick went round and looked and the lights were orange in colour so we had to switch up and wait for the batteries to be brought up to spec again before we could shoot. Again there was very little technique involved in that. Again Sammy was making these for New Era who were handing them to United Artists had one of them, I think Warners had one of them, this was filmmaking really at its worse. It was £1 a foot. And on that particular film it was alleged, I don't know how true it was, he wrote the script in his wife's name, the props on the set came from the Samuelson home, so I imagine the Samuelson home was stripped of furniture when we were filming. There was a double bed, we wondered were Sammy and his wife slept while we were filming because the bed was on the set. That may be fiction but it was strongly suggested. From there I suppose I went into, apart from working at Blattner's Studio where I loaned out from Stolls on a film for Reg Fogwell which again was very much akin to Worton Hall. It was

not really a serious studio. It provided floor space for people to make very cheap films. Reggie Fogwell was the director of that and the sound system was the same one which had come over from Worton Hall, it was called Fidelitone, this was a glow lamp recorder. I would say there was no such thing as technique, not really in those kind of films, not really, you'd just line them up and shoot them. Although the camera did his best it didn't really matter if it was an academy award or not. It was probably never seen, it was a form of fine I suppose. Then after leaving Stoll, I went to Ealing. That was a very different kettle of fish. That was a purpose built studio. It was custom built. There was central control. The doors opened and shut from a console on the floor, all the light were switched on from the same console, the camera was switched on from the same console on the floor. It was a very beautifully designed stage. There were two stages. One of them you could divide into two. One of them had a tank, a big tank which was often used. And I suppose technique did start to show then. There was Basil Dean the director of some of the films there and Graham Cutts was the director of some of the films there. There was, I think, a much more serious approach to filmmaking at Ealing. There length of productions was quite good. On Impassive Footman which was the first film I worked on, that was just over the month. Then I worked on a Gracie Fields film, Looking on the Brightside and I was by this time an operator and Dean was the director. That was a musical, obviously with Gracie Fields, and again, very big sets, night exteriors on the lots, big crows, I don't think it was a particularly good film. It was utilising Gracie Field's personality and voice. But technically it was very good. Bob Martin photographed it. He was quite a good cameraman. The sound was very good. The sound recordist was a man called Valentine, I'm trying to think who the boomman was, I've a feeling it was Charlie Tasker who'd come from Stolls. It was quite a pleasant film to work on inspite of Basil Dean. Gracie Fields, was an absolute charmer. She was a wonderful person to work with. Then from that I went to work on Three Men in a Boat. This was something quite new. Most of it was shot on exteriors on the Thames at Hurley, the soundvan, it was an RCA soundvan was on a barge in the middle of the river Thames. The cables from the barge to the camera which was on a motor launch with a microphone on was floated on tyres in the Thames, this was quite an undertaking because you've got a camera boat which is separated from the sound department but it also has to be attached to the sound department because it has the microphone boom with the microphone on and the legisties was one of the orders of the day, Carol Reed was one of the assistants on that and his commission I think was to look after Iris March who was I think a young hopefully up and coming star Basil Dean was hoping to marry. Carol and Iris March and the rest of the crew used to go up to the club at Pinewood and go into the swimming pool there, and Dean never knew about that. Arthur Valance who we left behind used to say we'd gone out for little walks which was very useful. The after that, again we made Loyalties which was Basil Rathbone, a Galsworthy script, again Basil Dean directing it. Again a very serious approach to that and it was on that film that the camera department got into very serious problems, we were using film stock, Dupont film stock, which Bob wanted to use and we were getting very good results on this Dupont stock. And then something appeared, a butterfly static, on the screen so we had to do a lot of shooting. It was decided with Humphrey's we'd run off the last 100 ft of every roll because it seemed to be appearing at 75 ft, this butterfly static, so the Idea was that you closed the camera shutter and rolled off, put it straight through, and they'd take off and try on locate this static and see if it was anywhere else. I think the camera which Brocklebank was using, he forgot to open his shutter when we started on his next roll and so there was a whole roll

with nothing on it. The next morning Dean actually went mad. The whole of the camera department was put on instant dismissal. Brocklebank was shot out. Frank Basil was shot out, I was under a cloud, Bob Martin was under a cloud, Jeff Seaholra was under a cloud but ultimately we sorted out the butterfly static and we came back into slight favour. But it was never the same again. The atmosphere at Ealing had gone, there was animosity between the front office and the floor which is not a good thing. After that I had my problems at Ealing and then went into television which is an entirely different kind of technique which I've described really. There was no technique just a process and I didn't get involved in technique again until I shot the television demonstration film before the war. Though that one was really reproducing what had been seen on the television screen but with a little bit more refinement. That's all I could say about that. I didn't get involved into technique really at all until the army Film Unit days and then It was quite different.

Arthur Graham: In what way different.

Alan Lawson: The thing was we knew ourselves from our experience in Spain if you got in the front line and put your head up you got it knocked off. You had to evolve a means, in fact we were going back to the pretend days of making battle films. OK there were genuine stuff shot which was very outstanding but it was very few and very far between and there were we trying to make films so we had to manufacture a lot of the effects, Desert Victory, there's some wonderful stuff in that, quite a lot of it shot down at Pinewood in the stage, the night, the troop going forward, laying the white tapes over the minefields, the cleared minefields, it was obvious, anybody who really started to analyse, and I think we were feature film makers making war films, that was all we were doing.

Arthur Graham: You say when you started television there was really no technique

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Arthur Graham: Perhaps you can tell us something about Alexandra Palace when you went there.

Alan Lawson: We went there in the early autumn of 36 and started our installation. The transmitter hall was on the ground floor which was quite a concern, it was a common transmitter capable of taking either our system or the EMI system. On the first floor there was studio A, which was the EMI studio and studio B which contained the Baird complex. The Baird complex was telecine, what they called the spotlight transmitter which again was only an enlarged form of disk scanning, and the telecine room and the Baird control room. The EMIs had their own control room on the outside wall.

The lighting, I think we used, it came from Kamden, it was a German company, we were using their lights. I think they were 2s. I don't think we had any spots, proper spots, they were 2 kilowatts, no lens spots only two kilowatts and banks, overhead banks. In the EMI studio I think it was very similar as far as the lighting was concerned. The studios were on the outside wall, facing outwards to London itself. On the other side of the corridor was the dressing rooms, makeup room and the wardrobe. The scene dock, I trying to remember where that was, oh that was on the ground floor at the back somewhere. In the Alexandra Palace complex there was an old theatre and I think they utilised the scene dock of the old theatre as the carpenters' shop. They had a very good carpenters shop at Alexandra Palace. The art director, the man in charge of the art department came from the theatre, Peter Bax, who was quite a well known name. Again while

we were in the experimental stages, apart from the continual and constant worry of the week's of Baird transmission, there was a very nice atmosphere in the place. We were all as it were learning. You got on extremely well with everybody despite our constant breakdowns. I suppose perhaps ,the most outstanding memory I have of Alexandra Palace was Leslie Mitchell who again is a man who I had a great admiration for, because he was the type of person, you'd just push Leslie in front of a camera and he would just ad lib until ready. He was absolutely amazing and he was never at a loss for a word.
Enormous sense of humour, also a very great sense of occasion as well. He could do the occasion and he could also do the humour. He was a professional, he'd been an actor, he was very very professional. We had two others who I eventually they started to call speakerines, and that was Jasmin and Elizabeth but I think they soon dropped that title. They were young, slightly uppercrust, but again they were extremely pleasant, they became a very good team. We had Dallas Bower there as a director, George Moore O'Farrell, and Steven Thomas. Again, Stephen Thomas had come from the theatre. George Moore O'Farrell had come from the theatre. Dallas had come from films. There were various other minor people there. There was Cecil Madden who was there, 1 think very overrated person. His kind, the height of culture to him was in town tonight. But he put on a programme and it was a very popular programme called picture page. Joan Miller was the anchor girl on that who became Peter Cotes wife, she was Australian,
Arthur Graham: Canadian,
Alan Lawson: I thought she was Australian. She became quite an actress in her own right. That was how Alexandra Palace functioned. I think perhaps one of the outstanding evenings I can remember, we were on transmission, there were two transmission a day, one kind of afternoon, and the other in the evening, and we'd finished our afternoon transmission and we were getting ready for the evening, and we'd finished the afternoon transmission and we'd had our supper and we were sitting out on the balcony looking across south London and on our staff we had a young engineer called Paul Terry who anything you said to him he would always take literally, you could always raise an enormous laugh by saying something to him which he would accept as being true. We were looking out and on the horizon in the south there was this enormous glow and he said I wonder what that is and it was I think John Reeve the engineer in charge of our transmitter part said oh I think it must be the bloody Palace on fire. Paul Terry rushed to the phone and rang through and it was. That; really put the nail in the coffin of Baird, all our backers had gone when that went up, not that it would have made any difference anyway if it hadn't gone up, but this was it.
Arthur Graham: You've given us a run down of your career, have you ever worked on any overseas assignments.
Alan Lawson: The only overseas assignments I've worked on I suppose was with the BBC. Two overseas assignments I did. One was the blowing up of the Heligoland UBoat Pens which was quite something. I went out. There was Alf Tungwell for I think Paramount and Dennis Towler I think for Universal and myself for BBC Newsreel. The operation was going to be viewed from the seas but we wanted something better than that and I got hold of a camera with a time switch so I got onto the little island opposite the U Boat pens and I set up this little camera with a time switch and only hoped to god it would work because the nearest we were allowed to it was 5 miles in our boat. So that was my first overseas assignment. Fortunately the timer did work and we got some spectacular pictures of the U Boat pens going up. This was my first overseas

assignment and it lasted 4 days. The 2nd overseas assignment started at Southampton Water. We were going to do a story of the flying boat service to Johannesburg. BOAC had given us a birth on that and I was the cameraman.
Arthur Graham: This was for the BBC
Alan Lawson: Yes this was about 1950. I got to know the skipper of the flying boat, he said he'd been the skipper of the flying boat since the days you had to be a carpenter and this was the Solent Flying boat which was an adaptation of the short Sunderland. And he said as soon as we were airborn be my guest you can move as much as you like. We were airborn and I looked out of one of the portholes and I thought collapsible wing plates, I've never seen those before and I looked out of the other one and they weren't collapsible at all, they had collapsed. The flying boat just flew about over Southampton Water getting rid of some of its fuel and then it came down on Southampton Water and as soon as it was down the crew were out onto the wing, the good wing and we taxied back in and that was the end of that overseas trip and I went back to Alexandra Palace. The next morning BOAC rang me and said did I take any film. I said yes I had. They said have you got it I said I haven't sent it to the lab, there was nothing really to send. They said can you save it for us, can we have it, I said yes, and Jimmy Balfour who was also on the BBC newsreel he'd done the take off from ground so I sent his stuff and our stuff to the labs and it was processed, and I called them up and they came up and we showed it to them in the projection room and they said can we see it again, and they saw it a second time and a third time and every time they saw it they said that's it that's it there and I watched and I couldn't see anything at all. Anyway I became their pin up because apparently something they didn't know about they found from this wretched film, so when they ultimately got it sorted out it was lined up again and I had the most wonderful trip on that. That was really a wonderful way of flying. We came down at Marseille, we then flew onto Augusta, we night stopped at Augusta and stayed in a hotel. The next day we flew to Alexandria. From Alexandria we flew to Cairo and from Cairo we flew to Luxor and night stopped at Luxor. We then flew to Khartoum, we flew down the Nile, had lunch in a hotel there. Flew onto Fort Belle and night stopped in Kampala. The next day we flew onto Victoria Falls and night stopped at Victoria Falls. The next day we flew into Valdem which was the big fresh water lake they built for Johannesburg and also for the flying boats. I was in Johannesburg I think a week and every evening I was BOAC's guest, they wined and dined me. And during the day time I went out filming. And whilst I was there Dave MacDonald and Alec Bryce were there doing Diamond City. So I bumped into them. This is where I bumped into Dennis Mitchel who later became a documentary film producer. But in those days was making programmes on tape for the BBC. He used to disappear out into the bush with reels and reels of tape and disappear and come back and put together an half hour programme having recorded probably 10 hours of tapes, that's been his problem ever since really. On that I went and filmed Huddleston, Father Huddleston who eventually became Bishop of Stepney, not an easy man to talk to. He was highly suspicious of me because I was from the BBC. That was the end of my overseas locations. I did a couple of grand tours for the BBC but only in an administrative capacity, not in a photographic capacity.
Arthur Graham: You've mentioned earlier on working on 3 Men in a Boat which was obviously a location film, did you have any other location.
Alan Lawson: *Balaclava* was a long one, I think we stayed in the Queen's Hotel Farmborough 4 weeks, that was quite a long one. Also the Great Gay Road, that was a location film which we

made at Stoll's with Sinclair Hill, that was 3 weeks. We stayed at Tunbridge Wells.
The location, location film, a lot of location filming, I worked on a serial for Universal made Henry B MacRae who was one of the great serial directors from the States and that was rushing around London in fast cars filming from fast cars and filming fast cars. We had people from Scotland Yard with us to make sure the local police knew who we were and it was alright. That was about 4 or 5 weeks rushing around London in fast cars, that was called the Green Spot Murder Mystery or Lloyd of the CID.
Arthur Graham: In talking about technique you've gone into the question of equipment and you've mentioned various things. You've mentioned Debrie and Bell and Howell and the Mitchell cameras, what was the difference between them.
Alan Lawson: The Debrie you looked straight through the film if you could, very difficult. A lot of people wore a black patch over one eye, they'd lift it up and look through and still see the image. The Bell and Howell, there were two versions of the Bell and Howell, there was one which had a look through, and we had one of those at the Bush. And we had one of the other kinds where you didn't look through the film when you were taking, you used a viewfinder. The Bell and Howell was very noisy. It was a very good camera for silent days, great positive registration, the film was clamped into, position during the exposure, and so it was absolutely rock steady. The Mitchell which was a much quieter camera, it did eventually have fibre gears in it, that, the film wasn't clamped into position when the exposure was taken, there was a back plate which held the film steady, or that was the theory, but it did usually hold it steady, but you had to be incredibly careful about the gate of both the Mitchell and the Debrie, you could very easily get scratches, you were continually having to clean the gate. With the Bell and Howell, although you didn't have to clean the gate as such, I suppose cleanliness in Kodak or any of the stock making plants was not as good as it might have been and you used to pick up whiskers and thinks like this. So it was usual at the end of every shot to take the gate out and make sure that there were no whiskers. If there was a whisker, you did a retake immediately even though the whisker may just have come down. You always did a retake, Then after that was the Newman Sinclair which had a form of clamp gate, it had a rocker arm which lifted the film up and took it over the perforations. The original Newman were really the Rolls Royce of hand cameras but they were a little bit archaic, which was a great pity. They were made, they really were made by hand. I can remember going up to Archway where they were made and old man Sinclair showing me how they made their sprockets and they were handmade, it was quite incredible, very little machining. Then also there was the Imo. Bell and Howell made this hand camera. It was originally 100ft spool loading, then they produced a version which took a 400 ft magazine, I never understood why they did it because it ceased to be a hand camera. The original Bell and Howell had a spring drive and every now and then the springs would go and you'd have the have a new one in. The same with the Newman Sinclair, they had spring drive, they had double spring drive. The Imo had a single spring drive. There was a very cheap camera called the which was really a joke and we had some of those bloody things during the war on lease lend. We also got a whole load of Imos on lease lend and some of those Imos we got the lens mounts, or the sockets for the lenses, they were eliptical, we had to take them to Lymes, you remember Kingston Lymes, old man Lymes had to sleeve them, bore them out and sleeve them with brass sleeves to get them round. The hand camera until the Arriflex came along has always been a bit of a Nuisance. You always had trouble. During the war Vintens produced what became known as the

Normandy. That was going to take a 200ft spool loading and the spool was tuffnal I think. They were single lens and I think they also produced a turret model, but they weren't a success. Then of course the Germans came along with the Arriflex which has gone on from strength to strength, the same way the Eclair has come up. There was an Eclair of course the same time as they early days of the Debrie which was a very finicky camera. It was a really clockmakers piece, lots and lots of cogs and springs and whathaveyou and rather delicate. We also had, there was a high speed Debrie, there was a high speed Bell and Howell which used a special high speed gate which again was a great scratcher, an enormous scratcher. There was a high speed Mitchell, I think but they were very few and far between.

Arthur Graham: Have you ever worked on any specialised processes. You mentioned the Schufftan process.

Alan Lawson: I worked on two of the films at the Bush they used the Schufftan process. High Treason was one, and I think Greek St was the other. For the occasion marvellous but very limited.

Arthur Graham: How did the process work.

Alan Lawson: What you did was you built half of your set properly, the bottom half, the top half could either be a model or a photograph or a painting and in front of the camera is a silver surface mirror, and you remove the silver surface from the lower portion of the mirror and the model or the reflection is at 45% to the set or to the camera, I think I'm correct, and apparently there is this enormous set with this great domed roof in front of the camera and your actors are walking around under this great dome or whatever you have on top of, reflected on top of the set. But you couldn't pan, you couldn't track, that was it. You had one set up but that gave you your production value.

Arthur Graham: To come back to you personally, your own career. With with technician you've worked with gave you the most help.

Alan Lawson: I should think Desmond Dickinson without doubt. For a long time a very underrated man. He knew so much about the techniques which go into making film, the machinery side of it, the processes, I don't think there was any single process that he didn't know about. Even the lull when Stoll's where deciding whether to give up or go into sound, Sir Oswald Stoll sent Desmond round Europe looking at all kinds of inventions, he saw anything which anyone said they had which they said would work. Dick went and saw it, understood how it worked and knew immediately what the snags were. To illustrate that, when I was at Stolls we had the head of the sound department, a Captain Round, a very brilliant engineer, but he had ideas above his station. He thought he knew about everything. He kidded Sir Oswald Stoll, I say he persuaded Sir Oswald Stoll that he knew .someone who had a real stereoscopic system and we should test it. So we were instructed to test it. So Dick said to Round tell me is it the D round of lens. So he wrote a report, put it in an envelope, gave it to the studio manager. The next day we went and shot the test which consisted of Ted Chan jumping up and down, opening his arms and closing his arms, opening his legs and closing his legs and we then went and saw the rushes next day, Dick said open the envelope, we opened the envelope, then we showed the rushes and there was this man with wings and a tail. There was no stereoscopy at all, this was nonsense. This was what he did know, he would not compromise at all. In those early days, quota quickies, a lot of people came in and they said we've got our film stock. And it would be Agfa or Gaevert and it would be 1,000 ft and Dick would say where!s the rest. They would say we'll get that as we want

it, eventually you were getting batches of this and batches of that and none of it was consistent and Dick was always getting into trouble because of the inconsistency. It wasn't him being inconsistent, so he swore he would never use anything but Kodak. So he organised himself out of a job because of that which was a very great pity. Ultimately he did come back and came back very strongly. He was probably he would be second to Freddie in the annals of cameraman.
Arthur Graham: In your estimation how long does it take you to establish yourself as a cameraman.
Alan Lawson: I started and I lost out didn't I. So I suppose it wasn't until the war years, I'd established myself by then, Burma Victory and other films I made with the Army Film Unit. Then after the war with the BBC because I did a tremendous amount of filming on all kinds of things. I did a lot, I did the very first series Norman Swallow did with a man called Reed, a journalist, I photographed all those, it was about industry, I was fairly ambidextrous as far as style was concerned. I did the equivalent of feature work for Rudy Cartier and the equivalent of documentary for Norman Swallow.
Arthur Graham: Did you at any time have any inhouse training for film skills.
Alan Lawson: I suppose only hearts to hearts with people like Bill Shenton, Sid Bonnett, and Desmond Dickinson.
Arthur Graham: But there was no set scheme, evening class. Did you ever go to anything like that?
Alan Lawson: No. I think most evenings when I was starting to take life more seriously were spent on behalf of the ACTT.
Arthur Graham: You've mentioned various peoples names producer has made the most impression. What director or television
Alan Lawson: I suppose with the television producers I've worked with I suppose Rudy Cartier who again was quite a character. I don't know anything about his background at all. I think he was an Austrian, I'm not sure. I worked on quite a lot of films for him, for his drama productions. And I must say although he presented you with the most terrible problems, I did one with him, Tis Midnight Dr Schweitzer, and this, they couldn't do it as a live thing and we had to film it. It consisted of a hut which was a hospital and the hut moved, the camera moved, everything moved, it was an absolute nightmare but it worked and he was very pleased with it. I must say I was very pleased with it. I suppose the other person I got a lot a pleasure at working with was Norman Swallow. His was economics of politics, that kind of documentary, dealing with politics and economics of politics, etc.
Arthur Graham: You've mentioned various names of people who are quite well know film history like Maurice Elvey, what was your opinion of him. in
Alan Lawson: As he got me my first job obviously I must have a very soft spot for him. He was a very strange character. When I first met him he did wear piz nez spectacles and he would remove them with his right hand and say dear, dear boy, dear boy. But then went on to wearing ordinary glasses but he still continued doing the same thing. I don't think he was a particularly good director. We weren't making terribly good films in those days. Perhaps the odd one came out by accident but I don't think Maurice was a particularly good director. I don't think he was a bad director, he was a bread and butter man.
Arthur Graham: How about Carol Reed.
Alan Lawson: I worked with him on two occasions. The first time when he was an assistant

director on Three Men and a Boat, and he was a delightful man, and absolutely delight to work with, humour when humour was required, serious when seriousness was required. Then I lost touch with him until during the war he came in on The True Glory and it was an absolute joy to meet him again and work with him. But it was very small stuff we were working on, I was working on with him, it didn't have actors at all.
Arthur Graham: Talking of actors, what about Harold Huth.
Alan Lawson: I trying to think what he was, in *Balaclava* he was the poor man who lead the charge in *Balaclava*. He was a very handsome man with his moustache, a very pleasant person to work with, I worked on one other film with.him but I think it was quite a small, part, but I don't think . that I saw him again but he was in the original *Balaclava*, whether he was in the sound version I'm not sure.
Arthur Graham: Before we leave this there was somebody who had quite a reputation we've mentioned several times, what was your opinion of him.
Alan Lawson: When he was nice he was very very nice and when he was bad he was horrid. He really was rather like that. I don't honestly think he was a good director. He terrified people which I don't think is the best way to behave with actors and actresses and in fact the unit as well. But in mitigation I understood he did suffer from some stomach trouble and his bowels didn't function properly and had to be pumped out once a week or something like that. And we always knew when the day was due because he was almost unbearable. He could be quite vicious with people. I think he was very unkind with the way he behaved to the camera department on Loyalties, he was very unfair, but it was probably the day he needed to be pumped out perhaps, but I think it was an unforgivable thing to do. It blotted a man's copy book for a long time very badly.
Arthur Graham: Someone else who was very well known who you had contact with was Baird, How did you find him.
Alan Lawson: John Logie Baird had this company Baird Television and the Ostrers bought into it, again I'm not sure, but I think they bought in Baird's because RKO bought into Thorokin's company in the States. John Logie was a committed mechanical man and the Ostrers could see that his plans were pretty limited. He liked mirror drums and mirror drums are snare and delusion especially when they fly off at speed, which they sometimes did. They brought in Captain West who had been the head of the sound department at Ealing who'd fallen out with Dean and West had been over to Germany and had seen the Nipal disk system which Fernseh had. And we had a working arrangement with Fernseh and they supplied us with disks. And John Logie was given an annual honorarium to run away and play and he went down to Sydenham with his laboratory at Sydenham and he was working on large scale television down there, and we in Long Acre embarked on intermediate process and telecine machines as well as a flying spot scanner. And we'd see John Logie once in a blue moon. When we moved to Alexandra Palace, John Logie was somewhere over in Sydenham which wasn't very far away. Again we didn't see a lot of him. As far as the Baird Company was concerned in those days, John Logie, honestly and truthfully was not really in the running. He wasn't part of the company, not really.

SIDE 5, TAPE 3
Arthur Graham: Now you were talking about Baird. Have you any other recollections about him,

Alan Lawson: Not about Baird, but when we were at Long Acre, I can remember one lunchtime I bumped into John Paddy Carstairs and he said I'm glad I've seen you, I'm going to direct a film and I want you to photograph it. I said well, I was working for the Baird Company, I could got and ask, how long was the film going to be, I think it was about 3 weeks, you won't laugh when I tell you who's producing it. I said who's producing it, he said Ted Cham, an old colleague of both his and mine from the Stoll days. I went to talk to West and said I had this chance to do this film, would Baird's release me for the 3 weeks or however long it took. It wasn't a very busy time and West said yes of course, as soon as it's fixed come and tell me and we'll arrange for you to be released. So I went to see Ted Cham, I had had a lot to do with Ted Cham at Stoll's who was a very strange character. His father had something to do with the Romanian oil fields during the 14-18 war. Ted Chalm was always borrowing half a crown and paying to back sixpence. The next week he'd borrow another half a crown and pay you back 2 sh. That kind of thing went on for a long time. He was one of those characters. He name of his company was Paragon Productions and their office was in Lower Regent St., it had quite a pleasant office, I think it had 3 rooms, and he had a partner named Bunting. Now Bunting had worked for a second or two in the sound department at Stolls. Bunting's father was I think a vicar or a cleric of some kind, and they had this production called The Barbe of Grande Bayou. I asked about money and Cham said how much do you want, I forget what I said now but it doesn't matter, and I said what about crew. He said you have who you want. I said I want Arthur Graham, I'd like George Robbins. I said what about salaries for them, he said what do they want, I said I'd find out, I saw Arthur and George Robbins and they told me what they wanted. I went to Cham and told him and he said that was fine. I said when are we going to start and it was a Monday or something, and he said we're getting it all ready so we'll probably start Friday of this week or Monday of the following week. I said what about roll stock. I was thinking back to what I said about Dick and 1 was wondering if I was going to get odds and ends from the short end kings, he said what stock do you want to use. I thought it's too good to be true. I said I'd like to use Kodak. He said that's alright. I said can I reserve a batch. He said oh yes, that's a good idea. I rang Kodak and said I wanted to reserve a batch and said how much I wanted and they said fine, give us an order.

I went back to Ted. and said they want an order. He said alright, we'll do that tomorrow. Towards the end of the week I went in and said well, when are we going to start, ah well, it won't be Monday, it might possibly be Wednesday. This continued on. Eventually, I took instructions from George Elvin, I took instructions from ACTT and apparently these two villains were selling each other's shares to other people. The company went into liquidation and if you go through the old ACTT journal you'll see comments not tonight Josephine, well this was it.

Arthur Graham: I'm afraid that wasn't a unique story in the industry in those days. To recap a little. Is there anything further you have to say about the war years? You've mentioned Desert Victory and Burma Victory, have you any other recollections of the times, of the people you worked with?

Alan Lawson: An outstanding recollection, and one which gives me great satisfaction. Not long after the Boultings had finished Thunder Rock, they came back into the service units, John was in the RAF Film Unit and Roy in the Army Film Unit. There was a custom at Pinewood, it was either every Monday night or every Friday night, there was a showing of one of the films doing the rounds in the West End. This particular night was Thunder Rock and the theatre was full of

all the cohorts of the Boulting Bros and ourselves and all was fine and dandy until it came to the last reel and the changeover came and up came Tarzan in New York. You could have heard a pin drop for about 10 seconds and then the place absolutely exploded. The Boulting Brothers with their cohorts got up as to a man got up and swept out in high dudgeon, I'm not sure whether they thought they'd been sabotaged or not, but that's a memory I'll never forget. But again coming back to those days. There was Alex Bryce who I well remember. He and I went on this great bumper exercise and he and I got to know each other quite well. He was a great character, he wasn't particularly strong in his attitudes to things, he was a bit of a weak man, he did some very good work actually. He was a very good support to Dave MacDonald. He kept Dave's morale up. Dave could get very depressed. And I think Alex Bryce kept his morale up. He needed to have his morale kept up because we did have some very strange people on our staff, very strange people. There was Del Strother who was our adjutant. Del had worked for Korda before the war who was a very moral person and a man I have to be very grateful to and it was thanks to him I finished up in the BBC. There was Pat Langton who was a continuity girl. She came in as a sergeant and she eventually got promoted to a lieutenant in the ATS. She had a soft spot for Glendenning but Glendenning ran a mile, a very great pity. Glendenning who I worked with and whom I was very fond of has disappearing unfortunately.

Arthur Graham: Moving onto another field altogether. Have you ever worked on film or tV commercials.

Alan Lawson: I've worked on a film commercials but they were advertising film but this was in 1929 and they were made by the Morgan Film Service but I can't remember for the life of me what they were, we made 3 of them, 2 at the Bush, Walter Blakeley was the cameraman and one of them we made in the Russell Hotel but that's all I can remember about them. I can't remember what they were for and what it was all about now but I can remember the Russell Hotel, this rather ornate Victorian establishment.

Arthur Graham: Another field altogether. How did you first get involved with the ACTT and who recruited you.

Alan Lawson: That's a fair question. I'm not sure. I have a feeling it might have been Sid Cole. I've looked at my application form and it's signed by some people I don't even remember. I think it might have been Sid Cole.

Arthur Graham: And when was that?

Alan Lawson: Roughly 33, early 33, I'm not sure of the date but it's 33 I know. That was when I was at Ealing. I then started recruiting when I was at Ealing and I was the studio secretary or whatever we were called in those days.

Arthur Graham: What are your earliest recollections of it?

Alan Lawson: I certainly can remember 30 Piccadilly Mansions and Captain Cope and I can also remember of the Assyrians meeting him in the office, I can also remember Winnie Pearson up there too. I think she was there at that time or did she come later.

Arthur Graham: She came with Elvin.

Alan Lawson: There you are. I remember the night Cope went and George came in. I was a little bit upset about it and I- wasn't sure I wanted part of it but I may probably have gone home and talked to my father about it but in the end I came round to the idea. Obviously it was the right thing.

Arthur Graham: What do you think ACT's standing was up to the War

Alan Lawson: Pretty good. I think George had done quite a lot of good work, and Thorold Dickinson and Desmond, we had some outstanding technicians who'd adopted the ACT banner, Thorold, Desmond, Sidney Cole, these people. 1 think respectability, standing was alright, we'd become respectable, although it was still far from fun and games.
Arthur Graham: Did you find recruiting difficult. Or didn't you go in for active recruiting.
Alan Lawson: Oh I went in for recruiting. In fact in a way that was one of the troubles. Probably if I'd stuck to ACT and left ETU the course of my career might have changed. No I was very active in recruiting and ETU even when I went to Bairds. I even recruited some people to Baird's but that was much more difficult, some of the engineers there had come from research labs and they didn't want to know.
Arthur Graham: What positions have you held in the ACTT.
Alan Lawson: Apart from General Council and being on the EC for a time I was the treasurer for a year and it was a very unhappy year, our funds weren't great. As far as figures are concerned I know 2 and 2 make 4 but after that it become highly complicated. I din't enjoy it at all, not at all. I served on the general council right up to the war years, and during the war I was the unofficial forces' representative, I used to appear at council meetings in my uniform, against king's or queen's regulations, whatever they were in those days.
Arthur Graham: What about after the war.
Alan Lawson: When I went to the BBC, I started recruiting there and things became very difficult. I was warned off by management. There would by no recognition by ACT, only the staff organisation would be recognised, but I did persist a bit but ultimately the membership dropped off because they were getting nothing back from ACTT. The management had just dug their feels in and there was no possibility of recognition. This I think, partly my ACTT activity, and partly I'd been to Spain, did inhibit my progress, because after I'd been there 2 years, 3 years, I asked about establishment, this was when a member of the temporary staff becomes established staff and it gives you pension rights, and Philip Dalty said it's very difficult you know, you were in Spain, to which I did point out we had fought a bloody war. It took to get established it took me, and again George intervened ultimately, about 15 years before I got established.
Arthur Graham: What do you think is the future of the ACTT in the film and television industry?
Alan Lawson: Something which is beyond the control of ACTT is the present Government attitude to unions, but all things being equal I don’t see why ACTT hasn't got a very important role to play, given all things being equal, but are they equal.
Arthur Graham: Do you think the Association has played a useful role in shaping the film and television industry.
Alan Lawson: No doubt about that. It has made mistakes probably, who hasn't made mistakes, I've made mistakes, but that 's the price one pays for being human. I think they've place a very necessary role and a very useful role.
Arthur Graham: To come to a totally different subject, we've covered you life as a technician and the different aspects of the film industry, what sort of social life did you have as a film technician, what was life like in general.
Alan Lawson: I suppose in the first period, when I was at the Bush, I didn't have much social life at all. It was backwards and forwards to the studio. And I was very much younger than Stephen Day in the camera department and Mounteney who could be very aloof. Stephen Day

was much older than I was so there was no real companionship between Stephen, Ching and myself. Sid Bonnett if you like was a father figure to me. But when I moved to Stolls, it was a complete change, there was Jerry Gibbs, myself Maurice Johns, Ted Lloyd, and Desmond Dickinson, we became very close and we went to a lot of films together. I think Dick and I stuck together much more than the others. Dick and I would go and see usually 2 films, probably 3 films a week. Often that was down on my father's, my father would give me his card. I got to know the West End managers, I would ask to see them and present Dad's card and in we'd go on the nod. On one night we did 3 films in one night finishing up at the Empire for the late night show. My social life was spent mostly seeing films with Desmond Dickinson, or Gerry Gibbs, or Ted Cham. I didn't do much mixing in my own locality at all. Then when ACT came along my social life was spent up in the ACT's general councils, and I've a feeling we used to do an awful lot of meetings.

Arthur Graham: What is your impression of the general type of people who were film technician's in those days.

Alan Lawson: In a single word they were middle class. There were the odd ones who broke the mould, I suppose George Provis would be one, but mainly they were middle class people. I think there might have been the odd sound engineer who had broken through from being an electrician of some kind. I suppose the equivalent of an electronic electrician, had broken through and become a sound recordist but on the whole they were middle class.

Arthur Graham: You've mentioned your father several times, he was connected with the film business, have you any recollection of the stories he told you of the days before you ever entered.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes. He started in the film business as the advertising director, publicity director, something like that of Film Booking Offices, this was a company, a renting company run by the Claverings, and the Claverings funnily enough built two entertainment houses at Golders Green. One was the Golders Green Empire which is now used by the BBC for concert night, light music there. The other was the Ionic Cinema, the Ionic Cinema was built to take the overflow from the Hippodrome, it was a very sensible idea. That was the Claverings. He left Film Bookings Office and I think he went to United Artists for a very short period and after United Artists he went to Universal when the incredible character James B Bryson was the head of Universal operation here in Wardour St. He was an American and he brought over Phantom of the Opera with Lon Chaney in it, and some how or other my father had engineered a territorial regiment who were looking for recruits to escort the film in an armoured car from Southampton. Somebody squeaked a merry old hell about that, the army being roped into a publicity stunt. But my father was with Universal for quite some time and then he moved back to United Artists where he was the director of publicity. He remained there until just before the beginning of the war when they discovered he was 75 and they shot him out.

Arthur Graham: He passed stuff onto you. Are you passing any of your experiences onto another generation.

Alan Lawson: I did pass some onto my son who I hoped who would follow and be a film cameraman but he decided he'd like to be a sound engineer and it so happened I met Marcus Cooper who I'd know for some time and I asked him if he had room for a boy in the sound department. So he saw my son and he took him on. He was in the sound department. After a year he rang me up and said I'd like to talk to you about young Tony. So I went to see him. He said I haven't the heart to tell him, he won't be a sound engineer. He'd be a very good knob twiddler,

doesn't he want to do that. I said I'm sure he doesn't want to do that. So he said will you tell him. So I had the job of saying to Anthony, do you want to be a knob twiddler or do you want to be a sound technician. So I told him what Marcus had said. No I don't want to do that, I want to be a proper technician. I said then how would you like to go into the editing side because Marcus had a, her name was I think Simpson, her husband was one of the senior technicians at Kays, anyway mother Simpson took Anthony under her wing and he blossomed from that. Then eventually he said he thought he'd got as far as he could go there and I happened to bump into Bert Eggleton of A, a partner of Reg Hughes. Bert said have you got a family. I said yes. He said I wouldn't mind first refusal on any of them. I said as a matter of fact my son wants to move. He said send him to see me. He went to see Reg, or Bert Eggleton, Bert Eggleton took him in and then Anthony was working with Teddy Damos as an assistant to the editor. After a year and a half he moved to Worldwide. He then decided he wanted feature film experience, I was absolutely terrified by that but you can't push people off. So off he went and he got a job on a Boulting film funnily enough, Rotten to the Core, he was assistant editor, he worked on that. He gradually worked his way up. He is now a fully fledged editor, now in the top flight which is very satisfying and very nice. My daughter had no ambition at all. She worked for Athos as an assistant editor. She was given a chance to become and editor but she didn't want to be an editor, she wanted to remain an assistant editor. Now she's just a mum.

Arthur Graham: Which particular film or TV program gave you the most satisfaction and why?

Alan Lawson: I suppose the very first film I lit it certainly looked very good, I was very pleased with that but it was a flash in the pan. But I got enormous satisfaction from working with Henry Moore. I think, I learned to appreciate is the word, I learned to understand what Henry Moore was up to and it was a great pleasure to work with him and John Reed on the film. We did work as a team which is always very pleasant.

Arthur Graham: If you could start your career again would you change course and if so why.

Alan Lawson: This is a very difficult question to answer because I'm one of those people who never look back. Not really. What has happened has happened and that's it, there's nothing you can do about it. I suppose I would loved to have been like Freddie Young. That would have given me enormous satisfaction. The kind of respect everybody has for him. For his technical achievements, remarkable man.

Arthur Graham: Thank you Alan for a very successful interview.