BILLY WILLIAMS

Lighting cameraman

Interviewer John Taylor, with Alan Lawson, recorded on 20 November 1991

John Taylor: The usual thing is you start off with the day you were born

Billy Williams: 3rd June 1929,Walthamstowe, Essex. And my earliest memories of cinema are through my father and I would like to talk about him to begin with, because he was born in 1895 and in 1910, his name was Billie Williams, B-I-l-l-i-e whereas I'm B-I-l-l-y. In 1910 he went to work as an apprentice at a film studio in Walthamstowe, a glass studio, I believe it was Wood St, Walthamstowe, but I'm not absolutely sure about that. And the entrepreneur who was the cameraman, chief cook and bottle washer was a man called Thomas James Gobbett. And there were two brothers, Gobbett, but I don't' remember the name of the other ones, but I remember my father always talking about Thomas James Gobbett because he was his tutor. And in those days the cinematographer almost did everything from the point of actually perforating the film stock, setting up the camera, loading the magazines, photographing the subject matter, developing the film, printing the film and showing the film in the projector to the public. Because in those days most of the subjects were quite short. But my father started there as an apprentice and of course being made of glass, they were very dependant on daylight. But they did have some arc lights, I believe they were called **Kliegel** arc lights which they used to supplement the daylight. And of course they drew the silk curtains to soften the harsh light. Now I don't know anyone else who ever worked in this studio but my father worked there from about 1910 until he went into the navy in the First World War, and I think it was 1915.

And he went into the navy as an electrical wireman but later became a cinematographer. And he says there were only two cinematographers in the navy at that time which I'm rather surprised at. I would have thought there were more, but he said there were only two, and the other one was Lord Curzon. I'm not absolutely sure if this is correct, I'm not

sure if you know as far back as that, but one of the notable things that my father did was to film the surrender of the German fleet at Scarpa Flow, and this is archival material. And I got a tremendous thrill a few years ago when there was a BBC programme called Scarpa Flow, the history of the naval base and there were shots of these war ships coming in to surrender, and they seemed to go on forever with these magnificent looking ships coming in line after line to surrender. I got a tremendous thrill, I thought some of those shots must be my father's. Well after the war he became very much.

John Taylor: Do you have any idea of what kind of equipment he was using at that time.

Billy Williams: I have a very old negative somewhere which has become mislaid unfortunately of him with a handcranked movie camera which was either a Moy or a Williamson.

Alan Lawson: Probably a Williamson.

Billy Williams: Because he did own both of those cameras and many other makes, of course because in those days once you'd become a cameraman you had to have your own equipment. Because the rental business hardly existed and all the freelance cameramen had their own equipment. And of course you looked after a camera like you looked after a baby, because without it you wouldn't be working. So from a very early age I remember cameras being around the house and on the dining room table in bits and pieces and being maintained and lenses being scaled and tests being shot. Those are my earliest memories of film.

But to go back to my father, in the 20s he became very much a documentary and assignment expedition cameraman, mainly shooting on exteriors. And a couple of his notable achievements was in 1928 he went to Africa for 12 months and filmed the Cape Town to Cairo expedition for Chevrolet, which was an endurance test, with two saloons and a lorry. They went from Cape Town to Cairo and then finally on to Gottenberg I think it was in Sweden. And this was one of the early forms of advertising, exceptthe film was about 14 reels I think. I would love to see it. I know he made it for the **Jo Hanley** Picture Corporation of Chicago. I don't know if they still exist. Being General Motors I suspect that it might be in their archives and it would be lovely to see that one day. And then later on in the 20s, he moved

into sound films, the late 20s and did a couple of films with GB Samuelson, who is Sydney Samuelson's, Michael and David's father. So we have a very close, long standing relationship with the Samuelson family. GB Samuelson was a director my father photographed a couple of films for him.

Al: Do you know where they were made

Billy Williams: I think they were made in Isleworth. *Wigan Express* was the name of one of them, but I can't remember the name of the other. But they were in the late 20s.

Al: That would be at Worton Hall

Billy Williams: Worton Hall I think. Years later my father worked at BIP and he tells a story about a man I never knew called Stapleton whom I think must have been the studio manager. And my father arrived to do I don't know how many days work, and this man Stapleton came up and handed him the film stock for the day and he gave him Agfa film. And my father said but I use Kodak. And a great row developed, I have a feeling that this guy Stapleton was well known for telling people what they should do. You remember.

Al: Yes.

Billy Williams: Then another milestone in my father's career, he went back to Africa in 1935 to do a film called *Safari* with a man called MA Wetherell who was a naturalist, well known naturalist of the day, and it was film of wild animals, big game hunting, that sort of thing. And he was the first man to take a film camera to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro which was a handcranked Debrie and filmed from the summit and it was quite a headline in the trade press, and it even got into the *Sunday Express* of the day, as the man who got to the highest mountain in Africa. It's not a great physical achievement, but I think he was the first one to film from the summit. I know he was. Then later after that he bought a Bell and Howell, a Model H Bell and Howell with a chap called Norman Leavers of Leavers Rich, and they went to Ceylon to photograph a film called *Tea Leaves In The Wind* with Nils Asther. That was 1937

Billy Williams: Was that a feature

Billy Williams: Yes, it was a feature film. He didn't do many features. He was more documentary and newsreel of

course, he used to film the Grand National every year and the Cup Final and tell stories of how the franchise used to work out in those days, that Paramount or Movietone or Pathe would have the rights and everybody else would try and smuggle the camera in and sneak it.

And he used to film the big fights too. I remember him telling a story, which if you've ever interviewed Morton Lewis he might tell you another side of the story, because he was engaged to film a world title fight, with Morton Lewis's father, Kid Lewis. And as on those occasions they usually employed several cameramen, well the man who was promoting this was a man called Jones and he was known as Knocker Jones because he never paid anybody. And so when the day came to this big fight, the only cameraman who turned up ever hopeful of getting paid for a day was my father so he was there photographing the fight on his own. He was hand cranking of course and reached the point where he had to reload the camera, and that was the point, whilst he was reloading the camera, that the knockout occurred

John Taylor: Inevitably

Billy Williams: So he hadn't got it you see and there was no other camera turning. So the next day they had to restage this whole thing somewhere, because they had to have the knockout. So they staged it. And of course it was phoney. And they put this thing out and people complained this wasn't, it didn't work, and they wanted their money back because they hadn't seen the real knockout. Well Morton Lewis tells a different story, that my father got so excited about the fight that he stopped turning. But I can really can't believe that, because it was something you would never do, was to stop turning. I know Morton has written a book, I don't know if its been published, but that story may well be in Morton's book from the other side. So my father had a very long career from 1910 and he died in 1965. And I have a photograph actually of when I was about 7 with this Model H Vinten that he bought which was really a massive investment in those days. But he always had a camera. I can well remember a handcranked wooden 400 ft Parvo, French camera

Al: It was a Debrie actually.

Billy Williams: A Debrie Parvo, yes. And a clockwork De Vry which took 100 ft spools and the Eyemo of course. But then

he was one of the first people in this country to get an Arriflex.

Al: Pre-war

Billy Williams: No, it was about 1942 or 43. Because I started working with him, I left school at 14, it was 1943 during the war, and he bought this Arriflex, mirror shuttered Arriflex, I think it was the 1A with 120 degree shutter, and he bought it from an American serviceman, who had come back from Germany with this camera. I remember the lenses, there was 28mm Schneider, a 35-50-85 Zeiss, and some 200 ft magazines. And I don't thing anybody else had an Arriflex at that time in this country.

Al: What date was that

Billy Williams: He either bought it in 1942 or 1943, because I remember when I started with him using this camera. And of course it was quite extraordinary, it was the first mirror shuttered camera, and it stayed that way for many years. And it wasn't until they bought out a later model which enlarged the shutter from 120 to 170 degrees, to give you a little bit more exposure. But the movement remained very much the same. And so having left school at 14 I worked as my father's assistant for 4 years.

John Taylor: How much did he pay you.

Billy Williams: The first job that I got I was paid 30 shillings, £1.50 in today's money a week. And it was a film for the Admiralty, it was a training film about the Royal Naval Air Service. And we travelled to various stations, and filmed pilots at work flying, maintenance of aircraft, during the war years of course. I remember doing 2 or 3 films at that time involving travelling around to places like that and staying in the officers mess, and learning how to play snooker on a full sized table which was a tremendous experience. But he was a hard task master, I suppose fathers do expect rather more of their off spring than others and he would always insist that the equipment was maintained impeccably and watched over and cleaned and everything had to be very orderly. And at 14 this came a bit hard because I didn't really know what I wanted to do at that time. I was too young. But 2 or 3 years later I really began to appreciate much more what I was doing.

And one of the most memorable experiences was in 1946 when I was 17. He got a job with the Colonial Film Unit. A chap called Bill Sellers was the producer then. And it was just after the war of course and we still had a lot of colonies. And my father went back to East Africa where he had been twice before, Kenya and Uganda. And I went as his assistant, and we took the Arriflex camera. And we were gone for 8 months. I went out on a troop ship through the Suez Canal, landed at Mombassa, and drove up from there in some old Humber, well they weren't old, in their time I suppose they were just vehicles which had been used during the war, 4 wheel drive vehicles. And I remember learning to drive there, driving in the mud in these wonderful old 4 wheel drive vehicles, it was exciting.

We got to Nairobi, sorted ourselves out, started filming. And we made films like *Spinning And Weaving, Road Building* and *Animal Husbandry*. They were shot on 35. And then the negative came back to London. And we used to ship the negative back and put in food supplies, because you could get tinned food in Kenya that was rationed in England. So we used to make up the boxes with food for the family. And then later on these films would be reduced to 16mm and shown on mobile vans throughout the colonies. So I spent 8 months there. At that time Bob Paynter who was also working for the Colonial Film Unit, went to West Africa, and Bob has been a friend of mine since those days, and our paths have crossed many times along the way, because our careers seemed to have developed almost along parallel lines.

Al: Sydney Samuelson was there as well.

Billy Williams: Sidney was there afterwards. The year I went into the RAF, I went into the RAF in 1947, and that year Sidney joined my father as an assistant and they went back to a Kenya and Tanganyika with George Noble directing.

John Taylor: That must have been an experience.

Billy Williams: And Geoff Hermges whom I met the other day at our British Transport reunion told a story which I had heard Sydney tell once before, but Geoff verified it which was very amusing actually. My father never told me, but he and George Noble apparently, they'd got these vehicles, these 4 wheel drive vehicles. And they were staying in a place called **Arusha** near the foot of Mount Kilmanjaro, and a lot of visitors used to come to see the mountain and

climb the mountain. And my father and George Noble were transporting these people from the hotel to the base of the mountain. And Geoff Hermges turned up there one day and the hotel manager said Billie Williams and George Noble are here and they've been jolly helpful helping us with out tours to climb the mountain. And apparently they were using the Colonial Film Unit vehicles and charging people to taxi them to and fro. My father never told me that story.

John Taylor: If George Noble was involved with it you can be certain it was crooked. He was an amazing man. They worked together did they.

Billy Williams: Yes. I never knew George Noble because at that time I was in the RAF. But to go back to when I came back from Kenya which was in 1947, I can remember we flew from Nairobi in one of those little planes that seem to stop off at all the little towns up the Nile, you know you fly for a couple of hours, and then you stop down. I remember staying overnight in Khartoum. And then we got to Cairo and stayed a night, was it Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo. And it was a very formal place and you couldn't eat in the restaurant unless you had a jacket and tie and I didn't have a jacket and tie. So I was put in a little side room to have dinner.

And the next day, we had to leave on a Sunderland flying boat which was a 4 engine boat which took off on the Nile. And my father had all this camera equipment you see, which was his own property, and when it came to loading up the pilot said we can't take all this camera equipment because the plane's full, we've got a full load. And my father would never be separated from his cameras, he said I'm not travelling without this equipment, this goes everywhere with me. So the pilot somewhat reluctantly agreed to load all this equipment. And I remember when we took off on the river, and you see all these lights flashing by on the shore, that it seemed to take about half an hour before the place actually left the water. I thought oh dear, we're overloaded, we're never going to make it, it's all this camera gear. Because eventually we did take off and we refuelled in Malta, and then we landed in Poole Harbour.

And then not long after that, I was called up for National Service in 1947, and I went into the RAF and did my national service at Padgate, square bashing, and then was fortunate to get into the photographic section and was

stationed at a place called Noonham Park which was a subsidiary of Benson, in Oxfordshire, where they used to do the processing of the aerial survey photography. So I was involved in map making and printing and taking the occasional photograph. I didn't actually do any flying. I met a chap there called John **Jokenson**, and Archie Ludsky who is a film editor, John Jokenson is a still photographer now.

When I was demobbed in 1949, hadn't got a job, I was 20 of course, and I decided I would really like to become a little more independent of my father and try and find my own work and looking for a job I went to a place in Petit France where British Transport Films had just set up an office. And John Jokenson and I both went along there looking for a job as assistant cameramen. Edgar Anstey, of course, was the producer, and a chap called Ian Ferguson was the production manager. I went along to be interviewed by Ian Ferguson who said they hadn't got any work at the moment but they'd just started this film unit and if anything cropped up they'd give me a call.

Well a couple of weeks later, I got a call could I go to Hull to work as second assistant cameraman on a film called *Berth 24*, which Jack Holmes was photographing, and Ron Craigen was photographing, Jack Holmes was directing, Ron Craigen was photographing, and Jimmy Ritchie was doing second unit, second camera. Ron Bicker was the camera operator and Peter Bucknall was the first assistant. I'm not telling this against Peter Bucknall but when I got up there, apparently Peter Bucknall hadn't got an awful lot of experience with focus and they asked me to take over the focus on this unit. So that instead of just staying there a few days, I sort of stayed until the film was finished. Some one else I met at that time was Jim Garrett, one of the assistant directors. And the production manager was John **Godio**. Years later I worked again with Peter Bucknall. We told stories of Hull docks. The film was very much about the loading and unloading of the shipping and the director was Jack Holmes. Well those few days work eventually became an engagement for 6 years.

John Taylor: Was it, as long as that.

Billy Williams: And the office moved from Petit France to Saville Row, next to the police station. And there were two permanent staff cameramen, Ron Craigen and Jimmy Ritchie.

And then there would be people coming in on special engagements if they wanted someone else like Reg Hughes, Michael Currer-Briggs, Peter Hennessey, John Page. All documentary cameramen. And there was another assistant who had come over from London Transport Film Unit called David Watkin. And then shortly after that Bob Paynter joined the company. So there were 3 assistant cameramen and then a fourth came called Cyril Morehead who later went on to the BBC. Both Watkin and Paynter and I, our careers have kind of developed along the same lines in that we spent several years in documentaries and then went to commercials and then went to features. So I spent 6 years there working as an assistant working on films about transportation, railways, docks, inland waterways, road transport, mainly with Jimmy Ritchie who was a wonderful cameraman. Most of the films were in black and white and I suppose that I learned as much from Jimmy Ritchie as I did from my father. But by that time I was a little older and was able to appreciate much more what was happening. I understood, I was beginning to understand lighting and composition and film technique more, being in my early 20s. And I owe a tremendous debt to Jimmy Ritchie. He was really a creative, artistic cameraman. And he very sadly died 2 or 3 years ago having only just retired. And I worked with you for a short time on a job in Scotland. John Taylor: Were you on that

Billy Williams: I came up for a short period. Because I think Bob Paynter was the assistant on that. With Ron Craigen

John Taylor: And Jim Garrett. It was one of the nicest locations I've ever been on. We were shooting on Technicolor monopack and you might remember the speed of it but was abut BS8-2

Billy Williams: It would have been more than that, it would have been either 25 or 50. It was the first single strip colour stock. I think we used it first in about 1951, something like that, because most of our work was in black and white and we had 3 Newman Sinclair cameras, British Transport Films didn't have any Arriflexes unfortunately. We had Newman Sinclairs with Cook lenses,

Al: With mirrored shutters

Billy Williams: Later with mirrored shutters. The early ones didn't have mirrored shutters. They had the single

lens slide over and you used to look through the prism from the side focus. And it was later on, probably around 1953 or something that they brought out a turret with 3 lenses on and then they brought out a mirrored shutter. It was never as good as the Arriflex I'm afraid

John Taylor: It was quite strange really that unit, in its own way it was unique. Because it wasn't all that efficient in some ways, but somehow it seemed to work and it looked after people very well. Did you find that.

Billy Williams: Yes. Well it was continuity of employment of course, which there wasn't so much about in those days.

John Taylor: And it is important.

Billy Williams: Yes in that, I remember when I left, as an assistant cameraman I was getting £8.50 a week, no £11, it went up to £11. This was in 1955, I left in 1955 and they were very important formative years for me.

John Taylor: I think that for everyone, especially for young people working there, I mean that continuity of employment and working with people like Jimmy Ritchie. It was a very good training ground.

Al: Continuity is vital really.

Billy Williams: And some of our colour work was done on 16mm Kodachrome. And it is remarkable how good the quality was in the early 50s and some of those films were later blown up to 35 and showed in the cinema as supporting features.

John Taylor: Yes. And Technicolor blew them up

Billy Williams: Yes. And there were 2 or 3 jobs done in 3 strip Technicolor which I never worked on, I never worked on any of the 3 strip jobs, but they were quite prestigious films with large budget.

John Taylor: Well Technicolor supplied the crew didn't they. They had the Technicolor technicians. But I've always thought of Transport as very important training ground for people like yourself and Jim Garrett in various fields. Garrett's early training there must have stood him in good stead through all the rest of his whatever it is. No in

some ways it was a strange unit, things were very slow and films took years to make

Billy Williams: They took a long time to finish.

John Taylor: But at the same time, it was a kind of school for people

Billy Williams: It was probably the last of the great documentary film units, the last one.

John Taylor: That and Shell and the Coal Board but Transport in the field was the one.

Billy Williams: One of the most memorable experiences I can recall was with Jimmy Ritchie, it would have been in the mid 50s, doing a film called *The Elizabethan* which was a steam train which went non stop from Kings Cross to Edinburgh. And it was like the crack locomotive and we made a film about it which has been shown many times on television, very successful film, in black and white. And I remember being on the footplate of the Elizabethan with a hand-held Newman Sinclair travelling at 100 mph, with the fireman shovelling the coal into the furnace and the heat coming out and the platform bucking like a bronco and this tremendous noise and wind. I mean it was absolutely thrilling to be there filming that, fighting your way back through a narrow corridor alongside the tender to get from the locomotive back to the passenger compartment where there was a relief crew. They always had two crews on the train, it was non stop, very fast.

John Taylor: Which other films did you work on there do you remember

Billy Williams: At Transport. There was *Ocean Terminal* which was set in Southampton and it was a drama documentary with one or two actors and actresses cast as well as the people who worked in the port. It was a little story running parallel to the work of the tugboat captain who took the Queen Elizabeth out, to get her clear of Southampton water, it was the story of the toings and froings of the great ocean liners. I remember one occasion we were on this tug with the captain, Captain Curly, he was one our principle characters in the film, and it was called the Calshot this tug, and we had a camera, two cameras on board and the tugboat was taking the Queen Elizabeth out

until she was clear to go under he own steam, you see. Well the captain of the Queen Elizabeth was being very co-operative and helping us to get our shots. And we were waiting for the right light and the clouds and we were running round in circles round this liner and getting all the angles we wanted, you see. And the liner was just moving very slowly and waiting for us to finish. And then eventually came over the radio from the captain of the Queen Elizabeth, to us on the Calshot, to say well if you've finished your filming may we now proceed on our way to America. Typical of film units, once you start filming, everybody else's priorities are forgotten.

Also the waterways with Rod Baxter, I did a couple of films on the waterways which Rod Baxter directing, Jimmy Ritchie photographing called *Here Come The Boats* and *Inland Waterways*, and a chap Williams, a composer wrote some very nice music for that.

Al: Edward

Billy Williams: Yes Edward Williams. Another Williams. And there was another film about moving a farm by train.

John Taylor: I was on that as well.

Billy Williams: And a film in Scotland called *The Wild Highlands*, a 16mm film.

John Taylor: *The Wild Highlands* was 35mm surely.

Billy Williams: No, 16mm Kodachrome

John Taylor: Was it really. Because the quality, the finished quality.

Billy Williams: That was 16mm Kodachrome, because I went back there about a month ago to shoot a commercial and I hadn't been to that part of the world since the 50s and I thought wow isn't this magnificent country and wonderful colours.

John Taylor: The quality of *Wild Highlands* it's unbelievable

Billy Williams: We also went and did a film in the Channel Islands on 16mm, I forget what that film was called.

John Taylor: On that moving a farm were you up in Yorkshire.

Billy Williams: Yes.

John Taylor: I was there as well. It snowed, they loaded a whole farm onto one train, didn't they.

Billy Williams: That's right, all the animals.

John Taylor: And while we were doing it, it really snowed and we had lights, I can remember people with piles of snow on top of their head it was snowing so fast, and I went into the local pub and bought two bottles of rum. And went around and gave everybody drinks.

Billy Williams: You directed that, John.

John Taylor: No, I was sent up as associate producer for some reason.

Billy Williams: Who directed it

John Taylor: Le Tour

Billy Williams: Charles

John Taylor: His daughter is Le Tour the actress. And you didn't come on the train.

Billy Williams: Yes I did.

John Taylor: We were all in a carriage together with no heating. Do you remember this. Should I go on. We were stuck on the end of this big silly train and Frank Bryce the electrician had paraffin lamps which they used when they couldn't get electricity.

Billy Williams: Tilly lamps

John Taylor: A kind of big tilly lamps. And we bought one into the carriage we were in. It was the middle of winter and no heating in this bloody place at all. And we kept warm during the night. We were supposed to be in Sussex by 6 o'clock in the morning. And at 10 o'clock in the morning, we had no food, nothing to drink. We got somewhere down

into London and John Page put his head out the window and was hit in the eye by a lump of coal.

Billy Williams: I remember that. I was on the train when that happened.

John Taylor: And we had to stop somewhere and put him off for an ambulance. And we finally got down to Sussex about 6 o'clock in the evening, it was pitch dark and we started to unload.

Billy Williams: And we had these tilly lamps didn't we.

John Taylor: Yes,

Billy Williams: To provide illumination.

John Taylor: It was quite an occasion that

Billy Williams: What was it called, *Moving Farm*

John Taylor: I think it was *Moving A Farm* or something like that. The whole farm was moved, cattle, tractors, chickens, furniture the lot, in a whole train load. It was one I remember vividly. It froze solidly and we were in a guest house up there which had no heating.

Al: It must have been one of those great winters

Billy Williams: It was quite an experience, Alan. And there were a number of xxx cameramen on it, John Page, and Reg Hughes,

John Taylor: Were you photographing

Billy Williams: No, I was assistant.

John Taylor: I can't remember who else was on it. Quite a few of those Transport films had memorable occasions on them didn't they.

Al: It seems an awful long time that they kept you as an assistant.

Billy Williams: Yes.

Al: Was that normal.

Billy Williams: I was 20 when I joined the company and I was 26 when I left. About 5½ years. And it was a little bit like the civil service in that you had a grade which determined your salary structure and you could only get so much money as an assistant, you couldn't get any more, being part of the railways it was very strictly controlled. So we didn't earn a lot of money but of course it was regular. And there were four assistants there, and just occasionally I would be allowed to shoot something. But by the time I was 24 or 25 I was becoming a little more ambitious to photograph something of my own.

And the very first thing I did, it was whilst I was at Transport I got some time off and permission to photograph an appeals films for poliomyelitis victims. And the director was a chap called Guy Brenton and the film was called *Birthday* and it was in black and white and it was my first attempt at lighting which was pretty awful. But it gave me a taste of having the responsibility of photographing. And I then began to feel well I really want to get on to doing something on my own. But being at Transport there really wasn't the opportunity to get promotion because there were two regular cameramen, Jim Ritchie and Ron Craigen, and if they wanted somebody else rather than promote from inside they'd bring in Reg Hughes or Michael Currer-Briggs in from outside and give them the job. And I got a bit frustrated with this.

So I was looking for an opportunity to leave and become a cameraman, and it was Michael Clark, a director called Michael Clark who eventually gave me the chance. And he had a film to do for Film Centre, sponsored by Iraq Petroleum to shot in Europe, and I think it was called *The World And Ourselves*. And he offered me this job to photograph the film and I thought this is my big opportunity. But I must have a camera, I was following in my father's tradition. And so I bought an Arriflex with a 28 Schneider and a set of Cooks. And I spent absolutely all my savings on this camera.

Al: Was it a new one

Billy Williams: It was brand new. It was an Arriflex 1 B I think it was and I bought this lovely camera and tripod and batteries and everything and went off to Europe. Went all round Europe shooting this film for the oil company with

Michael Clark. Alan Hewison was my assistant, and Ralph Sheldon was the assistant director. And I was doing jolly well with this camera because I used to get about £20 a week for it you see. And the whole lot cost about £1,000, so this was a jolly good return. Well that all worked out jolly well.

And I was offered another job through Film Centre to go out to Iraq. And I went to Baghdad and worked there under John Shearman who was the producer of this company, I think it was under the auspices of Iraq Petroleum, but he was the producer based in Baghdad and he'd set up a film company and brought out several English technicians, directors and cameramen to form like a permanent unit a little bit on the lines of British Transport. Because I remember one or two people there at the time, there was a John Armstrong, and a chap called Peter Kelly who was a cameraman, and John Armstrong was a director. And I was there for about 4 months during the summer of, I think it was 1955, it was unbelievably hot.

John Taylor: How did you get on, you didn't work all day.

Billy Williams: Oh yes, we did. I was there from August till about November. And of course August was really a hot month,

John Taylor: Because it's one of the very hot places

Billy Williams: We went, we started in Baghdad and then we used to go out to the historical sites like Babylon and Niniver and Mosle, Basfera, wonderful, places which are so familiar now since the war. And the film was called *Rivers Of Time*. And it was the cultural history of Mesopotamia as it was then known. And we went to many of the biblical sites. And it was a tremendous experience going to places like that.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Al: We were talking about *Rivers Of Time*

Billy Williams: Yes, I was talking about the extreme heat that we worked in in the summer in Iraq. There was air conditioning in those days in some of the offices and hotels, but not much. But you wouldn't find many people on the streets in the middle of the day.

John Taylor: Did you work through the day

Billy Williams: Yes. We did, we didn't have a siesta. We would have a break for lunch of about an hour and then we'd go out say about 2 o'clock and we'd work until it got dark. And this is in the desert

John Taylor: This is 125

Al: What did you do with the stock

Billy Williams: The stock was amazing, I mean we didn't really have many problems. We used to put silica gel, these little sacs of silica gel to absorb the dampness. I think just once in a while we'd have a little bit of trouble

Al: A marking

Billy Williams: No a sort of granularity which was associated with condensation. But of course you didn't known anything about this until sometime afterwards because the film had to be flown back to London to be processed.

John Taylor: There was tropical packing as well, do you remember

Billy Williams: That's right.

John Taylor: There was the film tin and then there was a square tin which was sealed with solder and you had to rip it open to, I don't know how effective that was, but I remember that went on quite a while, that tropical packing.

Billy Williams: The hottest place I ever went to was Basfera in August because there is such high humidity there.

Al: It's nothing above sea level isn't it.

Billy Williams: I must say I've worked in hot places since then and I don't mind working in extreme heat but I've worked in extreme cold recently which I'll come to later on. I think the cameraman, most of us who work in films when we travel the world and have to be prepared to work in the most extreme conditions as part of the job. You get used to it, don't you, you accept it.

Al: I suppose so, when you're young

Billy Williams: But to continue the period when I was a documentary cameraman, another film I did was called *European Tapestry* and it was for Peter Bucknall and Bert Eggleton. And they sent me to Holland and there was four of us on the crew, it was a French director whose name I can't remember. A chap called, Michael Dryhurst was the assistant director. And Harvey Harrison was my assistant. And this film was for BOAC to encourage people to travel, mainly for the American market. And we went to Holland and we introduced ourselves to the kind of tourist office in Amsterdam and all we had was a letter from BOAC saying we were a film unit and could they give us every possible assistance. So they pointed us in the right direction, like the Wraxs Museum.

Another museum where they said there was a Van Gogh exhibition on it at Arnheim, where the parachute drop during the war, and they said there is the biggest collection of Van Goghs there. And we went to this very modern museum called the Krolle Muller at Arnheim. And the four of us turned up there, And we met the lady curator and just introduced ourselves, we had no credentials at all really. We just turned up and said we're an English film unit, do you mind if we film the paintings. The lady was very helpful, she said yes, just wander around. The public were there, there was no security at all, no security, just one or two people, one or two security guards, but no barriers, no electronic devises. And there were the most well known of, the most priceless of Van Goghs paintings. And this would have been around 1956, 1957, somewhere around there.

We wandered around filming. And come about 5 o'clock the public started to leave and we stayed on. We thought we will get just one or two more shots without the public, one

or two tracking shots, build up the story. And about 6 o'clock the light was going so we thought we'd leave. There was no one there. And we called and we couldn't find anybody. And in fact everybody had gone and we were locked in. So we wandered back into the office where we met the lady curator, we took a key off the wall and we opened the front door and let ourselves out, without the paintings and put the key under the door and left. We never heard another word. About 5 years ago I was working in Spain with film with Peter Yates, and Ginger Gemmell was doing the second camera for me and he was just about to get married to a Dutch lady called Anna from Amsterdam. And I told this story. And she said oh yes, I've heard that story before. I said I don't think you could have done because there were only four of us there. She said oh yes it was in the papers, a great scandal just after, when they discovered what had happened.

John Taylor: Things were much easier in those days

Billy Williams: They were

John Taylor: If you were a film unit you could walk in and say we're a film unit and they were pleased to see you.

Billy Williams: Yes. So I did things for Film Producers Guild at Merton Park which was, Merton Park was quite a memorable place for me because when I was a few months old I went to live in Morden which is only a could of miles from Merton Park. And he was often working there. And in fact I appeared in an advertising film when I was about 2 or 3 with a dog which was shot at Merton Park and photographed by my own father. One of the earliest forms of advertising.

John Taylor: Was it your father's dog, the Airedale

Billy Williams: You remember the Airedale.

John Taylor: Yes. Well, I was your father's assistant in a studio in London, it wasn't Marylebone but it was one like Marylebone but I don't know which one it was. And I used to have to take the dog out for a walk during the day

Billy Williams: We had this Airedale from when I was a few months old and he lived for 10 years and he was called Boy, that was the name of the dog.

John Taylor: Yes, I remember him vividly, wandering along Marylebone High Rd with a large Airedale dog. In those days they didn't worry about making messes on pavements. Also I think it was your father's camera he was using, it was in a small studio, but where and how I don't know

Billy Williams: In Marylebone in the church

John Taylor: No, it wasn't Marylebone, it was another one just like Marylebone which was quite close to there.

Al: I worked with you on a schools thing before the war in 1939 and that was in Marylebone but it wasn't the church place.

John Taylor: Yes it was. Yes. Was it a recreation of a Victorian schoolroom

Al: I can't remember

John Taylor: It was, it was 1938, it was the 50th anniversary of the LCC and sorry to ramble on

Billy Williams: It was during this period in the mid 50s that I met my wife, Ann, who was a nurse at that time and we got married in 1957 and we've been married 34 years now. We have four daughters and the eldest daughter Claire went to the National Film School for 4 years and graduated as a director with a very strong visual sense. And later when she left the school she became a cinematographer, so she is third generation camera person.

John Taylor: I wonder if there are any other 3rd generations, I doubt it really.

Al: I've a third generation. My father was in the business, I was in the business, my son is in the business, his son is in the business.

Billy Williams: It does tend to run in the family.

John Taylor: What was your father then

Al: He was director of publicity at United Artists, before the war. When they found out how old he was, he got made redundant.

Billy Williams: Your father was not a cameraman. I don't know if there are 3 generations of camera people.

Al: No.

John Taylor: What other documentaries did you do at that time.

Billy Williams: Quite a few industrials for the Film Producers Guild out of Merton Park. I can't remember

John Taylor: Who were you working with down there

Billy Williams: Thumwood, do you remember Thumwood.

Al: He was the senior cameraman.

Billy Williams: I have problems remember the directors of those films because some of them were quite short

John Taylor: Your memory is very good on the whole

Billy Williams: About that time I was becoming more interested in the feature side of the industry. And my great idols were Jack Cardiff for colour work and Guy Green for black and white. And of course they both won Oscars in the 40s for their work. But in those days if you were a documentary cameraman you got very little hope of becoming a feature cameraman. It was like the premier league and second division. And it was very difficult to move across. Very few people had done it, I remember the name of someone, Osmond Borradaile who was a documentary cameraman who went on to do things like Sabu.

Al: Yes, but it was only because of his location work really

Billy Williams: Yes, the documentary cameramen were specialists in location work. So that I was looking for a break through to get from documentaries to features and I couldn't get a job in features, because in order to get into features you had to start at the beginning in the loading room and be teaboy and then the loader and then focus puller and then operator. And then eventually you would become a director of photography, lighting cameraman, after many, many years of studio experience, which I didn't

have. My experience was all on location and mainly with exteriors I didn't have a lot of lighting experience. Well in 1957 I was called to do a day's work, as an operator actually, for a company called Television Advertising, and it was the very beginning of commercial advertising in Britain and I went along to a film studio in the basement of Film House, Wardour St. I went for a day as an operator, but I told them really I wanted to do lighting. And after a few weeks of operating they let me do a bit of lighting. And in fact I stayed there for 6 years, became a staff person for Television Advertising.

And we had two small studios in that basement, very claustrophobic, very hot and uncomfortable. But they were wonderful experience at learning something about lighting.

Al: Was Dallas Bower there

Billy Williams: The cameraman who was senior to me was Geoff Gurrin

Al: I wasn't thinking as cameraman, producer, director.

Billy Williams: No the producers were Jim Garrett and David Pears. And the directors were John Armstrong, Michael Law, Peter Sims. And we used to shoot one or two 30 second commercials a day. We didn't go out on location much. We used to build pubs for Watneys, and shoot them in the studio. And very seldom got out.

Al: How much were you getting then, on that.

Billy Williams: About £50 a week, in 1957, 1958. And of course it was black and white to begin with, they were all in black and white because we didn't have colour television I think until about 1959 or 1960. And then when colour, commercial colour television came in, we shifted over to colour.

John Taylor: You were doing them for the cinemas as well were you

Billy Williams: Yes, very often they would be shown in the cinemas as well

John Taylor: And it was all 35

Billy Williams: It was all 35mm. Pat Moyner was the production manager. And Gregory Baird Smith.

John Taylor: Was it a Rank company

Billy Williams: No it wasn't Rank, it was an independent company, TVA. It had a board of directors but it was Garrett and David Pears that ran the company. And I stayed there for six years and gained a lot of experience and worked with some good directors including Ken Russell, John Schlesinger and Ted Kotcheff. But I still hadn't got my feature break. But in fact commercials turned out for me to be the stepping stone, the bridge between the two. And also for other people coming from documentary, Bob Paynter, Watkin, Larry Pizer, quite a few people. I think Walter Lassally is perhaps the one who didn't go through commercials. He was one of the first in that period to make the break through through his association with Tony Richardson.

Al: Before we go onto features, let's go back and talk about equipment, the progression of equipment. You started off with your father on his Bell and Howell

Billy Williams: The Arriflex and the wooden Debrie, Parvo.

Al: Was that a motored Debrie.

Billy Williams: He had a motor but he also hand cranked it, because in addition to photographing the film he'd do the titles and he used to do the titles and do the fades in the camera which you could do with the hand crank because you could fade out with a Debrie and wind back and fade in. So you got the fade in the camera on the original negative.

Al: Were you taught to hand crank.

Billy Williams: He showed me how to do it.

Al: Were you given a formula.

Billy Williams: He just had a rhythm and he could say this is 16 frames and this is 20 and this is 24, and of course it was so smooth it was like second nature.

John Taylor: It was a very skilled manual job as well, because the way they used the pan handles, turning at the same time.

Al: It's very difficult.

Billy Williams: Very difficult

Al: Especially if you were turning the other one the wrong way

John Taylor: I can remember Sydney Blythe, we could talk a bit about the cameramen at that time and their position in the industry. They were, repeating what I said before, they were the real technicians who knew what they were doing, and in all sorts of film techniques, they were the experts, people like Sydney Blythe and your father and so on

Billy Williams: I think you had to be such an all rounder in that you had to be able to maintain the camera

Al: But also one of the important things, there was no specialisation.

Billy Williams: That's right.

Al: I mean the trick work you did, you didn't have a specialist

Billy Williams: That's right. You did it in the camera. But you also had to maintain the camera, repair it if it went wrong and you would be lucky if you had an assistant. A cameraman loaded his own film and did the whole thing, set it up.

John Taylor: The gadget boxes of those cameramen, they were really treasure chests. They had gauzes and key holes which they put in

Billy Williams: And graduated filters.

Al: Did your father go in at all for gauzes and things

Billy Williams: Not so much for gauzes and things. I remember he had a wonderful box of grads. And I lost some filters once and he never allowed me to forget it. I left

the filter box on the side of the road, it didn't have everything in but it certainly taught me a lesson about looking after equipment.

Al: Those ones in those days, weren't they in those days hand made

Billy Williams: Hand tinted.

Al: Can you remember the name of the firm that did them.

Billy Williams: I'm not sure about the very early ones that my father had but a little while after that there were two old ladies who did them to order, I can't remember their names. I think they were sisters. Do you know their names

Al: I don't. That's why I was asking you. Then of course the Rackmans came in. You talked about the Arri and the Parvo and then you went onto Eyemos

Billy Williams: My father had an Eyemo and a De Vry. But myself, when I got into commercial television, we had a couple of Mitchells that belonged to the Admiralty that were kind of on a long lease, BNC Mitchells. And we used those with the big Rabie blimp, very cumbersome. But of course superb quality, Cook lenses. And we had Arriflexes

Al: That was the viewfinder

Billy Williams: We had the wild viewfinder on the Mitchell yes, with the parallax correction.

Al: Did you ever have to make the cams, did you ever try making cams

Billy Williams: I didn't make cams. I understood how they were done but never actually got involved with that. That was jolly difficult operating with the wild viewfinder. I never became very good at it because I didn't do it for very long. Anymore than I was on handles for long. But also at that time Arriflex started to blimp the camera and it was a very poorly designed thing I'm afraid, with sort of little strips of plastic that clipped off and on and you had to scale them up. And there was quite a bit of backlash so the focus wasn't all that precise. So they were the two cameras that we were shooting commercials with.

Al: Coming back, working with the Newman, the original Newman, did you ever work with not the mirrored shutter, the other one

Billy Williams: Yes, the Model A. No,

John Taylor: With the side focus on it.

Billy Williams: The earliest one that I remember was the single turret with the slide over it. And there was a prism on the side that you pulled out to look through to check the focus. They were the ones that I worked with at British Transport Films in the early 50s

Al: With the awful view finder on the top

Billy Williams: Yes, like a little wild, like a sports finder

Al: There was also that Newtonian lens thing, you put a mask in

Billy Williams: Different lenses. Yes, very, very imprecise. Of course it was clockwork and it was a 200 ft load and it never ran 200 ft at one wind

Al: The pre war ones did

Billy Williams: Yes. Not the ones after the war. I remember a long take sometimes, I would be winding up the camera while it was still running and trying not to shake it. And there were two engineers out at Archway called Bob and Ted.

Al: One was Ted Hill

Billy Williams: Ted Hill and Bob

Al: Bob Hume.

Billy Williams: And they were a wonderful double act. You always saw the two together, if you took the camera up, they were always together. There used to be a great repartee between the two of them. And I remember that if something wasn't quite right they'd take the gate out and they'd get take a file out and file a bit off here and there. It was all very imprecise.

John Taylor: That is the standard story isn't it. One of them would say, well we want 2 thou off. And that would be 2 strokes to the file.

Billy Williams: That's right. It happened just like that.

Al: That's where the Hills started. George started there and Ted started there. Ron didn't. Ron was at Technicolor.

John Taylor: The equipment really was terribly crude wasn't it.

Billy Williams: Yes

Al: I don't know

John Taylor: The British equipment

Al: Sid Bonnett swore by the Newman.

John Taylor: Didn't he film Everest with a Newman.

Al: Yes. Yes, he also flew to the Cape with Cobham with a Newman.

John Taylor: They were very dependable

Billy Williams: Well it had a register pin and when it was working well it was really quite steady, much steadier than the Arriflex which didn't have a register pin.

Al: They were really hand-built. But then when the war came they had to increase production and that's when things went wrong. And they never got the same springs again.

John Taylor: If the spring went on one of those, all you had to do was go to the local gramophone shop, they had two standard gramophone springs in them. I put springs back into them. The spring goes bang and you go and buy one and put a new one in. But it always struck me that equipment in this country was very backward indeed. And joining equipment and so on. The studios had Bell & Howell joiners and so on, but most of the joining was done by hand on a piece of blotting paper.

Al: There were the equipment company. Vintens. And he was, when I was at the Bush, he was known as the blacksmith of Wardour St.

Billy Williams: I suppose if you go back to the pre war days, we didn't really have a sound camera that was made in England.

Al: No, no.

Billy Williams: You either had a Mitchell or a Debrie which was French. And it wasn't until Vinten made the Model H which was actually before the war. My father built a blimp for it, it didn't have a blimp. He built his own blimp out of plywood and foam rubber. And housed it and then it wasn't until the Everest, the Vinten Everest came out, it was a sound camera but I remember the lens was set very well back inside. And it was very difficult to get access to it and you couldn't get the camera as close as you wanted to. Do you remember the Everest

Al: I had a hand in building it.

Billy Williams: Are there any around still

Al: There is one somewhere. I know the BBC had one. Whether they've still got it I don't know. I was instrumental in fact in having it bought.

Billy Williams: Why did that not develop any further.

Al: I think it was a good camera too late. That's all. It came too late. Mitchells had come in and Mitchells were going out, the Arri was in by then and the Arri had become very sophisticated.

John Taylor: The Americans had all sorts of good, do you remember the 16mm Maurer were they called, it was a copy of a Mitchell. It was a beautiful camera. Whereas over here they were shooting that stuff on Kodak specials weren't they. Really amateur cameras. It always struck me that a lot of the English equipment. The **Aitley** was a beautiful camera. It had a built-in gear system for panning and titling. It was part of the camera and the camera, it had an enormous shutter opening, 230 or something like that. And it was a focal plane shutter that went around like that. Did you ever use one of those.

Billy Williams: No I didn't.

John Taylor: It was developed by a man called Carlakely who was a big game hunter. And it would go from there right over backwards, like that. You could do a pan shot of the sky or the heavens. I'm sorry to ramble on about that. But those Newmans, although they were very dependable, the fact that the parallax was nowhere near what it should have been and so on. But a lot of good stuff was shot on them anyway. A lot of people were very skilful in those days.

Al: I worked with a Newman which in fact had a proper look through. It was grey back film so it was an absolute

John Taylor: You were looking through the film

Al: Yes, looking through the film but grey back so it was an absolute nightmare.

Billy Williams: You used to look through the Debrie didn't you

Al: Sure. You put your head underneath black velvet and stay there.

Billy Williams: Until you became accustomed

Al: You daren't come out. You just put your head underneath and stayed there till the end of, the rehearsal was over and the take was over, before you moved it on to another set up. It was hell

John Taylor: Going back a bit further, what rank was your father in the navy

Billy Williams: He was a leading seaman.

John Taylor: He was a rating

Billy Williams: Yes, on the HMS Repulse, was the ship, it was quite a well known warship. That was the ship he was on, yes.

Al: Having left tv advertising.

John Taylor: Were you on the staff there.

Billy Williams: Yes, I was on the staff. I was still looking towards feature films and decided that I'd spent long enough at Television Advertising and decided to break out and become a freelance again which I did in 1962.

The result of that was that I finished up doing, still staying in commercials with the occasional documentary thrown in, things like the 24 Hour Le Mans race for Shell. And in fact Jim Garrett also left not long after that and set up his own company called James Garrett and Partners and he invited me to become a staff cameraman, which I didn't want because I wanted the chance to meet more people and gain some contacts. So I declined that but I used to work with him as a freelance. And that continued till 1965 when I did in fact get my first break on a small feature film and it was through a chap called Michael Anderson, David Anderson, I beg your pardon,, the son of Michael Anderson, David Anderson was the production manager and he recommended me. The producer was Bob Kellett and the director was Jeremy Summers and it was a little black and white comedy called San Ferry Ann.

And it was made by the same company that had the previous year made a highly successful supporting feature called *A Home Of Your Own*. And *A Home Of Your Own* was sponsored by Tersons the builders who started of by trying to make a sort of 20 minute film for in-house Christmas entertainment. And they got together a wonderful cast of comedy actors and actresses and it was going so well they made it into a full-length film. And *Home Of Your Own* became the most successful supporting film of all time in the British distribution field. Very funny.

Well we tried to repeat the success of that with San Ferry Ann which was a silent film with music by Ron Goodwin, comedy. And we had people like David Lodge and Barbara Windsor and Joan Sims and Fred Emery, and Warren Mitchell, and Ron Moody and Wilfred Brambell, all playing small parts in this story of a typical group of British holiday makers, two or three couples going to France on the ferry boat. Dover to Calais and their adventures on the other side. Quite funny but predictable. And that went out as a supporting film. That was my first break so to speak, and in black and white.

And I've always wanted to shoot in black and white again. And never have, never done another film in black and white although it's my great ambition and I've tried several times to persuade producers and directors to film in black and white. And they always say there is no market and the audiences don't want black and white. And one cites examples of black and white films in recent years that have been extremely successful and made a lot of money, but they still resist. But I try to photograph colour as if it's black and white, to look at it in black and white terms. So that one is dealing in tonality when one is composing and lighting. I think that helps to give it a bit more dimension to the subject.

But going back to the next film, it was for the same company and it was in colour and it was called *Just Like A Woman*. And funnily enough there is a film shooting right now called *Just Like A Woman*, the same title. But this was in 1966. And it was a sort of matrimonial drama with Wendy Craig, John Wood and Francis Matthews. And we filmed it at Isleworth. Now at that time there was a property, props, a property hire chap called Roy **Moores**, who has made quite a lot of money out of renting old properties and bought this old cinema in Isleworth. And he got his props store there and he had the whole of this ex cinema and in fact decided he was going to build a studio, which he did. He transformed and built, I think we had 2 stages at that time, although more have been added since. The place is still being used as a studio, mainly for commercials.

But the first filming that was done there was on *Just Like A Woman*. And it was a nightmare because it's right under the path to Heathrow and a plane was going over every two minutes and we were trying to shoot sound. Nightmare. So that was my first feature film in colour. That was 1966. And I then went on to do several things around that time.

John Taylor: Did you have an agent at all

Billy Williams: I didn't have an agent at that time. No, I was later to have an agent. I tried to get an agent but I didn't have anything very much to show. So I stayed independent and I think I was getting something like in 1966, either £100 or £125 a week, without an agent. After just *Like A Woman* I did a film with Dudley Moore, called *30 Is A Dangerous Age Cynthia*. Dudley Moore and Suzy Kendall, directed by Joe McGrath. It was a comedy which was filmed

mainly on location around Chelsea and in a house in Wimbledon. It wasn't a huge success.

And another film I did then which was very enjoyable was called *Red And Blue* directed by Tony Richardson, who very sadly died last year. And this stared Vanessa Redgrave as a nightclub singer, in colour. And it is the story of the love affairs in her life with a song related to each love affair. And the film was part of a trilogy. And one of the other films was called *The White Bus* directed by Peter Brook. And the idea was the 3 films should come out as a major feature, called *The White Bus.* But in fact it never really got much distribution and *Red And Blue* came out as a short film in its own right but it wasn't particularly well received. But I did enjoy working with Tony and Vanessa.

Al: Which company made that

Billy Williams: Woodfall.

Al: That was it their early days.

Billy Williams: Yes. That's right. It was the only time I ever worked with Tony.

John Taylor: By now, what kind of equipment were you using by now, blimped Arris.

Billy Williams: I still had my own Arriflex which I was using as a kind of second unit mute camera because I didn't have a blimp for it. In the studio we were using Mitchells or blimped Arri, only what one could afford, because the blimped Arri was much cheaper than the Mitchell. But there still weren't any major rental companies. You see Samuelsons had not in the mid 60s become a force. So that if you wanted a camera there was somebody called Bunny Onions who had a couple of Mitchells. And Bob Huke had a couple of Mitchells. And there were one or two people with blimped Arris. There was surprisingly little equipment, one wonders how we managed actually, because there wasn't an enormous choice. There weren't any zoom lenses, they were just beginning to come in the zoom lenses. I remember there was, **Ingenou** were the first ones to introduce a 10 to 1 which you could put onto the Mitchell with a long side finder. And it was quite a good lens actually and you were looking through this sidefinder through the lens, because the Mitchell hadn't been made into a mirrored shutter

camera in the mid 60s. It was still using the rack over system. And then there was a Berthio zoom which was about 35 to 140 I think it was, which was a French zoom. This was before Cooks got into zoom lenses.

Al: Cook were in zoom lenses before the war, the vario. But it weighed a ton. And although the widest aperture was F8 but you couldn't shoot at F8 because when it was fully out it had to be F16. It weighed a ton

Billy Williams: But the didn't develop the 10 to 1 or the 5 to 1 until the late 60s.

Al: That's right.

John Taylor: And you would have been using Mole

Billy Williams: Mole Richardson. Mole Richardson which more or less had the monopoly but there was a company called General Electric who had a rental department for a while. And quite interestingly you should raise the question of lighting companies, because when I was at Television Advertising for 6 years, the chief electrician was a very short gentleman called Eddie Koker, and he was very shrewd. And he was the first one to develop the independent rental of electrical equipment, which eventually led to the break up of Mole Richardson. And I remember at Television Advertising we had quite a lot of equipment and from time to time this equipment used to be missing, in that you'd perhaps leave something set overnight and you'd come in the next morning and it had all gone. And you'd say to Eddie where's the 5k. And he's say it's being maintained or it's in the shop and it will be back tomorrow. In fact what he was doing was renting the equipment out on the side, this Eddie Koker who has since passed away and a chap called Bob Taylor who was his assistant. And then later on Geoff Smith. And a guy called Bill Burst who went into generators. Well not long after that, Eddie Koker set up On The Spot Lighting which I think was the first independent lighting company of any consequence apart from Moles.

Now Moles were going through a very difficult period at that time and when I was filming *Just Like A Woman*, the labour force from Mole Richardson went on strike and we were in the middle of filming *Just Like A Woman*. And we were in real trouble, because we couldn't shoot. So the producer tried to find somebody to replace Moles and he

turned to On The Spot, and they refused to do it, because they didn't want to fall out with their colleagues, because they were the two main companies then, Moles and On The Spot. And the people who got us out of trouble were John and Benny Lee. And they actually came along and did the job themselves. And that is when John and Benny were first beginning Lee Electrics who were later on to become the biggest electrical rental company in Europe. And they probably are still today.