

The History Project                      Transcript number:  
Interviewee:                                Christine Whittaker (22.12.1942 – 16.08.2017)  
Occupation:                                Archive Producer  
Interviewers:                                Sue Malden and Jerry Kuehl  
Cameraman:                                 Graham Whittaker  
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Transcribed by:                             Sandra D Ward

SUE MALDEN

Christine is going to start by telling us something of her early life and how she first joined the BBC and went on to become one of the most foremost archive researcher producers.

JERRY KUEHL

01:00                                        Just say a few words Christine.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well, what happened was that I left University where I read languages and my ambition like all my friends, was to be an interpreter. Obviously I didn't get a job as an interpreter, no-one did. I joined the world of television after university because I did languages at

university – it happened quite by chance – and I wanted, like all my group, to get a job as an interpreter I couldn't get a job because no-one did straight from university and so I did a bi-lingual secretarial course and it was a toss up between the Foreign Office and the BBC and I ended up at the BBC and I went to work in 02:00 Bush House on a French... on a programme which was BBC overseas service to, including other things, programmes to French Canada. So I used my French a bit. It was great fun. The most interesting place I'd ever been to, Bush House. And after about a year I moved to television on a job as a trainee PA.

[CAMERA MOVES OFF OF CHRISTINE – END OF REEL ]

#### CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well I joined the BBC quite by chance because I did languages at University and I wanted to be an interpreter. I couldn't get a job, no-one did straight out of university. So I did a bilingual secretarial course for six months and then it was a toss up between the BBC and the Foreign Office and my shorthand and typing weren't good enough for the Foreign Office, so I went

to the BBC and I went to work in Bush House, which was, you know, World Service etc. and amongst other 03:00 programmes, I worked on programmes to French Canada. So I used my French a bit. I had a brilliant time at Bush House. It was the most interesting place that you could imagine in those days. This was by the way around about 1966, I think. Yes, '66, '65/'66. And after a year I moved to television as a trainee PA, which was all very exciting. I didn't use my French any more really, ever, in the BBC but I... First of all I started off on 24 Hours which was great fun. I met all sorts of interesting people, obviously a different programme every night. My guests that I had to meet at reception in Lime Grove included Charles **Aspinall**

Astabull [?], very thrilling, Richard Burton, I can't think of, really, both political, etc. etc. I do remember that there was a lot of ... the culture was very different during those days because the hospitality cabinet used to come out at about seven o'clock and I remember one time, during the seaman's strike, unfortunately the seamen went into the hospitality room before the programme went out and it wasn't a very good interview but anyway, we had a lot of fun. After about

six months I moved on to a department called “General Features” I think it was.

SUE MALDEN

24 Hours would be a current affairs programme

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

A current affairs programme in Lime Grove, yes. And we were still in Lime Grove at first, but then I moved to Kensington House and I went to work eventually with Eddy Mertzov, who, you know, is a really distinguished documentary maker. And I started off doing... I worked for him as a PA for about a year then I was very lucky and I became a researcher. And I worked on a series called “Birds Eye View” with him 05:00 which was a wonderful series, all shot from a helicopter including all sorts of other programmes that I did. Then eventually,

SUE MALDEN

What did the research work entail?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

In Birds Eye View it was ideas, it was locations. On Birds Eye View it was ... a lot of them were written by John **Betjeman** Batchman, I was lucky enough to work with John Betjeman, suggesting poems that he might include which was quite funny because, you know, obviously my choice was a little **banal** compared to his knowledge but I had a terrific time and went all over the place on Birds Eye View. It took about, I think, three years to make and we worked with some very interesting people.

SUE MALDEN

How many were in the series?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

I think that there were eight or nine in the series and it was all shot from the helicopter. I actually met my 06:00 husband on one of the programmes because he was the assistant cameraman. So we went all over the country following the helicopter or in the helicopter. I do remember that was very, very difficult. We were filming a May Day parade and we were in the

Cotswold's and I was on the ground telling the...  
communication with the helicopter as it came down.  
We had permission... The rule of helicopter filming is  
that you are not allowed to go below a hundred feet  
without special permission but, of course, you have to  
go below a hundred feet. You have got to get special  
permission to film closer and at one time we were  
filming this May Day parade in a village in the  
Cotswold's **Cotwolds** and I was desperately trying to get in  
touch with the helicopter because as we were filming over  
this village slates were coming off the roof of a shed  
07:00 and nearly decapitating a baby and I was trying to stop  
them from, you know, fly away, fly away. Anyway,  
nothing terrible happened. It was great fun. And  
eventually with Eddy, I worked on various things with  
Eddy and eventually, in the early '70s we started to  
work on history programmes. I think at that time it  
was obviously known that Thames Television was  
making "World at War" and we knew it was going to  
be, you know, a fantastic series, which of course it was.  
And I was doing... I am not a historian, as I said, I was  
a linguist, but I was working on these history  
programmes, finding people. A lot of them were... I

worked on the Sharn Horse one, (?) the U-boat War, a Second World War related subject, and at that time I was finding people, going to see people, in Germany and in Britain, finding participants and I also started to do the film research. So I did people and film and this 08:00

is when I first got in to film research and I remember my first visit to the Imperial War Museum and being absolutely fascinated by this film that was going ... I hadn't a clue how to load a machine or... obviously, it was Paul Steinbeck (?) and I was taught by the people at the War Museum and elsewhere, how to load the film, 35mm set sep mag film onto the Steinbeck Steenbeck and I

was absolutely fascinated by the material. So then I

was doing film and people and the people... I remember a

lot of the characters involved. But I particularly remember at the War Museum there was Mrs English who ran the film cutting rooms at that time, the viewing rooms. And also, Queenie, who was her assistant. Do you remember Queenie? She was great.

It was fantastic. They were very, very helpful to me. I 09:00

also was lucky enough, obviously, I did a lot of research in Britain. I remember going to Movie Tone and Pathé (Pathe) etc. etc. but I was also...

SUE MALDEN

How well catalogued were those?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

They weren't really, they weren't. I mean everything was on cards and it wasn't shot listed. It wasn't shot listed. A lot of it wasn't shot listed. If it was on cards or it was in a file and you just go through. In the Imperial War Museum you go through by date and you look at the material by date. I remember looking at a lot of German material in the Imperial War Museum, because they had some of the Deutcher Vokencher **Deutsche**

**Wocheschau** [??]. It took me some time to realise that on the Deutcher Vokencher, **Deutsche** **Wocheschau** you know, you had to go through quite a lot before you came to the relevant piece. So, obviously, news reels. And the same with Movie Tone **Movietone** and **Pathé** **Pathe** etc. etc.

SUE MALDEN

So, you were using your intuition quite a lot?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

10:00 Oh, enormously, enormously. And, as I said, you see there was not really the role of a film researcher, so I took the film research as seriously as I took the people. It wasn't a minor thing for me to go and find film. So, and I was looking for exciting material all the time. Not just ... no-one said to me, "Find a shot of a destroyer" or whatever. So, that's how it happened and I loved it, I absolutely loved it. I was fascinated by it and I was also lucky enough to go to Germany to look at the Bundesarchiv, which was then held in Germany, which was still divided then. I remember going to the [Erin?] Reichstein Ehrenbreitsein which was the place in the Koblenz film where you went viewing and it was in Koblenz overlooking the river. You went up to a fortress and 11:00 they would get the film out for you etc. etc. And, I don't know if you know the story of the Sharn Horse? It was called "The Life and Death of the Sharn Horse". Scharnhorst And one of the things that happened was... I can't even remember the year but the Sharn Horse and the Scharnhorst and the Gnisenau[??] did a dash down the Channel to escape. From Brest, I think it was. They dashed down the English Channel and they managed to

escape and so the Channel Dash

of the Sharn Horse

**Scharnhorst** was one of the big things to look

for and I

remember being in the Bundesarchiv in

[Erin?]

Reichstein **Eherinbreitstein** and I think that the guy that was

helping me, advising me and getting the film out was

called Herr Hoffman. And he was great and he said, “I

think we have got the rushes here”. Well, I was so

inexperienced. Of course, I had to order everything on

film. I will talk a little bit more about the technology

in those days. But, he actually found the rushes of the

German coverage of the Channel Dash. Well, if that 12:00

had happened now, obviously you would order the

whole thing, but because I was so scared of spending

the BBC's money, I selected sections. Because, of

course, in those days, everything was on film and you

had to order dup negs and prints and it was all pretty

expensive stuff. So you papered up the film as you

went. You know, you put a bit of paper at the shot at

the beginning and a bit of paper at the end or a piece of

string. I think it was a piece of thread, it was, in

Germany. So you definitely have to choose your

sections. You had to have initiative. You couldn't just

order VHS's because there weren't VHS's of anything.

SUE MALDEN

Did you have to put a little arrow on your pieces of  
paper?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

You put a piece of paper, yes

SUE MALDEN

... sequence [???

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

...sequence. So it is pretty hard to do it really. The  
only place that I know that you still have to do that  
actually, is in, well not the only place, but you still do  
that in Moscow at the Russian archives.

SUE MALDEN

13:00 [???

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

No, no,

SUE MALDEN

State Archives?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, The Russian State Archives. Yes, you still do that.

SUE MALDEN

And again, was the German material any better catalogued or were ...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Oh, no, no, no. You did the detective work and you were relying very much on the help and skill of the librarians that you were with and you would have a very good relationship. You know, and you'd be talking to them about the material. It wasn't catalogued at all, the German material. Not then. I mean, there were a few files but nothing was shot listed. So, you know, you might find something that said, you know, Sharn Horse **Scharnhorst** or whatever, but there was no shot list as such. And the same, actually, in the Imperial War Museum. You just go through files.

SUE MALDEN

How did you get the..

[FILM RUNS OUT AND CAMERA SWINGS OFF OF CHRISTINE]

SUE MALDEN Shall I repeat the question again?

JERRY KUEHL

Yeah, yeah

SUE MALDEN

14:00 First of all, how did you find out about the German  
archives and how to go there?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

I think I talked to people at the Bundesarchiv, The  
Imperial War Museum. I just rang people and you just  
did know. I can't, to be honest remember, but you  
know, there were historians, and I just knew about it.

SUE MALDEN

[??]

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

And, I rang people, and I rang people at the BFI, I can't actually remember. Particularly, The Imperial War Museum would advise me but it was never questioned that I wouldn't go because, as I say, the film research was as serious as finding the people. So, that was it.

SUE MALDEN

So, [????] something going ... [?]

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

15:00 Well, I mean, people had done film research before because, of course, there had been the Great War series and they travelled all over the place looking at material. So, it was just that, there wasn't a job as a film researcher as we know it now. I mean, it was researcher. So, the researcher did the film and the people. And, the kind of working out the technology of the film and how things were shot listed or if they were shot listed. Well, this didn't apply at all. And, of course, as we know now, shot lists list kind of what you see on the screen and the kind of shots and whose

in the picture. There was nothing like that at all so you had to actually get to recognise, you know, who Guring **Goering(?)** is or **Dönitz** or whatever, and I just did. And, no, and what was actually very interesting, when we were doing the filming for the Sharn Horse **Scharnhorst** programme, Ludovic Kennedy was the presenter and interviewer 16:00 and when we were doing the filming in Hamburg, one of the people we filmed was one of the, the Captain of the Sharn Horse **Scharnhorst**. And, the Sharn Horse **Scharnhorst**, Ludovic Kennedy's father was killed, on a ship called the **Ramillies**, which was one of the first ships to go down in the Second World War. And it was sunk by the **Sharn Horse Schanhorst**. And this wonderful Captain Topp, Kar Topp, who was Captain of the ship, the Sharn Horse **Scharnhorst**, who was a wonderful man, highly respected, really came and apologised to Ludo. **There is something odd here.** The captain of the **Scharnhorst** was **Kurt-Caesar Hoffman**, and the vessel which it sank on Nov 21 1939 was the **Rawalpindi** in which **Edward Coverly Kennedy lost his life** It was so moving and Ludo did not blame him obviously at all. There is something It was a very interesting topic to do. A very interesting programme to work on. And that was the first of several series, several programmes I

made and worked on with Eddy

Mertzov

Mirzoeff

about the Second World War. So, I suppose I 17:00

became a bit of a kind of an obsessive. I mean, I am an obsessive person and you have to be obsessive to be a successful film researcher or any researcher because, I would never settle for no. I would always be looking, looking, looking for the better material. But as I say, it was a bit daunting to know that you were responsible for the money so, if it was on film, which it always was on film, the material would go to the labs and you would have to pay per foot.

SUE MALDEN

To have it duplicated?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

To have it dup neged, to have it processed, yes.

Because you ordered dup neg print and what happened

then was that ... I got to know a little bit more about

film. But I do remember working at the BFI, where the

lady at the National Film Archives who dealt with film

researchers was called, Dawley Minnick **Dorly Minnick** and

she'd 18:00

been there with Ernest Lingrin **Ernest Lindgren**

when the whole thing started. I mean she'd been there a long time. And, I think that she was Hungarian or Austrian. I can't remember where she was from originally, but she was very terrifying when you first met her. And she was very, very stern and I remember being terrified because she said to me, "Single perf or double perf for your film?" I said ... Sorry, I should have said that most of the film that I was looking at was 35mm. We were working on 16mm so you had to get 16mm reduction negs and prints made. Well, I didn't know if I wanted single perf or double perf or whatever. So, it was terrifying. But actually, she was a very kind woman and she was terrified of lots of people and she was disliked by lots of people but actually she was a very gentle, nice woman really with this manner which put people off. She was very kind and interested in talking to me about my family and so on.

JERRY KUEHL

She wouldn't accept an indemnity. That was the problem.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

No, she wouldn't. She was absolutely strict about rights and also she wouldn't, at the BFI, The National Film Archive, they were very strict about donors rights. If a donor had given the film, the donor would have the right to say, yes, we were allowed this to be duped or not and obviously, not all donors had said anything. So, if there was nothing in writing, she wouldn't allow you to have the film. So, all the rights issues have always been there and, you know, been difficult. And it was very difficult to understand that at the beginning actually, for me. It still is in a way but particularly the BFI's. They were very, very strict about it.

SUE MALDEN

20:00                      Yeah, with rights it is very, very difficult for a lot of people isn't it?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yes, it is.

SUE MALDEN

So, presumably when a donor donated stuff they didn't automatically give the rights to use.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

No, because it was meant to preserve and to look after the film and also, that was the aim originally, to preserve, and still is in a way. So, you weren't automatically given the right to use the material. So it is a bit of a dilemma.

SUE MALDEN

Was it difficult to trace donors?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

21:00

Yes, a lot of them were dead, a lot of them were dead. And, of course, the cataloguing was never up-to-date and the system was, you know, odd files that you could look through etc. etc. I mean, obviously, I don't need to say this but we are talking years and decades before the computer came so, its not the same at all. You had to have a sort of killer instinct to go for it. You had to be a squirrel, you know, searching, searching, searching. You had to want to find things. If you weren't that interested, you'd never be a good film researcher. You have be to an obsessive, as I say. But

poor old Dawley **Dorly**, I do remember going to her funeral.

I think it was in Mortlake Cemetery and she ... crematorium, and I do remember the awful thing that as the coffin went behind the curtains there was a rattle at the door and it was the bus bringing the people from the BFI who'd arrived too late for her funeral. I thought that was the final send off for poor, dear Dawley. **Dorly** I remember a few of us really, she would have really liked. It was me and Vicky May Prosser

**Vicky Wegg-Proaser**

worse than her 22:00

research. Then I

BBC and I,

film.

was another she liked. Her bark was bite. So that was how I got in to film did a few programmes about the War at the you know, I became more and more interested in And then when I, in 1974, my daughter was born and I had to leave the BBC because in those days they didn't keep your job open. You know, you only had six weeks maternity leave and that was it. You had to come back. So, I left the BBC and I think I was off for eighteen months before I started work as a freelance again. And when I came back, by then I suppose I was a specialist. I was always asked back or nearly always asked back as a film researcher as opposed to a general

researcher. So, film researcher became my speciality and I became more and more obsessed by it. And I worked, well I worked at the BBC quite a bit but I also spent a year at London Weekend actually.

SUE MALDEN

So, were you freelance or back at BBC on contract?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

23:00                      Freelance. I was not on the BBC. I was freelance. Between 1974 and 1981 I was totally freelance. But a lot of my contacts were in the BBC. So, I was asked but I ... because I had another child in '77 so all those years, you know, I had another eighteen months off but I was never out of work really. And then I worked for London Weekend for a year which was a different experience altogether because you were part of the film department and you were not treated in the same sort of equal way as you had been ... I mean it was a different way of working. The film researchers were just kind of totally ...

JERRY KUEHL

We are running out of film again. I will give you...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

OK

JERRY KUEHL

It is 22:26 and Sue give the question.

SUE MALDEN

24:00                      So, were you on contract, on a freelance contract?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

What happened was that I was asked back for various programmes because, you know, most of my contacts were in the BBC. So, I would be asked back to do work on a series of a particular documentary. I should say that I tended always to work on factual programmes. When I was at London Weekend, that was a bit later so I was, yes, I was working on factual programmes in the BBC because I was in this department called "General Features". One of the things that I worked on was a programme about Lady Astor, Nancy Astor, she wasn't actually the first British

MP but she was always named as the first British MP.

Absolutely fascinating story,

SUE MALDEN

Woman MP.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Woman MP, yeah, woman MP. Married to Lord Astor.

She is an American woman and they lived at Clifton.

25:00

So this was a wonderful find because I put an advert in the Daily Telegraph. Had anyone ever done any

filming at Clifton? Did anyone have any general home

movies or whatever, you know. Anyway, I got a call

from a guy who... Clifton by then by the way had been

sold off to ... I think it was going to be made into a

hotel [pause] and I got a phone call from a guy who

said that he had been the electrician at Clifton and

when the items went up for sale he bid for a camera

and he got some roles of film. Because they had a

little camera and they had a screening room. And

when we looked at these films they were all the Astor

home movies going back to the 1920s. All people like

MacMillan at Clifton, the children, I mean, David 26:00

Astor who became the editor of the Observer; Bill Astor whom there was a bit of a scandal about at Clifton. I think Jake Astor. Anyway, they were all there as children. And Lady Astor there with all these people, important people you know, George Bernard Shaw visiting Clifton. There was even film of Kennedy's sister who was married to, I can't remember who she was married to but anyway there was film of Kennedy's sister and Kennedy visiting. So, it was absolutely extraordinary. And we had David Astor, I think it was, around to look at the films, to show because he had not seen these films since they were children. It was a fantastic find which really helped the programme as you can imagine. Unfortunately, what 27:00

happened then was that we gave it to the BFI. It was given to the BFI. Well we didn't, they gave it to the BFI and no-one saw it for about another thirty years. No-one was allowed to see it because the BFI sort of said, oh no, no, no. You know, it was not catalogued, it was... anyway, I think it is released now. But it was colour footage, you know, it was extraordinary footage. So, that was one of the best finds ever, I think. And that was just by luck because I had put this advert in

the paper.

SUE MALDEN

And presumably anybody wanting to look at them or that knowing what was in it would have to come to you because you had been...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well yes. I mean we had the Astor family looking at it to tell us who people were but I mean some of them, obviously, George Bernard Shaw was someone we recognised and so was Harold MacMillan visiting Clifton. And also, as far as I remember, there was film of, what was the name of the German Ambassador just 28:00 before the War, the German Ambassador to London? Yes you would know.

JERRY KUEHL

Ribbentrop

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Ribbentrop. Yes, he was there visiting because of course, yeah. He was part of the Nuremberg Trials but

anyway, he visited Clifton. So that was a very exciting find. And, I worked on various things. And then after my second child was born, I went to London Weekend for a year because there wasn't anything coming up at the BBC. I took eighteen months off from when he was born. And then I went back and I worked at London Weekend which was very interesting. I met some terrific, interesting people there including Julie Lewis who was ... The film researchers were kept separately. There was a film research department. And they were just told to go and find a shot of blah, blah blah, which is not something I ever had in the BBC. 29:00 And they were kind of... they weren't regarded with the same ..., I don't know, it was slightly... I had to fight to make my presence felt, which I did, I think but, and I think that things have changed there now. But it was a different way of working. And also I had never worked on Weekend World which was their most famous programme and I do remember seeing John, but I did go to a drinks do and I remember seeing John Burt **Birt** serving a very wicked dry Martini there [Laughs] at the Christmas party.

SUE MALDEN

Weekend World was a big current affairs programme?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Big current affairs programme ... but they were... yeah.

SUE MALDEN

And even they didn't have their own researcher?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

They did. They had a film researcher but film researchers were kind of a department which they are in bits of the BBC now but, I mean, I had never been part of that, you know. Anyway, so I was there for a year and then I had a phone call from Peter

30:00

Pagnamenta who I had met, first of all when I was on Twenty-Four Hours because he was the Assistant Producer, I think they were called then. And he rang me and said that he had an idea for a series and was I interested in coming to talk about it. And this series was called, "All Our Working Lives" and I got the job of being the film researcher on it. And it was the most wonderful series, it was a history of British Industry,

twelve programmes I think. In fact, there was one that went out last week called "Cutting Coal". I saw it last week on BBC2 and it's still a brilliant, brilliant series. And we looked at, maybe there were nine programmes but there was one on the ship building industry, one on the coal industry and Peter had had this vision that, how the world had changed and so we looked at the development of the ship, you know from the beginning of the industry until the 80s, when obviously, 31:00

everything was changing. And so that was a terrific thing to work on and I've... On that, not only was I going to the libraries and looking at material but I was also going and getting material from, say the Steel Board or whatever. The National Coal Board in those days, you know, they still had their own films, and private factories and things, so I was travelling around Britain and I became a kind of specialist in social history films I suppose.

JERRY KUEHL

So you were responsible for the rehabilitation of the industry of the sponsored film which sometimes is ...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

In a way, yeah.

JERRY KUEHL

... now but it wasn't in those days.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

32:00

No it wasn't and I mean, I don't know if there is something weird about me but I always find that sort of thing very interesting. But what did happen, I do remember this, in those days, everything was on film, obviously and we used to borrow film and a lot of it was on nitrate stock and when we were on... actually, All Our Working Lives was the first programme I worked on where we actually transferred the material onto one inch tape. Before, everything had been done onto film as I said. This was on to one inch tape which was a new format that had really just started. So we used to borrow the films and get the films to Lime Grove and we used to copy the films, you know from a [??] singing machine. A lot of the films are on nitrate and there was just one machine in the BBC that was allowed to run nitrate and that was TK2 in Lime

Grove. It is not like a television programme...

[CAMERA SWAYS AND SWINGS AWAY OFF OF CHRISTINE– END OF REEL]

SUE MALDEN

Sorry

JERRY KUEHL

We are rolling and it is 31:21

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

So, yeah, 35mm nitrate film. A lot of it was filmed on nitrate stock, which I think was 1950, 1951 or 2?

JERRY KUEHL

Two.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Most 35 mm was on nitrate stock, which is really inflammable material, which still, if it is kept well, looks brilliant but it is the most, you know, it can blow up, it can self combust. So we had to have a fireman

sitting with us at TK2 all the time we were running it and I used to run up and down stairs. You were only allowed to bring six cans of nitrate down from the vault at a time and the fireman would sit beside you as you were transferring this material onto tape. And, of course, we didn't choose bits, we copied the whole reel. And I can remember the fireman giving me a real hard time - "Not another film about an industrial process, how boring can you get? Haven't you got anything better than this? You know. He acted as a film censor. Anyway, so, what I always wondered about, so we had all this nitrate film and a lot of the 34:00 newsreel film was still on nitrate then, Pathé etc. And it was very carefully kept in this one vault at the top of Lime Grove and you had the fireman with you. However, what was very odd was that it used to just get sent back by taxi to wherever we had picked it up. So it went through London in a normal car. It doesn't any more of course, but... so that was it. And of course, I should also say that most of the material that I was looking at was black and white. Most of the material... in those days it wasn't, if you saw something in colour it was quite exciting, but it wasn't an absolute

necessity, people were quite happy to look at black and white apparently. Anyway, everyone was happy to look at black and white.

JERRY KUEHL

Was that when you had the bridge built at Kensington?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

That was, and when I worked with Peter and we worked on All Our Working Lives. It was the first series that I did with him. I did various series with him but I used to have to carry 35mm cans...

35:00

[CAMERA SWINGS AWAY AGAIN - END OF FILM REEL]

JERRY KUEHL

We are at 33:38 and ...

SUE MALDEN

OK

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, so, there is a lot of nitrate and black and white.

But a lot of material also came on 35mm and if it wasn't nitrate I would always be looking at it on a Steinbeck **Steenbeck** . I looked at the material in cutting rooms near the office. I worked then in Kensington House and the vaults where these films were dispatched was in Woodstock Grove which was across a yard and I would be carrying these 35mm cans which were very, very heavy from the vault back to... And also, a lot of the BBC material was on 35mm, of course. So, I would be carrying backwards and forwards to my office and Peter Pagnamenta, the dear man that he is, 36:00 had this bridge built for me. Well, no-one realised it but it was built for me so that I didn't have to go up and down the steps. The bridge went across from Kensington House to Woodstock Grove to carry the cans. So, as I say, one inch had taken over from two inch really, in the early 80s. Before that, the two inch material, which a lot of the old BBC programmes are on two inch which, of course made things more difficult. But we worked on one inch. And that was it. And then I went to work with... I worked on another series which Will White, who was the Head of Department had suggested was called "Now the World

is Over“, which is about the 1945 to 51 first Labour Government and after the War. I think that was the 37:00 next one after All Our Working Lives which Angela Holsworth produced but with Peter, who'd worked with Peter as well on All Our Working Lives.

SUE MALDEN

So, when you were transferring all the film to one inch tape presumably you were also needing to make a log of what you transferred to help... [??]

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yes, I have still got them but they are very, very badly done and I've got to say that logging has never been my forte, I've got to say. The shot lists were fine but it was not like now where you have, what do you call it, code, you know, numbers ...?

SUE MALDEN

Time codes.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

...time codes. It wasn't like that. So I have got a shot list but it wasn't exactly the same at all.

SUE MALDEN

But the picture editor must have been dependent on you identifying the images so that he could...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Oh yeah, we could go through everything and...

SUE MALDEN

Would you sit with the picture editor?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Oh yeah, quite a lot, yes, quite a lot. Yeah. And of 38:00 course it wasn't like, well we cut [pause] just trying to think how we cut it actually, because you wouldn't... I don't think we ... I think the one inch material was played in, it was...

SUE MALDEN

You'd of had your archive on one role and...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, [pause] yeah.

SUE MALDEN

... his interview or whatever on another?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yes, but it would've been, the interviews would have been shot on film.

SUE MALDEN

Were they played in on film?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, played in on film and then... I think so. I think that is how it worked, anyway.

SUE MALDEN

So the film interview is transferred to one inch tape ...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

I guess so. To be honest I can't remember exactly.

SUE MALDEN

...and your archive played in at the same time...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yes, I think so. I think that is how we did it, I can't quite remember actually

SUE MALDEN

It would be quite difficult for film editors... picture editors...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well, of course, but there wasn't...

SUE MALDEN

You would've had your archive on one role...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Oh yeah, it was very much... we were still cutting on film. I mean I have worked with some great editors, 39:00 Alan Ligo **Lygo** being one of them and, of course, Steve Sampson who did Peoples Century which was one of my later films but yeah, no it was a very interesting time actually and so... Then I did "Now the War is Over" which was also social history really, about

Britain, and that is when I got to know things about, well a bit about America. Because, of course, there was all this aids from America coming across and stuff so... But I didn't go to America which some people done. And then I worked on a series called "Out of the Dolls House" which was about the history of women and work which was also a very memorable series and then I worked on a series called "An Ocean Apart" 40:00 which was about the relationship between Britain and America and that was when I started going to America to look at the archives which was an amazing experience to have and which of course, I kept on doing more in my career. And I worked with a researcher, somebody suggested David Thaxton in Washington as a colleague and he showed me... I would go over, he didn't do the research without me but I went to Washington where a lot of the material obviously was in the National Archives and worked with David and it was extraordinary experience.

SUE MALDEN

Did he work in the National Archive or was he ...

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

41:00

No, he was a freelance researcher. He had been actually at the... he worked at the American Film Institute. You know, he was... He had worked at West Point and taught film at West Point actually, that's what he did. So, yeah. So that was when I got to know the American Archives. That was really when I started travelling. I was so lucky. I mean I've been all over the world really. So I did that. I used to go to America, a lot, to Washington and to New York.

SUE MALDEN

What were the main archives that you used there?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

In America, obviously it was the National Archives in Washington, which were then, near just down the road from the White House in Pennsylvania Avenue I think it was. They are now out in ... [???

SUE MALDEN

Colpepper.

JERRY KUEHL

[inaudible]

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Anyway, you know where they are, it will come back to me.

SUE MALDEN

So did you use the Library of Congress as well?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

I did but, the Library of Congress, yes I did but the 42:00  
Library of Congress was of course, mostly for early  
film and feature films. I did use both but the actual...  
most of the material that I was talking about for the,  
you know, for the post-war period was in the National  
Archives. And, of course, that's when I got to know  
about public domain material because, as you know,  
there is no such thing as public domain material in this  
country, at least in Britain, A lot of people think there  
is. There is not. It is not official. It is only America  
that has rule, this law that material shot for and by the  
Government, for the Government and by the

Government is counted as in the public domain. It's just the same way as written archives are. So, I suppose it is a Hollywood thing really. You know, that the film industry has played a part in them taking film 43:00 more seriously or something, I don't know but.

JERRY KUEHL

The taxpayer's dollars have paid for this, therefore the tax payer should have access to it.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Absolutely. It is a most wonderful, wonderful thing that is fading away now, I think. It is not as much.

What is happening now is that there aren't films shot any more. So, there is just not the same kind of material. So, I was really, yeah. I did a lot of travelling to America

SUE MALDEN

But you still have to pay a certain amount for access to that public domain.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

No, you don't. You only pay... you pay for the technical side and obviously if you have a researcher working with you which, in a way, you need an advisor. I mean, but I was lucky that I went there because a lot of people now they just use someone else over there. But I made a lot of trips to America. I 44:00 went to New York a lot as well and went to the Sherman Grinberg Library who have the Pathé and Paramount material and to CBS and NBC etc. etc.

So, it was all terrific.

JERRY KUEHL

Was the Grinberg Library as big then as it is now?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah. Well, what happened was it was run... they didn't really have a cataloguing system and the Paramount material and the Pathé **Pathe** material was held there but you couldn't... I mean it took a lot of working out and unfortunately, I think the guy who ran it was Bernie Sherlock wasn't it? and he died and, of course, it then 45:00 moved to L.A. It was a wonderful collection though. Absolutely fantastic collection. But in the same way

that the material in this country. I mean it was all on film so you had to have knowledge of it. You had to have.

SUE MALDEN

What was the basis of the collection?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well, Sherman Grinberg was a collector I think, wasn't he? He was a collector. It was a bit like, it was... actually, To be honest what it reminded me of was Visnews because it had news reels and it had modern material. No, Visnews was a very complicated library and I can remember, you know, finding stuff in Visnews which was extraordinary because they had all the early news reels there. They had the Paramount, they had the British Germont, **Gaumont** they had the Germont **Gaumont Graphic** graphic but it wasn't catalogued so you'd have to really pick your way around the cards and. And it was... what happened unfortunately with the Grinberg, with the ... [pause] Visnews material and I can't ... this happened 46:00 early on in my career. We used to go to School Road, Acton to look at it but then, when they

moved, they did not have the right to have any nitrate material. So the nitrate material was given to the BFI and it was not catalogued and they had, they had a very bad thing of transferring material onto very inferior tape and then there was the nitrate gap, I think it was the material from 1946 or something to '51 never got, never got... the Paramount gap. A lot of the Paramount newsreels were never copied so the only way you could get them was to try and locate them in the BFI. So, yeah, so that was another interesting place to visit, and fun but , you know, you had to... it was all very quirky everywhere you went. It wasn't like now where everything is about 47:00 sales. That is the difference. Everything is about sales. Then you felt that you were researching and everyone was interested in the material. Now it is about making money, obviously, because people have to do that. Because Visnews of course, in the early days, was partly owned by the BBC.

SUE MALDEN

Nearly 51% of it.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah

SUE MALDEN

Which is why other people did have to....

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, we didn't pay but sadly, its ... well it then went to ITN, some of it did. It went to ITN.

SUE MALDEN

Yeah, they were taken over by Reuters.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Reuters, yeah.

SUE MALDEN

ITN managed the company.

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Yeah, they did. So then what happened then... So I started going to America on a regular basis and then I worked on an amazing programme, again with Peter Pagnamenta, called "Nippon" which was the history of 48:00

post-war Japan and then I had the amazing experience of going to Japan and doing research in Japan which was extraordinary. I actually tried to learn Japanese. The BBC paid for me for two weeks to learn Japanese, but unfortunately, when in Japan, you know, they have three alphabets in Japan and they have the, I can't even remember the name of the characters but there are three different kinds of language that they write in and when you are at university in Japan, you are still learning the alphabet. So there was no way that I could learn to read the cards in Japanese in two weeks. But anyway, it was good fun. So I spent quite a lot of time in Japan. I had various trips to Japan looking. We had an office in NHK and I can remember the first day I arrived because the rest of the team were there. I arrived and I had got them the subway, the

49:00

underground station to the... to Shinjuku, which was near where our office was and I walked out of the station, I could not... there are no street names in Japan at all. Of course, I couldn't read where I was. I've got no sense of direction. Unless there was a sign of a Kentucky Fried Chicken or something I recognised, there was no way that I would find my way to the

office, but anyway. I spent, I think, three... I went to Japan three times for a month each time.

SUE MALDEN

Which archives were you using there?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

Well I was using NHK who had the rights to the Nippon News. They had a lot of the Nippon news. I went to [pause] I can't remember actually, to be honest, I went to the National...

SUE MALDEN

Did they have the concept of a National or ... ?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

50:00 They did. It was very, very difficult. It was very difficult to sort of negotiate with them. I do remember going there and all the guy was interested in was the fact that I had to take my shoes off and... etc. But we had wonderful Japanese fixers. Yukiko was one of them and we used to spend quite a lot of time with Yukiko in her house. Her father was a banker, I think,

and I remember us all going around there for dinner. It was terrific, It was absolutely brilliant and I travelled a bit in Japan but it was mostly based in Tokyo. I went to various archives in Tokyo and then...

SUE MALDEN

Sorry can I just ask...

[CAMERA SWAYS OFF OF CHRISTINE – FILM REEL ENDS CAMERMAN  
GIVE TIMECODE AS 49:21]

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

51:00 So I was very, very lucky and then I was very lucky also, to get to work with Adam Curtis, who had a totally different way of working. When I was working with Peter, I think it was just before I did “An Ocean Apart”, Adam came and joined us in the office and he joined us and worked on An Ocean Apart.

SUE MALDEN

In what capacity?

CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

He was the producer of some of them, I think. And he had a totally different way of working, so that is how I got to know... And then I worked with him on Pandora's Box, which was his first sort of way he uses the archive differently from any other person and he kind of plays tricks with archive. It is very difficult to describe what he does but he's an absolute force to be reckoned with. And he has a more creative use of 52:00 archive. He doesn't use things to illustrate, he uses... it is very difficult to describe what he does but... So, I spent a lot of time in America working with him as well on this thing called Pandora's Box, which was about how science was used to create a better world. That was the aim. And the things that leapt out at people and so I then worked on about three or four series with Adam which was terrific so I was very, very lucky because I worked with Peter Pagamenta whose was one of... and Eddie Merztov and, you know, various people under Peter who were really great film makers and then Adam who was a very creative and extraordinary...

SUE MALDEN

I would imagine working with both Eddie and Peter that they kind of gave you an idea of what they were doing and what sort of archive they might want but you were very much...

#### CHRISTINE WHITTAKER

53:00

Well, of course, in that the difference between what I did, I think, I am not sure if it is different, but I would be in on the discussions at the beginning of the programme as much as everybody else so we would have discussions on the way that the programmes would be made and, you know, the programmes, I mean, All Our Working Lives was archive and it was talking heads and there was more archiving than specially shot really so the archive was sort of... there was no reconstruction at all and also this period was the period when presenters were out of fashion in a way, so suddenly. Things have changed now but that was just the fashion. So it was archive and interviews with people and the archive was used to find people as well, which was another thing that we did on All Our 54:00 Working Lives. So, for instance, we did one called "Plane Makers" which Jonathan Lewis made and we

had this film of the women making planes in the First World War and we found the women who had been making the planes. So the film came before the interviews if you see what I mean. So, it was an equal footing all the time and also with Adam, I sort of have funny ideas and I was able to sort of say, why don't we find oh, I don't know, a shot of someone having a fit or a butterfly or something, you know. Something totally unrelated to what you thought we were looking for. It wasn't just illustrating factual stuff so... I was really, really lucky in that and lucky in... you, know.

SUE MALDEN

So with Adam you had concrete ideas...

54:56 END OF PART 1