Cyril Pennington-Richards (cameraman and director) 17/12/1917 - 2/1/2005

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BIOGRAPHY: Cyril Pennington-Richards entered the film industry in 1932, working on short advertising films before moving into documentary production. By the end of the decade he had become a lighting cameraman and in 1940 he joined the Crown Film Unit, where he photographed Fires Were Started (1943) among others. After WWII he moved into feature film production, providing cinematography for directors Jack Lee and Pat Jackson, who also had roots in documentary production. In 1953 he made his directorial debit with The Oracle. This was followed by two b-feature crime films in 1957 and episodes of several popular television serials, including Ivanhoe (1958) and The Invisible Man (1958). He directed several film comedies during the 1960s and also made films for the Children's Film Foundation.
SUMMARY: In this interesting and detailed interview with Alan Lawson, Pennington-Richards discusses his first experiences in the film industry as a titler working on advertising shorts. He reveals that his break came with a film shot inside Caterbury Cathedral in 1934, which led him to set up a unit with the Religious Film Society. He also discusses his work with the Crown Film Unit, particularly Fires Were Started, giving an account of Humphrey Jennings' visual perfectionism and improvisation techniques. An interestingaccount of his work on White Corridors is also provided, and he claims the film was shot so rapidly at Pinewood that Arthur Rank was moved to investigate in person. Pennington-Richards also offers a great deal of technical information, particularly regarding the matching of studio and location footage.

BECTU History Project - Interview No. 122

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Interviewer: Alan Lawson and Colin Moffat
Interviewee: Cyril Pennington-Richards

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Transcription Date: 13.8.03 Interview Date: 9.1.90 Interviewer: Alan Lawson and Colin Moffat
Interviewee: Cyril Pennington-Richards Tape 1, Side 1

Alan Lawson: Cyril Pennington-Richards, cameraman. Recorded on the 9th January 1990, interviewers, Alan Lawson and Colin Moffat. Side One. First of all really the basic question, when and where were you born?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I was born in South London in 1911, December 17th 1911...I almost made Edward V11 but not quite! [AL laughs] I think I've been under five monarchs, it would have made six.

Alan Lawson: [Chuckling] What kind of schooling did you have?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I was brought up by a Roman Catholic monastery of all places, I'm not a Catholic but I was in fact brought up there. My parents tried to get me into Whitgift School in Croydon but they had a long waiting list and the nearest other place was St Joseph's College at Upper Norwood and that's where I went.

Alan Lawson: And did you get any special training at all towards the end of your school life?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, no I was plucked away quite early actually, I was plucked away when I was fifteen, simply because a man called Tommy Hanson-Lowe owed my father a lot of money and wanted to borrow some more. So he swore to my father that he had the most marvellous job for me. So I left school and got all dressed up for the first day at the office, bowler hat and wing collar and all this lot, and black coat and vest and striped trousers, and the spats - at fifteen I was then! And when I got to the office, I thought I was going to be something rather important. I was shown to a little tiny table with a lot of stamps and I had to lick 'em and stick 'em on envelopes, and that was it, and I got fifteen shillings a week, which was seventy-five pence a week.

Alan Lawson: What kind of a business was that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was an importer, a couple of Spanish partners owned this business, it was on Fish Street Hill, right by Billingsgate. And as I walked down the hill from the Monument Station, the very first morning, in my lovely gear, a fish porter who had a pile of fish on his head...you know they used to carry them on these corked hats in those days. He walked right up behind me and just tipped the thing so that all the juice went down the back of my neck! And he said, "Oh I'm sorry my young sir!" [Chuckles] And anyway I went to this place and I was there as an office boy under two of the biggest bitches I have ever known in my life, who were typists, and they really made my life hell. And after I'd been there about...the man who owed my father this money and got me the job, he was also there, and he was a dipsomaniac and was drunk from early morning 'till late in the afternoon. And eventually the managing director, a very nice man, called me into his office and he said, "I know you left school early to get this job but I'm afraid I've got bad news, in two months time we're going to close down because the partners can't agree. So I thought you ought to have as much time as possible to find another job." He said, "Please don't tell any of the staff because they don't know." So I went back into my little corner and these two bitches were riding me like mad and I was inwardly chuckling, thinking, "You don't know what's going to happen to you!" Because to lose a job then, in the height of the depression, was really something.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So a few weeks later I could see these two girls nattering away to each other. One of them said, "we've got a nice surprise for you, you're going to get the sack." So I said, "Oh yes, I know." So she said, "How did you know? How long have you known?" "Oh," I said, "a couple of months." She said, "You little beast!" [Chuckles] That was a marvellous moment! And so I left and I then...this same man who owed my father all this money got me another job in Covent Garden Market, which ended up the same way, because he told the managing director of the company that I was a marvellous book-keeper. I have no knowledge of book-keeping really whatever, except very primitive. So I sat at this desk at five o'clock in the morning, adding these figures up. And if I got two different totals, which I always did, I struck an average, which was good enough for me, you know! And this went on for about a month and then the managing director had me in, he said, "By the way, I want you to get the books in order because the auditors are coming in next week." I went out of the office, turned round and went in and gave my notice! God knows how they sorted it out, I have no idea, absolutely no idea at all. All I do know is some six months later one of the partners of the firm shot his wife and committed suicide, and I often wondered whether it was my book-keeping!

Alan Lawson: [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I don't think it was but er... And then I started up various businesses and eventually at the age of seventeen I started a radio business, which was very successful and I made a lot of money. I got a bit bored with it and I had a cousin who was making advertising films and he asked me if I'd like to join them. So I went in with them, with his two partners and him and we started in um - in fact what we did, do you know, I don't know if you know George Humphries Laboratories?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well they were just building a laboratory in Whitfield Street and I signed the contract to buy his business on the roof of that building, with the concrete mixers running. And he had a partner called Randal Terraneau...

Alan Lawson: Yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...who I bought a camera off, fifty pounds, and we started. He had a titling business - embossed titles. Well it was rather a ridiculous business to buy since sound films were just coming in. So that side was a bit of a disaster but we started making advertising films and that was really quite successful.

Alan Lawson: What was the name of the company?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was Industrial and General Film Laboratories, and another company called British Empire Films. We bought George Humphries' business for a hundred and sixty pounds and...

Alan Lawson: That was the titling business?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: The titling business for a hundred and sixty pounds [chuckles].

Alan Lawson: Yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And our premises were in thirty-nine, Windmill Street, Great Windmill Street, opposite the Windmill Theatre, we were on the top floor. And then we moved to eighty-nine Wardour Street, where we took over Edibell Studios - the Edibell company - they had a studio on the top floor and we had the top two floors. And I remember very well we paid three hundred[p1] a year for them inclusive, including the studio.

Alan Lawson: What actual job did you do?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I was actually managing director of the company. But I was rather keen on learning photography and a man called Bert Ford...

Alan Lawson: Oh yes, yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...who's obviously gone now, but a lot of his relatives are still in the business...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He was - we were doing a film which was being produced by Peter - the man who runs - oh God what was the name? 'The Mousetrap' you know...

Colin Moffat: Saunders?

Alan Lawson: Saunders.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Peter Saunders, that's right, and Paul Barralay[?], Paul Barralay[?] was a cameraman and Peter Saunders was his partner. And they dealt in short ends; they bought them from the studios and sold them to us. And a short end could be anything up to six hundred feet, because a cameraman would come in and say, "Oh take the short end off, six hundred, forget it," you know. Well we'd buy that, obviously. And Peter Saunders had the idea of making a film, we had the laboratory and we had the - you know - the studio. So this film was set up and they had two directors, Paul Barralay[?] and Peter Saunders and they used to run sixteen hours a day you see [chuckles] but the unit - that was me - ran for sixteen hours straight off. And the studio staff was an electrician and a carpenter, and that was it. And I've forgotten the name of the film now, but it was rather extraordinary because what happened was I went out with the camera because I wanted to learn you see. And Bert Ford would never tell you anything, in fact if he used a second unit cameraman, he would cover the aperture on the lens and if they went up and said, "What are you shooting at Bert?" he'd say, "The usual!" He would never tell them! And so I mean you couldn't learn anything! And then one day he didn't turn up, and so Peter Saunders said, "You'll have to photograph it." I had never even threaded a camera, and this was a Debrie camera which was quite difficult to thread you know. And so I took the camera into the car, and I'm pretty mechanical and I worked out how it worked with the loops and all that lark, managed

to thread it. And we shot this stuff and I hadn't got enough sense not to shoot against the light, because you never shot against the light in those days, you know it was a light over the shoulder and that was it. And of course I ran the laboratory, so when I had to print, I had to print on fine grain stock you know, and I think I had it amber coloured or something, one of these toned things you see. And I was staggered, I'd never done a bit of photography in my life, quite literally - it was absolutely beautiful, just a sheer fluke you know. And when Bert Ford came back the next day and heard that I had actually been shooting, he was livid of course, and when he saw the stuff he was twice as livid and he never spoke to me again, not ever! That was the end of that, I mean I worked with him for about two weeks I think after that and not one word passed between us! [Chuckles] And then poor old Bert, he left. But it was very sad really, because he used to walk up and down Wardour Street...in those days the cameramen used to walk up and down Wardour Street, and the musicians used to walk - er...

Alan Lawson: Archer Street.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Archer Street. There would be thousands of them, literally, every day, and people would come and take them off the street you know. And cameramen would just walk up and down, they'd say, "oh Bert, I've got a job for you," you know? And poor old Bert who hadn't worked for years you know, he used to carry a contract round with him which showed that he got eighty pounds a week from Fox for photographing, second unit. And it was so - this agreement was so tattered you could hardly open it, you know. [Chuckles] But he wore a piece of camera tape in the palm of his hand to show that he'd worked so hard that it got sore, I mean quite literally! Poor old Bert! Anyway I think we exchanged a couple of words before he finally died! But absolutely incredible really, and we staggered on with this and my co-directors, we had quite a big board actually by then, we were doing quite well, and my co-directors wanted to start a laboratory. I said, "Absolute madness!" And this was a laboratory in which you wound the films onto frames...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and you lifted the frame and when they were wet it was some job to lift 'em up you know. And they were dried on a drum, I think it was thirteen feet long and six feet in diameter, and if the clip came off the tail-end it didn't matter so much, because you'd only buggered up twenty feet, but if it came off the front-end you'd lost the lot!

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And it was rather stupid because of course George Humphries had put in the most modern laboratory and eventually we had - it was bringing us down, there was no doubt about that. And then somebody came in and asked us if we would process a fight film, and this was being fought at the Albert Hall. And I've forgotten the man's name but there was a very big financier behind him, and the idea was that you had to get that film on the screen by the next day, otherwise it's dead. So he came in and - oh in the middle of the night, we were getting the stuff in, in the middle of the night a camera case arrived and the film for the sound camera was in exactly the same containers as the film for the picture camera. So you didn't know - there was no note on it saying whether it was sound or picture, it just said, "Open in the dark". So the foreman

took it into the lab, which of course had a wet floor, groped about in the dark, felt it was a magazine, lifted it up, as he did that the lid fell off and the film fell out on the floor! So it obviously messed up a considerable amount of it, but we got it back in the case and processed it. When the cameraman came in the next day, the man who was producing the film actually, came in the next day, "Oh we didn't manage that [?], I didn't really need it." What had happened was, he'd put the lid on cross-thread in his panic down in the basement of the Albert Hall, because they had no loading bag or anything, you know, you'd just go in a dark room. And he'd got it on cross-thread and it fell off - didn't matter at all! So he started cutting this film, he was about a week cutting it and obviously it was of no value by then, it was cold meat. So the financier got rather ugly and he alibied on us and said that it was our fault because they'd messed this film up. And they were going to start a suit and I said, "Well no way am I going to fight a law suit." And at that time we were, in fact, just solvent, and so I had the company solicitor in, I said, "We'll go into voluntary liquidation." He said, "You can't go into voluntary liquidation if you're solvent!" So you had to wait for someone to bankrupt you, and I think Kodak's did it eventually. And they took all the gear, you know, usual thing. In fact, old Giles was still with us and I had what was known as "Walk-in possession." A couple of bailiffs would come in and say, "You got anything for us, Sir?" "No." "Right, we'll be back tomorrow," - having taken an inventory you see.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And Giles used to put his head round the office door and say, "Your mates are here, Sir." [Laughs] Nothing for them! And so eventually they took the stuff and they sold it up. When the official receiver took over and came across these minutes for this meeting when I had said that we would go into voluntary liquidation, they said, "It's perfectly legal and Kodak's had no right whatever to the equipment." So they had to put all the money back in again to be distributed amongst the other distributors. So out of this I had managed to save the camera, which I'd bought off Randal Terraneau, and my partner and I started up again.

Alan Lawson: What was the camera?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was a wooden Debrie.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: A wooden one, I mean really old. And we worked down in South Norwood, Henderson's Laboratories, a place called Henderson's Film Laboratories, and we rented an office there, they let us in you know, and we used to work there and make these advertising films. And there was a soundman called Lawrence Cussell[?] who had gone broke in France because the rate of exchange had been changed. And he was installing sound equipment into French cinemas. So Bob Henderson, who was the managing director, said, "Why don't you two get together? You've got the camera, he's got the sound, you know, why not make pictures?" So we said, "Oh good idea!" So we decided to do this; he was still building the sound equipment, which I helped him finish, and I had this wooden Debrie camera. And we decided to do a film about Canterbury Cathedral. There was no question of shooting inside because it's never been allowed, not even by MGM. So anyway we went off to Canterbury and we shot this film. Our budget was fifty-five pounds, we had thirty-five, we decided to take a chance on it - we'd

scrounge the rest! And we got through all right, we got back and we used to sit and watch the film go through at night in the laboratory, all night, you know to see if it was all right. And halfway through the night a chap called Pat Pattenden who was the foreman came and said, "What have you done wrong?" So I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well you've got the soundtrack cut off on the wrong side!" And in those days, being a silent camera...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...they had a slide-in gate, a slide-in mask, and the mask had been put in the wrong way by my partner. There was only my partner, myself and [???], there were only three of us. And so that was that, it was marvellous stuff but you couldn't print it. So we had to go back again. We started this in the autumn, by the time we went back the weather had broke. So anyway we started and I shot it on negative stock but I had to put it through the positive bath to increase the contrast, which worked very well in fact! And as we went on somehow we got introduced to a man called Hewlett Johnson, who was called 'The Red Dean'.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And he was a communist, very pro-Russian, and he was the Dean of Canterbury. And he'd got us permission to shoot inside. Well we had no lamps, we had no money. And we had met up with three brothers who were members of the Canterbury Amateur Cine Society, and they were brilliant, I mean they really were brilliant. They were called Entwhistle, and Bill Entwhistle was the older brother. I said, "Well I don't know what we're going to do here, we can't shoot inside, we haven't got any lamps." And he said - he was very quiet but he said, "We could make them." So I said, "How the hell are you going to make them?" He said, "Well we can make floods and I can make spots," which he did. And um, I don't know if you know Eric Cross?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He swore by them, he swore they were better than Mole-Richardsons - quite literally. And in fact we sold them for two pounds fifteen each - spots you know, focusing spots. And we made floods, which we needed, obviously, for the cathedral, by building a parabola of concrete, built into a garden, and moulding papier-mache and lining it with silver, tin foil. And we went back...and in the meantime we had got a tie-up with a firm called 'Gasparcolor'...

Alan Lawson: Oh yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...who offered us their facilities if we would do a sequence on the stained glass windows. This was a hand-cranked wooden camera, so I went back to my local garage and the man had a - I used to invent a lot of things even in those days, and this man who owned this garage had a marvellous workshop, it had everything, milling machines, everything in it. And he let me have the service of his foreman, he was the best engineer I've ever met in my life, and the whole workshop for a pound a day, so all I had to do was pay for the materials. So we stripped this camera down and we put the revolving disc on which was necessary in those

days to the colour. In the meantime, the Dean of Canterbury, who was a very, very famous figure, had offered to do a sound sequence for us standing on the steps of the altar. We couldn't afford a sound camera, so I went back to the garage again. We stripped the camera and on the shutter shaft at the back we put a little T piece and the speedometer cable, leading down to an orange box in which there was a motor wrapped up in felt. And the thing was driven - there was a twenty-four, twenty-five gear-box all in there, it rattled like mad! And all this fed up to the back of the wooden camera, which of course had to be put in a blimp. So I had to build a blimp for it, and it had to be light because we wanted to do a shot of the choir in procession and then pick them up inside the cathedral. So that meant I had to be able to gather the whole thing up, blimp, tripod and away - I had no viewfinder, I had two white lines, one on the top and one on the side. And let the procession go by and grab the camera and take a quick dive through the door and get in front of them by the time they got inside the cathedral, which came off, in fact. So then we finished the film, we went back, we sat there all night again, and Pat came in and said, "Well, now you've done it!" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "The sound track is down the middle of the film!" And this soundtrack that this bloke had built, this camera - something had happened and the optical system had moved, and we then learnt also that the film, that the motor that I had assumed was a fifteen rpm synchronous motor was in fact asynchronous, so it was about fifteen hundred. So in the whole of the sound sequence we were two hundred frames out. So that really finished us, we had no money, we had no film, we had nothing! So I went home, and I've never really let anything beat me - and I went to bed and I thought it all out and I phoned Cussell[?] the next morning and I said, "I think I can do this, I can handle it." So Hendersons had allowed me the run of their machinery, where they kept a sort of machine store, they kept marvellous machines. They used to perforate their own film, then a few years later that was no longer necessary and there was all this stuff with all these gears, absolutely beautiful gears. So I got an ironing board and I lined up a drive, and by stepping up the ratio and stepping it down I got exactly the two hundred frames out in that length. But of course it went through about eight gears and when you turned the motor shaft nothing happened the other end until you'd turned about a quarter of a turn, it all clanked and clattered. So I got Lawrence Cussell[?] down and I said, "This is it." So he looked at it, he was absolutely aghast, he said, "Are you mad?" He said, "In the sound camera there are two gears, they cost..." x amount, I've forgotten, an awful lot of money. He said, "They are so matched they are lapped in together so there's absolutely no 'wow' at all." I said, "Well what have we got to lose?" You know, it's going to... He had the sound heads because he was installing this sound equipment. So he gave me one, I cut it in half, cut the casting in half and offset the optical system so that it would read from the middle of the film instead of reading in the correct position. And all this lash-out was lashed-out together, and we recorded it and it was absolutely perfect, except for the bells on the final sequence, they had a 'wow'.

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: But otherwise it was perfectly all right, on speech, perfectly all right. So anyway that was that and then after that we still staggered on. Oh yes, we made this film, it was about Canterbury Cathedral, it cost us altogether when we'd finished a hundred and four pounds, I can always remember that. And MGM bought the 35mm rights off us for a thousand. And the Religious Film Society, who had had a lot of money off Arthur Rank and had produced virtually nothing, offered us - the 16mm rights were worth about thirty-five pounds,

that was the value of one reel - they offered us five hundred, which we took! So we made fifteen hundred pounds altogether on it which was quite a lot of money. And then they asked us if we would form a unit, find a studio and form a unit, which we did, and we made religious films for them right up to the beginning of the war.

Alan Lawson: What date was the Canterbury film?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: About 1934, about '34.

Alan Lawson: Ah ha. Then you were working at Brixton wasn't it, the studios? The British Film Studios?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, Upper Norwood.

Alan Lawson: Upper Norwood, yes that's right, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Upper Norwood, eventually. We found the Upper Norwood place for the Religious Film Society. I was working actually at South Norwood which was Henderson's Laboratory, that was our office, you know. Oh I built some incredible things really looking back on it. I mean I built for instance - one of the problems I had, the Religious Film Society wanted me to photograph hymn titles, you know one picture, one turn...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So I developed a one picture, one turn camera. And it was a bit boring because you had to photograph, you know you get a long slow hymn, it's a hell of a long way.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And then you had to wind all the stuff back and put the background on.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So I built this thing, I've just remembered it. And it was a vertical rostrum, on which you pinned up the background, you pin up the background with drawing pins, lining it up, that was that. You then - it had holes in the back and I had a vacuum cleaner, and you switched on the vacuum cleaner and lined up the title, and the vacuum cleaner held the title up. Then I'd made a machine, I'd made a gadget out of an old printing gauge, you know a half-round printing gauge...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...in which I had a gear, a sprocket geared to the actual camera at the rate of something like five or ten feet per hundred feet through the camera. And this had a

sprocket hole in it and having marked it off, the number of feet you wanted to do, you pulled the sprocket hole that far away. So if you wanted to do fifty feet you pulled it to fifty, and when you started it up that sprocket hole crept slowly towards the gate. On top of the sprocket hole was a metal clip so when that hole came to the gate it touched the gate through the hole and switched the thing off and actually operated in relay. And in front of the camera was a fire flap - off a projector, if the projector stopped, the fire flap came down and blacked it out. Well I worked it the other way so that when the camera stopped the fire flap blanked the camera out. It then went back to where it started, fifty feet. I had two of these things running in opposite directions, stopped the vacuum cleaner, the title fell down, the camera started coming forward again and photographed the background then stopped at fifty feet. That was, actually it was very good, it worked for an awful long time and then one day it went wrong and I got six hundred feet worth of title, it rather annoyed me! [Laughs] It failed to stop! But then from there, I was doing that actually until the war started. In fact Ray Sturgess...

Alan Lawson: Oh yes!

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...was my operator and Ray Elton was directing a film and I was photographing it on the day that I got called up, I joined the territorials. And it was getting pretty sticky and it was a question of whether I got the film done before the war started. And we finished at three in the afternoon and at half-past three my mother rang to say my papers had come, so I went home and went straight into the army and that was that. And I was only there about a couple of years and I got invalided out and I went to - I was up in town - oh I know, I'd been in hospital for three months and I decided that I wanted toughening up. So I went to the labour exchange and said, "I want a job" - the only time I've ever been there. They said, "Well what can you do?" I said, "Well I can drive." They said, "Well we've got a driving job here, I don't think you'll take it, we sent five blokes down, they won't touch it." And I went down there, it was an old Dodge lorry, on which the hydraulic lift had gone wrong, it had no bonnet, it was a forward drive so the engine was there, there was no bonnet on that...

Alan Lawson: Yeah...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and I remember I got three pounds eighteen a week at this job. And I thought it was a good challenge anyway and I took it. And it was murder but I quite enjoyed it! They were building [indecipherable?] aerodrome actually, and I used to get there - The man before me, he did four loads in two days and did overtime, I did seven loads in two days and no overtime. And eventually you know, chucking [???] - I had to pull a house down as well - I had a horse on the back [???], this is bomb damage you see. I had go and put the [???] around the house and drive off...there was a gang there to help load it. And loading up one day, I had a big chunk of hardcore and it fell back on my wrist, so I had to pack it in. And I was rather flattered really, because the managing director came round to my house. My mother was [chuckles] chairperson of the local Conservative Association, didn't take very kindly to me being a lorry driver! [Laughs] And he came round, I think it was three times, to ask me if - I wasn't there, I was out each time. And she said, "No I don't think he'll get back." And he came back the next time, two weeks later and said, "If he'll come back I'll guarantee he'll be manager in six months." And she said, "No I don't think that will be any good." He came back again, and he said, "If he'll come back I'll make him manager now." And I wasn't in but I'd told him that no

way could I go back. And I happened to be up in town and I bumped into Ray Elton and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well I'm not doing anything." Anyway I told him what I'd been doing and he said, "You bloody fool, why don't you come back into the business?" Well I was seriously thinking about it, and I was, I was always going to go back into it anyway. But he was working for - he was going to do a film called 'Eagle Squadron' with Walter Wanger. So I joined him and we worked on this thing together, and Harry Watt was directing and it was all you know, quite good fun doing it. [NB Watt actually only directed the background photography] But Ray and I weren't very popular with the director and producer who was a chap called Ernest B Schoedsack. He was about seven feet tall, I never understood what the hell he was talking about, because he'd go, "Waa...waa...waa...waa. What do you think, hey?" I'd say, "Yeah it's a good idea." "What do you mean, it's a good idea?" You know, all this would go on. And he had a suite in the Savoy Hotel and he used to walk up and down the Savoy in his braces and shirtsleeves and no shoes on, which didn't go down terribly well! And so we weren't in very good taste, and they had another cameraman, who shall be nameless, they brought in rather over us, and he was a 'yes' man, you see, and he got on very well with them.So they had arranged to pull down a five-story building to reveal St Paul's. A derelict building. But the producer, Ernest Schoedsack , wanted a cloud behind St Paul's. Now this is September you know, in England - you either get sun or you get rain, period. So for three weeks they had this bloody great bulldozer with a cable round this building and Ray and I, without their knowledge, had got into a building behind them, and we thought that this would make a marvellous night shot you see, we had a night filter on. And we waited and they waited, and we waited, and they used to come and go down the pub you see, "Let's not wait around the camera," I mean there was no way at all. So one day suddenly the cloud appears behind St Paul's, Schoedsack goes mad, you've got the recorder switched on so I won't tell you what he said! And they dug these blokes out of the pub and the cloud is now beginning to move away - great panic! And they shout, "Standby and roll 'em!" They rolled 'em and down came the building and there was St Paul's, a beautiful shot. We sold it, I mean it was beautiful! And there was St Paul's, there was a night filter on, a moonlight shot of St Paul's, you know all the dust and all that, so that was absolutely great. And as we were packing up, I looked down and I said to Ray, "Oh-oh!" And there was a knot around the camera. And what apparently had happened was that they didn't thread the camera, when they came they said, "Oh well we'll go down the pub and have a drink and we'll thread it when we come back" - they forgot to thread it! [Chuckling] So that was that, they survived that! We then went down to Southend to shoot some planes taking off, Spitfires, I think they were five or six abreast, which they did particularly for the shot. And when they came back all the gun ports were blown away you see, where they'd been - and it scratched. And that was the thing we were sort of concentrating on. And we had the second camera on it and they had the first camera and as the planes came in, Schoedsack was dancing with glee, it was an absolutely wonderful shot, it really was a wonderful shot. And he said, "Jesus Christ, that's great!" And when they cut, the RAF man standing with us said, "I don't know if it matters but I could see the film." [Laughs] They hadn't shut the door of the camera! That was that! So anyway Harry Watt, who had just done 'Target for Tonight' which was a documentary for the Crown Film Unit, said, "Why don't you go to the Crown Film Unit?" Well I was making about a hundred and twenty a week with Wanger, and he said, "Why don't you go to the Crown Film Unit, you'd love it," which I knew I would. So I went there and I got ten pounds a week, and I made a film with Pat Jackson, a little one, and then I made 'Fires Were Started'. And it's rather funny really because, then Pat asked me to photograph 'Western Approaches' which was the biggest film they'd ever done, and in colour. I hadn't done Technicolor - this was

going to be my big break, you know. Unfortunately my first wife was expecting a child, which she lost, so I had to go back home, back down to Croydon and sort things out and then get back again on the unit. I'd no sooner got back than I learnt my mother was dying, so I had to go back again. And Pat Jackson very kindly offered to sort of carry on with Jack Cardiff until I got back. So I said, "Well that's rather silly, because Jack Cardiff is the best Technicolor cameraman in the world - it just doesn't make sense." And Pat and I were great buddies you know, almost like brothers in fact, and I said, "Forget it - get on with it because it's silly." So anyway I went back for my mother's funeral, and they had got him into a - what they had done was to - we had a twenty-one foot lifeboat and they had built a platform on one end, on the stern-end, that's right. They'd built a platform, oh six or eight feet, hanging over the end of this thing. Well of course when we got to Holyhead, the chap in charge of the boat that was going to tow us said, "You're not really going out in that are you?" So we said, "Well yeah of course we are." So he said, "Well I'll tell you one thing, after we turn round I'll give you about three waves and you'll sink." You see [???] you know. The moment we got on the back, the front came up, so they put ballast in the front so the thing was stepping down [?] in the water all the time. And we had on board twenty-one merchant seamen - I'll show you a picture in a minute - a continuity girl, a soundman, three Technicolor, myself, Pat, first assistant and property - and this boat was really down in the water, no messing! So anyway we went out and the guy was quite right, we really barely got back, so we had to re-think that - that was before I went back home actually. And so I went to the studio and I learned that they'd got a problem, that they couldn't use reflectors because of the roll in the boat, and therefore they had to have a generator. No earthly possibility of getting a full-sized generator there, so knowing I was fairly mechanical, I said to Dora Wright, who was the production manager, I said, "Look, I'll find you a generator," which I did. I found a ten horsepower Ford with a generator attached to it, it hadn't been run for years. I got it going and I went back up there, to look after the mechanical side in other words, really. And we got this generator on in another boat, so now we had a boat called 'Tyella' which rolled like a pig! It was sixty-seven feet long and it drew three feet, and the only reason we got it was because it was useless, because every other boat was being employed by the war. And behind that we had the generator boat and behind that we had the shooting boat. And we went out and we were going about twelve miles in all kinds of weather, if I can find the film I'll put it on for you later on and you'll see what it was like. And we would go out at eight o'clock in the morning, freezing cold, we shot from I think it was from the 10th September until the middle of March, every day, seven days a week, we had three days off for Christmas, that was all we had. And no food - well we had food but you couldn't eat it because it was only a sandwich, a boxed lunch, and of course with the rough seas, you'd got out on an Irish sea there, the moment you unwrapped the sandwich you were eating pure salt! I mean it was impossible, and everyone was being sick anyway, you know. And poor old Jack Cardiff was the bravest man I ever knew in my life because he only had to look at water and he was seasick. I mean he was photographing it and they used to lift him up from the bilge to look through the viewfinder and lay him back again, quite literally. And in fact we had - eventually they changed this 'Tyella'. It used to go over, oh, it didn't look like it was going to come back. Everybody was sliding across on the outer bridge and, oh, it was absolute murder! [Chuckling] And the American soundman we had, he kept popping up about every three minutes to be sick [chuckles]. And so eventually they managed to change this boat for a trawler, a Hull trawler. And they had the original skipper, a Hull trawler-man - rings hanging off his uniform, cap all awry, it was his boat and they just appointed him skipper. And I remember one

day we were going down, it was blowing and this skipper had never been seasick in his life - took his teeth out.

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Jack Cardiff saw that, he was sick straight away! [Chuckles] Didn't have to get near the boat [chuckles] - that was the finish! And anyway we struggled on and we got this thing done, the whole picture took about eighteen months. And you know I mean I obviously wasn't the cameraman on it but I had a lot of fun on it. And I think we came back in about the middle of March. And then I think after that I did some more, I did some more for Crown Film Unit and then Ian Dalrymple left and started Wessex Films and he asked me to join him, and Chick Fowle [H. E. Fowle]. [Break in Recording]

Alan Lawson: Side two, Cyril Pennington-Richards. Yes if we can go back then to 'Fires Were Started'?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah.

Alan Lawson: And tell us more about that in detail, yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes well that was a film - I'd done a five-minute film with Pat Jackson called 'Builders' and um, actually it was quite a nice little film and everyone liked it. And Humphrey approached me and asked me if I'd photograph 'Fires Were Started' which he was about to begin for this, you know, for the MoI. And I said that I'd be delighted, and so we started. We used entirely the fire crew, no actors again, and we shot it actually during the blitz in London. And it was during a slight pause in the blitz, but it meant lighting up the whole of Dockland which had already been bombed very heavily, which was in fact not looked on too favourably by the locals, who weren't allowed to show a chink of light, of course! And we had - I think we had something like eight weeks in the docks, actually in the docks - no, perhaps a little less, perhaps six actually in the docks where we staged the fires. And we worked really amazing hours, well I think so. We used to start at eight in the morning until about half past four, when it was getting dark. Start again at six until twelve, then go back to the hotel and start again at eight. And the whole of that action sequence was in fact shot there, there was nothing in the studio at all of that particular sequence, the only studio sequences were of course in the offices and that sort of thing.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: But it was quite fun, I mean Humphrey was a very exciting man to work with, he was full of ideas and everything had to be absolutely right. I mean I've never worked with such a perfectionist in my life, quite literally. I mean we had to do a close-up of a poster and instead of doing what every other director would have done, stuck it up on the wall and shot it, you know cast a shadow across it or something silly, he put it up, put one up, soaked it with water and soot, tore it off, put another one up, soaked it, tore it off - about three or four and then put the other one on top and aged it a little. It looked absolutely marvellous, with the

water running down it you know. In fact it's the only time I've ever had an insert reproduced in a film magazine, it was actually shown as a still.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes. Tell me, what equipment did you use on that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: On that film we had um - it was black and white of course...

Alan Lawson: Yeah, sure, sure.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: We used, well we used several cameras in fact. One was a standard Mitchell and we also had a camera which er - very old now, I mean it doesn't exist now, it was called a Newman Sinclair...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...which was a clockwork camera. And we showed a shot of a very famous fire float, called 'The Massey Shaw' which eventually went to Dunkirk in fact, and had been to Dunkirk by then. And Humphrey wanted a shot of this from the shore as close as we could get and another one from the top of the quay, which of course had been bombed, you know the building had been bombed. And so we shot from the shore and scrambled up the pilings. And I put - getting up I put the camera above my head onto the wharf, and was horrified to see it bouncing on all the girders as it went down to the bottom again, and burst like a bomb! [Laughs] And actually cameras were so difficult to get, impossible, that I went to someone who I had known several years before when I first started in the business, called Kingston and Lines [?] and they fixed it up for me. And the Crown Film Unit never realised that it had ever been damaged! But it really - I mean it was an absolute wreck - I managed to get it done by the next morning so they...

Alan Lawson: That was old man Kingston, Arthur Kingston?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, Arthur Kingston, ah hmm.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes and there was another chap called Lines[?]...

Alan Lawson: Yes but he was a technical wizard rather...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh was he?

Alan Lawson: Yes, but Arthur Kingston was the real technician.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I bought a Bell and Howell camera from them eventually, only I had already bought one in the thirties and they did a terrific amount of work, it really was quite extraordinary. But I mean to see this camera, an absolute wreck! And the thing only ran I think

for about fifty feet, and old Sinclair, of course he had a works somewhere, I can't remember where it was...

Alan Lawson: Highgate?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Highgate.

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And he used to check the focus in the coal-hole, an ordinary house, you know. He was a genius really, to have produced that camera at that time.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Because the Germans had the Eyemo...

Alan Lawson: No the Arri... [Arriflex]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...Arri rather, and that was the end of it of course, that was the end of it.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I mean there were a lot of weird cameras. There was one called the Ackley[?]...

Alan Lawson: Yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Do you know the Ackley [NB possibly Acmade??]?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It had a shutter which went right round the mechanism...

Alan Lawson: Yes...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and the reason it did that was that if you panned with an ordinary shutter, focus shutter, an ordinary revolving shutter camera, you got a judder.

Alan Lawson: You got a judder, that's right yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: With an Ackley[?] you didn't, it was absolutely smooth. A great focal [???] shutter - like a flywheel.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Absolutely incredible!

Alan Lawson: It was used by one of the newsreel actually.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, that's right, big...

Alan Lawson: Yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...[???], absolutely. Well anyway I went - so we started this 'Fires Were Started' and we worked at Pinewood. I think we - I can't remember which way round we did it, whether we did the interiors first or the exteriors first. I've got a feeling we probably should have done the interiors first, but whether we did I don't know. But anyway we were an awful long time down in these docks and when it came to the end we packed up and went away and because of the hours we were working it was too late to wrap the gear up. We couldn't wrap the gear up and get back to the hotel and get back again eight hours later, obviously, because we wouldn't get any sleep. So we left the stuff there and we had night watchmen. And eventually we moved away from the site and some six or eight weeks after we moved, the ministry rang up and said, "Do you still need this night watchman?"

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He'd been turning up for eight weeks! I don't suppose he turned up for a moment, he just took the money! [Chuckles] That's bureaucracy for you!

Alan Lawson: Now from...

Colin Moffat: Can I ask a question?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Colin Moffat: Penny, can you recall whether you had a shooting script on the film, because it's what called - sort of today would be called a dramatised documentary.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes.

Colin Moffat: - There was dialogue in the film and there were sort of actors?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I do not believe we really had a proper script, a lot of it was off the cuff.

Colin Moffat: Was that difficult from a camera point of view, not knowing - that you were improvising scenes? I mean do you know when this is over and all that sort of thing?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well you'd have a rehearsal, you see you'd have a rehearsal. I've shot feature films without a rehearsal. I shot one feature film in which the principal actor, who shall be nameless, would not rehearse. And so when it came to what the scene was, you asked

the director. The soundman would say, "Well if he goes in that corner, will he say anything?" He'd say, "Well no I don't think - well he might." And this is how it would go on. And only once on a very, very intricate shot did I say to the director, "This is not going to work, we must have a rehearsal of this shot." And he said, "Well don't tell the star that we're having a rehearsal, go through it, pretend we're shooting." So we went through it with the camera and clappers and everything and when it was all over he forgot and said, "Right now we'll shoot it," and the star walked off the set, he wouldn't come back. He said, "Never, ever rehearse me" - I'll give you his name afterwards!

Alan Lawson: [laughs]

Colin Moffat: Did those firemen make up the dialogue as they went along?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Er...it was a bit ad-lib yes, they suggested things, oh yes certainly they did. I mean Fred Griffiths and people like that, oh yes they did indeed. Because people like Humphrey wouldn't know, they wouldn't have contact in fact with that kind of person you know. I mean he wasn't a snob by any means, not by any means, far from it, but he wouldn't be present when they would be talking naturally to each other. I mean Humphrey was an amazing man, I remember shooting something with him in London, I've forgotten what it was, and there was a man sweeping the road - he attracted people like this. There was a guy, a road-sweeper, and we got the camera set-up and he came by and he said, "What's that camera? What are you shooting at, three, eight?" or whatever it was. [Chuckles]. And apparently he was a film boffin - a film buff!

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And he was doing a job sweeping the road so that he could have plenty of time to run his films, he had a fantastic collection of old films. Now you see to me this is extraordinary - to Humphrey that wasn't extraordinary at all, he was surprised that all road-sweepers didn't have a collection of old films!

Alan Lawson: [laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He attracted, he somehow attracted or was attracted to these extraordinary people.

Colin Moffat: Do you think his background as a painter helped him at all?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes, oh yes, without question, oh without question. It was a little bit sort of um - I think he laughed up his sleeve a great deal. Because I remember seeing a hoarding which was torn, just a torn hoarding, and he took a photograph of it, and I saw that photograph in Bond Street, in a frame, in an art shop window, a photograph by Humphrey Jennings. I've forgotten how much it was, but I mean that was it, I mean he didn't contribute anything to it at all, he just took it, you know. But apart from that he was fascinating at work really, completely heartless in a sense. I mean I remember we had a man called John Cooper who was an art director and we were doing these explosions which were quite big and there was a

terrific explosion and I saw John Cooper absolutely blinded, you know, staggering around the back of the shot. And Humphrey said, "Get John Cooper out of the shot! Lead him out of the shot", he said! [Laughs] He was all right but I mean he was absolutely shaken, but I mean you know it's - he was an incredible man.

Colin Moffat: What about the shooting ratio, Penny, on the blitz stuff? I suspect you [???]?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes a hell of a lot, oh a hell of a lot, there was a tremendous amount of shooting. I mean if you were shooting an ordinary film you signed an agreement that you would shoot at a ratio, I think it's - I used to sign an agreement of about six to one. No one ever stuck to it but you signed that agreement and they could throw that back in your face. I mean you couldn't shoot a ratio six to one, you might get near it, I used to get very near it but normally it's more like twenty to one. For instance if you take a length of the film 'Fires Were Started' which was I think about an hour, I've forgotten how many weeks it took to shoot, but an awful lot. And the cutter was Stewart McAllister, you've come across him have you?

Colin Moffat: Did you see him at work at all?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes, oh yes, a great chum of mine. I've got a letter upstairs from him, I'll show it to you before you go.

Colin Moffat: I mean he was a bit unusual.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes, oh he was incredible, he'd work all night, I mean literally all night. And he and Humphrey would fight over two frames, you know. I'll get that letter for you. And Stewart, Mac was as dogged as hell, and he sneaked back in the middle of the night and put 'em back, and Humphrey would come back in the morning and take 'em out again, this lark would go on! They wouldn't talk to each other for three days, you know. And it was really absolutely extraordinary! [Chuckles] Oh I loved old Mac, he lived in British Grove [???]. Because I lived there, you know he came and had a drink there and eventually moved in you know - oh it was great fun. Oh they were very happy days, I was very sorry to leave. I never earned more than ten pounds a week all the time I was there.

Alan Lawson: What was your last one with them before you moved on? [Pause] Do you remember?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I think it must have been 'Fires Were Started'. I think it must have been, I can't remember anything else.

Alan Lawson: But then you went on to...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes well you see Ian Dalrymple moved to Korda.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well Ian Dalrymple formed a company called Wessex.

Alan Lawson: Yeah, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, Ian Dalrymple formed Wessex eventually and asked me to go with him, which I did, and then we started making these features. The first one he did was 'Woman in the Hall'. The second one was 'Esther Waters', unfortunately. It was a very unfortunate picture, he should never - it should never have been made. I pleaded with him not to make it in fact because we were chums, Ian - how it is with people like Ian. And it was a dreary story. He was madly in love with Thomas Hardy's work, that was the trouble, that was why it was called Wessex. The second one was going to be 'Far From the Madding Crowd', but of course he never got the money for it. In fact 'Esther Waters' has never been shown. It was shown, after three days at Uxbridge they had to take it off, and that was an expensive picture, about three times the normal price. A very, very sad thing really but um...

Colin Moffat: Had Ian been a producer before that point, a feature-film producer?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No I don't think he had, he was a writer basically. An extremely nice man, absolute dear, I mean there was no question, he was an absolute sweetheart. But he wasn't tough enough you know, I mean as a director he wasn't. He didn't like to intrude on the privacy of the artist by telling them what to do, I mean quite literally he considered it was impertinent. I mean Dirk Bogarde in his autobiography says he asked Ian how to play something, he said, "Well I mean you're the actor, I wouldn't dream of telling you." Well I mean [chuckling] that's just not any good! I mean he was a real dear, old Ian, pushing his glasses up. And unfortunately he carried the can for that film, financially, and he had one or two other things which I think were very unsuccessful, and they broke him, financially. It was very sad. Because he wouldn't duck behind anybody else, he would never blame anybody else - he was the producer, it was his fault. It isn't always.

Colin Moffat: The title 'Once a Jolly Swagman'...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah...

Alan Lawson: That was Harry Watt, wasn't it?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That was Jack Lee.

Alan Lawson: Oh, Jack Lee, right.

Colin Moffat: You shot that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No I didn't, no I'd left by then.

Colin Moffat: It's on your credit list.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No it shouldn't be.

Colin Moffat: ...in your book...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No it shouldn't be, no it shouldn't be.

Colin Moffat: [???]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No I didn't do that, er, Chick Fowle did that.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Actually what happened was this - Chick Fowle and I both did 'A Woman in the Hall', I think we've probably both got a credit on it. I'm not quite sure whether Chick has a credit, if he hasn't he ought to have had, because it's a rather crazy idea of having two cameramen. So Chick and I were great friends, great, great friends, and they could move from set to set. You see I would be lighting a set while they were shooting that one and then move over and shoot - this is the theory. Except that the lighting was quicker than the directing, that was the real trouble, and it was an absolute waste of bloody time.

Alan Lawson: Who was the director?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Jack Lee.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes that's right, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...in both cases. And when it came to 'Esther Waters' as far as I can remember I did that on my own, I'm pretty sure. I don't seem to remember Chick doing that at all.

Colin Moffat: 'The Wooden Horse'?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: 'The Wooden Horse', yes I did. I did that after - I did that with Jack Lee again. Ian called me in again to do that one, I was freelancing of course by then, and we went to Germany and did it you know.

Alan Lawson: What was Jack Lee like to work with? Because he was from documentaries wasn't he?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Hmm. Well in point of fact we got on quite well, we had differences you know. But he was a different cup of tea from Humphrey.

Alan Lawson: Oh yeah, he was very mercurial.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes absolutely, absolutely. And um, he did very well in the end, you know out of 'A Wooden Horse' and the other films like 'A Town Like Alice' - because he went to Australia. And in fact I was his wife's witness at her divorce so that they could get married. We were quite chums at one time you know, but people - you diverge, it's very simple, nobody's fault, you just don't behave quite the same as you did ten years before.

Alan Lawson: Yeah, yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And um we were both a bit pig-headed and that was it. But um, as a matter of fact I bumped into him the day he went to Australia. I was up in town, I'd just done a script for a picture and - called 'Guns at Batasi' for which I didn't get the credit - there we are, I've got the script upstairs. That was one of those unfortunate misunderstandings. That in fact, unfortunately, was done by the ACT. It was a mistake. What happened was that George Brown who I'd worked with before, had this thing called 'Siege of Battersea'[?], which had been a play by a man called John Hollis[?] - a good play, good central character, no question. And he asked me to do the script, which I did. And I was doing another film and due to a mix-up it went to arbitration and although I had in fact only used the central character of the original script and three pages of the script, the credit went the other way. It's the way it goes, it's the way it goes, one has to live with that. I accepted, I agreed that I would accept the arbitration. But I had never met him, they came down and said that I, with John Hollis[?] had done a very practical script - I'd never even met him! The only time I'd met him was when I was having a drink with him and Jack Lee walked in on his way to Australia! [Chuckles] And we never discussed script, anyway that's the way it goes - you have to live with that in this business.

Alan Lawson: Then after Wessex, what?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: After Wessex I did a lot of freelancing, I then did a lot of television.

Alan Lawson: You did Independent Frame, when was that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No I never did Independent Frame.

Alan Lawson: You didn't?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, they wanted me to, I wouldn't do it.

Alan Lawson: Ah!

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's why...

Alan Lawson: When was this then, when you were in Wessex?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Independent Frame would have been after I left Wessex...

Alan Lawson: Ah ha.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...1948...

Alan Lawson: Ah ha.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: 1948, when I was doing that film that was on that book - that was the reason why I did 'Give Us the Day'.

Alan Lawson: What the Edward Dmytryk?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes that's right, the first one I did with him was called 'Obsession'.

Alan Lawson: Ah ha.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And I refused to do Independent Frame. It was crazy, to me, absolutely crazy.

Colin Moffat: Would it be good to have an opinion of Independent Frame?

Alan Lawson: Yes, you were saying it was crazy, what is...

Colin Moffat: Give us your view of it.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well the thing's quite obvious. When you look at it, from a technical point of view if you know anything at all about films, the easiest thing to move is the camera.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: To move the set is considerably more difficult, you might as well move the studio! I mean you're talking about moving something weighing what, twenty tons probably altogether, instead of something which is designed to be moved on casters...

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...you can push it with one hand. And the theory was that the art department would give you a spot on the floor, number 523Z or whatever it was, and that big stage at Pinewood was marked out in squares, literally, and the theory was that you would occupy this position. You would then presumably sit down and do nothing for two hours while they wheeled in all the back projection gear and everything else. They had these ninety-foot tunnels... [Break in recording]

Alan Lawson: You say ninety-foot tunnels...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes... [Break in Recording - there is clearly a technical fault in the recording]

Colin Moffat: Best to go back, I think if you begin by describing the basic Independent Frame, in case anyone doesn't understand. What is Independent Frame?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Right, the theory was that for some reason it was sold to the Rank organisation by someone I think we both know, as being a good scheme, for some unknown reason. Basically it was brought about because the art department wanted to control the whole production, there was no question about that. I mean that was very clear at that time, that they considered that because they designed the sets they could design the production, which is to a certain extent true - to a certain extent, but not to this extent! And this - David Rawnsley had this idea (which to me was quite frankly, to say the least, not acceptable), that it was easier to put the camera, which was on casters anyway, in a fixed spot, and wheel the sets, which would have to be put on casters, which were called vicar's rostrums[?], which were enormous things, I don't know how many wheels they had on. But they would build the whole set, or about half the set on the rostrum or a quarter or whatever it was and wheel it all in and gradually set it up. And the windows would be covered by back projection screens, they wouldn't have painted backings, you'd have back projection screens, which would have to have a throw of about ninety-feet. So the studio wall had to be taken out and these projection tunnels built, which came in very handy later on when they abandoned the scheme and used it for straight back projection it was very good indeed. And they did get some very good back projection stuff out of it. As far as I know only about three films were made, but the cost of the actual equipment at that time, extra equipment at that time alone was, I believe two million pounds. Which at that time, well you're talking even today of something which is more like twenty million - even if you could do it. The idea was that you would do it the most difficult way. Instead of having full-sized sets you would have miniature sets, which meant that you couldn't have people in them. So that if you did a caf scene the caf would have to be closed and the chairs would have to be on the tables - miniature chairs on miniature tables. The whole process took so long to line up that they were very lucky if they got four or five set-ups a day. Because every time you moved the camera, or didn't move the camera rather, every time the camera had to appear to have moved, everything else had to move, it was absolutely unbelievable. And you can't track across a back projection screen for instance, you know that isn't possible, so that restricts the camera movement.

Colin Moffat: What did an Independent Frame shot look like on the screen? What was bad about it?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Bloody awful! What was bad about it was that it was so difficult. You see if you had a wide angle - you couldn't use a wide angle anyway because of back projection. I mean there's a limit to how wide the angle can be, put it that way. If you're straight on the beam with one projector you're not necessarily straight on the beam with another, that beam might be off-centre, the tunnel might not match. You know, you can't swing a whole tunnel, the whole ninety-foot tunnel to suit, period. So you had to - the shot had to be designed with all those limitations in mind. Now the amount of pre-production planning was so enormous that they had to shoot the doubling shots of the exterior perhaps three, four, five months before they even started the film, before the film was cast. So they had to cover all the possibilities of a blonde, fat actress, a blonde, thin actress, various dresses. The male lead might be an enormous man, might be a normal man, and this literally went on, they did all the combinations of it. Horses galloped, they changed, the horses galloped again, put some more doubles on - this went on. And then the director was completely limited by the plan of the - it was directed before he ever got near it! Because he was presented with a picture-board with each shot on it, that was his shot, whether he liked it or not that was what he was going to do. Now as I told Tom White

[production manager], I said, "Look, if you could find directors who could make up their minds the night before what they wanted that day, you wouldn't need independent frame or anything else. You wouldn't need a schedule as long as you've got, because most of that schedule is a group of puzzled people following an undecided director on a marathon round the set!"

Alan Lawson: Hmm, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know - quite literally! And the other problem which they hadn't faced was the fact that to produce anything in miniature, if it's a tenth of the size, it's ten times as much, if it's a hundredth of the size it's a hundred times as much, because that's the way it is. You can't just go out and hire a miniature chair, I wouldn't know where you'd go. You can go to Tines Furnishing[?] and get whatever you want, you know, period. And that's that, and you pay for the number of days you use, but not on this lot. And the things were so valuable that they would all have had to have been stored and it would have been catalogued on a computer today to find out what you had. There was - it was so limiting. And the other factor was that you had back projection tied in with set lighting. And they would have perhaps two projectionists and they would pan from this window, take a character across to that window. Now to get those two projectors balanced was something. You know, this one might be brighter than that one and then next take this one's - it was absolutely imponderable. I don't know how many films they did but it certainly wasn't many.

Alan Lawson: Hmm, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And then they were left of course with this marvellous back projection tunnel which they used as a back projection tunnel, which was very good you know, but it wasn't worth that kind of money.

Colin Moffat: Why didn't they do it just with the sets and have painted backdrops?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh that was - no, this is only the beginning of it, this is only the beginning of it, you're only talking about the beginning of this mad idea. The continuation of this was that you wouldn't have film on the set at all, you would transmit a television picture to the labs, and these aerials were in existence. And the labs would pick it up and put it straight on the film, on negatives, you see. And when I said to Bert Easy[?], I said, "What do you think will happen if some kid on a moped without a suppressor goes by?" And he sort of, "Well you know..." I said, "Never mind about "well you know", who's going to tell 'em?" [Chuckles] And they had this thing - television viewfinder...

Alan Lawson: High definition films.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, they had a television viewfinder on the camera, they came to Eddie Dmytryk when we were doing 'Give Us This Day' and they asked him if he would test it for them. Now it had two hundred and seventy six valves in it. Now you'd do it now with transistors of course like that [snaps fingers].

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It had a cable like that hanging on the camera, and all that did was to transmit that image back to the director, so that the director could sit in a deckchair and see what he was getting, right?

Alan Lawson: Hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And they said this to Eddie and Eddie said, "Look kid, if I didn't know what I was getting I wouldn't be in this business." He said, "No way!" So they said, "Um," and he said, "I'll tell you one thing, the day you start using that, by lunchtime it'll be in the corner of the set gathering dust." And strangely enough, I was talking to George Brown[?] years later and he had the job of testing it, he said that was exactly what happened. He said, "About eleven o'clock in the morning they packed up, that was the end of it."

Alan Lawson: Yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now can you imagine? Now at the back of their minds was the idea that John Davis could have that in his office and that any time he could press the button and see what was going on.

Alan Lawson: [laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I mean can you believe it! I mean the cable on this thing was - when you were doing a tracking shot it's bad enough to stop the ordinary camera cables making a noise, but you imagine driving this sewer pipe round with you!

Alan Lawson: Well this is the same diameter of cable they used to have before the war at Alexandra Palace.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: At what?

Alan Lawson: At Alexandra Palace, in television before the war.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right that's right.

Alan Lawson: The same diameter.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right that's right, it's the same thing. It's an old -it's a kind of television set.

Alan Lawson: Yeah that's right.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know, there have been some crazy things. I was telling you, I don't know whether you know it, do you know the Vinten television system?

Alan Lawson: Um, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Right, 1932, something like that, you see television came out in 1928 in England.

Alan Lawson: I'm going to stop you - are you going to talk about intermediate film?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Pardon?

Alan Lawson: Are you talking about intermediate film with the camera on top of the processing machine?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: On top of the processing machine.

Alan Lawson: That was me! [Laughing]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Was it?

Alan Lawson: Yes! Not Vintens it was Baird.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes well Vinten had one.

Alan Lawson: No they didn't, no, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Didn't they?

Alan Lawson: No, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was on show in Wardour Street.

Alan Lawson: No, no, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: There was one.

Alan Lawson: There was a Vinten camera.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Ah that's where I got it from.

Alan Lawson: A Vinten camera on top of a processing machine...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...that's where I got it from, that's right. I assumed it was all Vintens.

Alan Lawson: No, no, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And they used to go into processing, seven seconds development...

Alan Lawson: That's right, ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: - wash, fix, project wet thirty seconds later...

Alan Lawson: That's right.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and they used to have to record the sound to delay it for the thirty seconds.

Alan Lawson: That's right - no, no, the sound was recorded on the side of the film.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh was it?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh was it!

Alan Lawson: That was the problem! [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Must have been, must have been, yes. I assumed it was recorded to delay it.

Colin Moffat: Can you just go back to Independent Frame and say what titles were shot on it, if any.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Er, my God! I can't remember, I can almost remember them, not quite, it's an awful long time ago, but I can almost remember then. Because they were shooting that film when Eddie Dmytryk and I were making 'Obsession'.

Colin Moffat: At Denham?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: At Pinewood.

Alan Lawson: Pinewood, Pinewood, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: 'Give Us This Day' was Denham. And he was so incensed, he said, "They've tried all this lark years ago in America, it's an absolute waste of time," he said, "Kid, let's finish it." So we deliberately set out to make our picture as quickly as we could, without - not in a real hurry - we did it in five weeks. They were taking eight and their crew was about two or three times our size, they had more people in the art department than we had on the crew. You see they were trying, it was the time of the film industry when the art department were quite literally trying to take over. I remember they took over all the back projection - suddenly, just like that - they were responsible, nobody else. So they were going to organise it all. So I was shooting this film, I've forgotten what it was called now, oh Bryan Forbes was in it, he was twenty-two. It was called 'All Over the Town'. And we went on location. We came back with various plates. And so the production manager came and said, "Look, Penn, the art department have taken over all the plates and all that, they're going to prepare all the plates." So the first plate we had, the first back projection shot, up three flights of steps and there's a wall and so the

set's up [???] lights, the camera's up on the rostrum, the screen was on the rostrum and the projector was up on the rostrum. And of course that makes life difficult because everything's got to go up, lamps and everything else. I was standing there and I was thinking to myself. I said to the first assistant, I said, "Can you answer a question for me, why are we up on the rostrum?" So he said, "Well because the wall's up on the rostrum, because the projector's up on the rostrum, because the screen's up on the rostrum." I said, "Why is the wall up on the rostrum?" He said, "Well I don't know!" And so they sent for the art director - oh then the phone went and the art department literally poured into the set, I've never seen anything like it, they came in like rats coming out of a hole! And they started an argument whose fault it was. I said, "Look" - No, the first thing I said was - He said, "Where would you like to start, Penn?" I said, "I'll start with the night shot." So he said, "Night shot?" So I said, "Yes, on page so-and-so." They hadn't got a night plate, so I had to wait - I didn't have to wait, they went and did one, they overprinted a day plate, well you can imagine what that looks like!

Alan Lawson: Yeah, yeah...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know, it's shot with flat light, you know it looked dreadful. So then the next thing is, we're all up on this rostrum [chuckles] and Derek Twist was directing it and before you knew where you were there's a civil war going on between the construction and the art department! And Derek said, "Penn I wish you wouldn't start this." I said, "I didn't start anything, I just asked why we were up on the rostrum!" [Laughs] Oh it's absolutely incredible, everybody assumes that a film can be made by people sitting around a desk, and it's never been done yet, never.

Colin Moffat: Who stopped it, this thing?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Pardon?

Colin Moffat: Who stopped it?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I think we did, I think we did. Because I did another film called 'White Corridors'. Now Pat Jackson - basically, my wife had gone back to Fiji to see her mother and father, I was alone in the flat. Pat came and stayed with me and we did the whole script on a - you know we taped it - it was on a kind of recording machine, and we timed it and we literally played the whole thing through. We knew exactly all the moves, everything. And it was a two-hour picture, it went on the floor and it had an eleven-and-a-half week schedule. And I went to Jack Hanbury, who I knew, but who I'd never worked with, and I said, "Jack, you must cut this schedule, if this picture goes over eight weeks, I don't know how to make pictures." It's three and-a-half weeks off don't forget. And so he said, "Well look, I daren't. The time at Pinewood was one minute, nineteen seconds a day - a day!" He said, "I've given you two minutes, which is nearly double" and it still came out at something like eleven-and-a-half weeks. And so I said you know, it can't. Because I knew what was going to happen, if the art department had an eleven and-a-half week schedule, the sets wouldn't be ready, of course they wouldn't - they shouldn't be ready. They should go step by step, otherwise you're paying a lot of overtime for people for nothing. So we started the film and I told you the first shot was this long corridor shot, which we had in the bag in about twenty five minutes, I think it was within the first half

hour, which was unheard of. And so it went on. After three days, we were four days ahead, then the panic started. And we finished, I've forgotten how many weeks it was, it was well over three weeks under, which had never been done, ever. And Jack Hanbury nearly got the sack for over-scheduling it! He said, "I've under-scheduled it according to a normal schedule. You can't make a two hour picture in eight and-a-half weeks." And eventually - I've got a letter upstairs from Arthur Rank asking me if I would attend a meeting to find out what the hell went wrong!

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And I had this meeting with Arthur Rank and all the others - how can I tell other cameramen how to light? I can't, I wouldn't dream of it, I wouldn't dream of it. I just have a different way of lighting that's all - completely different. And the difference is that I have made films with my own money, right? Now if it's a question between a long-shot or an overcoat, it depends how warm the weather is doesn't it?

Alan Lawson: Yes! [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know, I mean it's the same money that you're going to take out of your pocket, and you're going to buy yourself a meal or you're going to buy a shot, and it makes you very economical. And you don't spoil the quality because you can't sell the damn thing if you do. So it gives you a very nice balance, and not many people have actually taken money out of their pocket and made a picture, you know, unless they're very wealthy. But you know [chuckles] when I think about thirty five pound film and we couldn't raise twenty quid - we managed to raise twenty quid but, I mean we're joking aren't we?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And um - you still could sell it, there's no excuses. And my experience of Independent Frame, it's just a nonsense, it's a nonsense! It's rather like saying, "Well look, don't move the bus, we'll move the road and bring the bus-stop down to you," isn't it?

Alan Lawson: [Chuckling] Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It's exactly the same thing, just about as sensible. And to think that you are going to have somebody - have a top-rate director come to your studio and they give him a storyboard, like he's doing a commercial, and say, "That's it" - they don't need him do they? I mean he'd just tear it up and throw it in their faces, I mean it's just too stupid. Why suddenly do they have twenty-five brilliant directors working in an art department? You know, why are they in the art department, why aren't they directing if they're that good? It's so crazy that it's unbelievable.

Colin Moffat: Do you know what the press reaction to these pictures was?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I don't know that they ever knew they were - they were disasters, they were nothing big, they were only small pictures but they took an awful long time and they employed an awful lot of people. I mean they could never have serviced the debt that they

incurred, like two million pounds, because every picture went over. You see there used to be a saying in the Rank Organisation in those days, they used to have a board which said on it, "This picture is so many days ahead or behind schedule." I never knew one, I never walked on the stage where I saw one ahead, never. And the stock reply was that if they said to the director, "You've got to get a move on, you're over-schedule and it's going to cost." "Then Arthur put another penny on the loaf!" You see, that was their stock answer, you know it was considered indecent to be ahead of time, it was considered indecent. You know it's like a quickie you see. And the thing you have to realise about films is that the producer, the producer's fee, if it's say a million-pound picture, then a hundred thousand pounds looks bad. If it's a five million-pound picture, a five hundred thousand-pound fee doesn't look too bad at all, it leaves you four and half million to make the picture!

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You see they can't put a big fee on a small film. [Break in Recording]

Alan Lawson: Side Three, Pennington-Richards. Now we're moving on to Renown.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Right. Well what happened was...

Alan Lawson: We need the date first, what year was that, exactly?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That would have been about '52, I think.

Colin Moffat: '51...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: '51, yep, it was '51, quite true, quite true. And I had been - what happened was that I'd done 'Theirs is the Glory' for Brian Hurst...

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...you see he was the director on 'Theirs is the Glory'. And he approached me to do 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'. And actually we went to - I think we shot somewhere in Rugby school, I'm not quite sure, I think we did, but anyway we went off to Rugby. And in fact I tried to persuade George Minter, unsuccessfully, to hire a pantechnican to put a set in it, so that if we had bad weather we'd just go in to suit[?], because the boys' studies were only six feet by eight feet you see.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And he was a bit worried about it and he didn't do it - he regretted it afterwards actually. But we did shoot in a tiny studio in er -

Alan Lawson: Where was it, er - ?

Colin Moffat: Nettlefold?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, no - did we?

Alan Lawson: No it wasn't [???]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No, a little tiny studio we shot in...er the Ab...

Alan Lawson: Abbey Studios?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Abbey Studios.

Alan Lawson: Abbey Studios yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Down at Kensington.

Alan Lawson: Ah, St Mary Abbott's!

Cyril Pennington-Richards: St Mary Abbott's, that's right, St Mary Abbott's. In fact if had a long shot you got your bum up the chimney, you remember the fireplace there?

Alan Lawson: [laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was only an old private house. We shot quite a lot there actually. The rest was shot at Nettlefold's I suppose, I can't remember, it must have been Nettlefold's, yes, yes it was, it was Nettlefold's. And we went to Rugby and we shot quite a lot up there, and then we came back and did the studio stuff and worked on the Thames. It was actually in the winter by the time we got to the Thames, so the boys swimming in the river, we shot in November! And in fact there is one where the two boys nearly go over the weir, I have photographs somewhere of actually - I don't think it's John Howard Davies, it's Charlesworth, John Charlesworth, the other boy, actually over the weir, they almost lost him, very nearly. And [Graham] managed to grab him back. And I had insisted on the boat being there because I said, "Those boys are going to be freezing, there's no question of taking them back to the studio. You've got to get 'em out of the water and get 'em in the warm!" So they had a boat with the oven open, it was really cosy, I mean otherwise it would have finished them! You imagine getting out, at that temperature, in sopping clothes, getting into a car and going back to the studio, I mean it's ridiculous, but there we are. And in fact it was a very happy picture really, it really was, it worked very well. Bob Newton was terribly good and very sober, never had a drink the whole picture. I did two films with him and not at any time was he any problem at all. In fact I thought he was very good in it...

Colin Moffat: Playing Doctor Arnold?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, and very good indeed, he really was. And it was a very good script by Noel Langley, very good indeed. You know he scripted 'Scrooge' - had a touch for that sort of thing I thought. And as a matter of fact, when the film was over everybody gave John Howard Davies - who is now of course an executive and not quite the same size - a

day out. And I have seen him once, I've seen him once since. I was doing a film at Twickenham and he was playing an extra in the film, and he came up to me and we had a chat, a slim young man, you know - now not a slim young man any more. But I liked old John very much. And when the film was over we all gave him a treat you see, so I thought, "Well I'll take him out on the river for a day." And he had this tutor, girl tutor with him, and it was arranged that I'd meet him at Walton or somewhere. Along he came, carrying a bundle, so I said, "What's the bundle for, John?" He said, "oh that's my dry clothes for when I fall in the river." So I said, "Don't be silly John, you're not going to fall in the river." He said, "Well Mummy says I am." [Laughter] This is absolutely true! So we got the hood up on this thing and it was only a three-berth, you know a little run-about thing with a cabin and all that lark. And so John said, "Can I put the top down?" I said, "Yeah all right, John." Of course he went round the back, and it's a catwalk about the side you know, and I'm still steering this thing and I was thinking, "Christ, where's John?" And I saw a man pushing a boat out on the shore, I thought, "Christ, where's John?" No sign of him, we could see on the [cameras/canvass] he wasn't there. So I looked round the corner, he's swimming! I can't swim a stroke, not a single stroke. So I bring the boat round, and I came up alongside him - he had dungarees on and a thick belt and wellingtons. And I lean over and I get hold of him by the belt and I start pulling him like mad, and he weighs a ton! I get him up and he's still got the wellingtons on!

Alan Lawson: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So I got him out and I said, "For God's sake John, why did you keep your wellingtons on?" He said, "It's the only pair I've got!" [Laughs] He said, "Mummy said I'd..."he fell in! [Laughs] He was a character old John, he really was, he was a funny lad. He couldn't sing a note, I mean he couldn't sing a note and his mother kept saying to Brian, she said, "No, John can't sing a note." And there are people who cannot, he didn't have the faintest idea. He'd try to sing the links in Poacher[?] - hadn't any idea at all whether to go up or down you see. And of course, when he started singing, that was it! [Laughs] It didn't matter because he didn't know how to sing well. Oh he was a real character, old John.

Colin Moffat: Do you remember a Gordon Parry?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yep, very well, yes he directed...

Colin Moffat: Did you know him at all before that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I did 'Tom Brown'. Of course, actually, he started directing 'Tom Brown' and Brian took over in fact...

Colin Moffat: Oh!

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Brian finished it in fact. Yes Gordon did direct quite a lot of it, and it was quite good you know.

Colin Moffat: Was it a low budget picture? Didn't it have to be done rather fast and so on?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was a George Minter picture...

Colin Moffat: Ah hmm...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He told me afterwards that I saved him twenty-five thousand quid. When it came to doing the next one I had a job to get the same money! [Laughs]

Colin Moffat: Hmm - a Scrooge?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: A Scrooge, yeah. Oh George, I think I done another one for him, I can't remember, I might have done another one. But it was low budget when it came in because it came in under budget - well under budget. I've forgotten what the budget was, the budget in those days was under a hundred.

Colin Moffat: Was a lot of 'Tom Brown' shot at the school?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes.

Colin Moffat: Interiors as well?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I've got a feeling I shot some interior.

Colin Moffat: Hmm, it looked like it.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes I know it did. Well of course what I did, when I came back I had the sets polished black you see, and that's what makes them look solid.

Colin Moffat: Well they look very solid.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah that's right, that's right. Because you see, I'm surprised - I'm not knocking other cameramen - but it surprises me that they're not terribly observant. To them it's rather - let's give you an example - when television came out... Colour film started, right, then television came out. Now colour films were a great asset, because people only saw green trees. Television came out, they spent six hours looking at black and white trees. And suddenly it didn't matter if it was colour you see, because they only - and to a certain extent this is true of cameramen, that they don't... For instance if I'm lighting something, say on 'Give Us This Day', I have a ceiling over the whole lot. Now I start with realism, because I think you've got to add to realism, you mustn't try and create realism, it's there, you know, you must make it be there, and then you must control it. And you'll find with these photographs here, I'll show you one down at Walton, when Freddie Ryan, the boom-swinger, he came to me one day and I'd just rigged a set which was a street in the snow. Now what I used to do was use a lot of dew arcs, very soft light, because a snow-scene is soft light, it's a grey sky and white snow. I mean you don't have a shadow, it doesn't exist. And I'd rigged this set with nothing but dew arcs and poor old Freddie, a very nice guy, he said, "Penn, I've just been on the set next-door, what am I going to do?" I said, "What do you mean, Freddie?" He said, "Well the light's straight over the top, I'll get eighty shadows." I said, "Well don't worry Fred." And he was still worrying his guts out, we went on

the set and I used to have it all rigged so that we'd walk straight on the set, switch 'em on and shoot, and no mucking about you know, which is where you saved the time. If I can get on the set and just say, "Right that's it," roughly - fine! Then we can save an enormous amount of time. And we walked on the set and he said, "Well where am I...?" I said, "Look Freddie, light 'em up." So he lit 'em up and he looked, he nearly cried. I said, "Put the mic in, Fred." He put the mic in, I said, "Where's the shadow?" There wasn't one - there were eighty tiny - well you couldn't see them, they were there in fact but you couldn't see them because they cancelled each other out. And that to him was a miracle, and he spoke about it the last time I saw him, years later. It's observation - it's really absolutely extraordinary to me. If you're doing a back projection shot for instance, if you want sunlight back projection shot, it's so quick that it's unbelievable. All you have to do, if I'm sitting here in a boat and the screen's back there, say it's six feet behind me, all you've got to do is put your key-light the right side, shade it down 'till the shadow of my head is just behind this chair, that's all, and put a really soft softener in - that's it, period. And I have Eddie Dmytryk's book upstairs, in which he says that when he runs 'Give Us This Day' he says, "I often admire Penny's skill, because when I run my copy of 'Give Us This Day' I can't remember what was shot outside and what was shot inside, it's so realistic." It's so easy, but they don't do that, they do cross light and back light and all sorts of things which are completely un-natural. You need two light sources and only two, no back light at all, unless you're shooting in summer on the backing of course, that's a different matter. But assuming that the back projection plate is shot the way you usually shoot with a three-quarter front-light, you've just got to get the key light, you can light it [snaps fingers] like that, literally, you know. And people are astonished that it looks real - of course it looks real, why shouldn't it? There's no difference. You see what I've noticed, for instance if I were lighting a set I start lighting the outside first, but they don't. They light the inside, get fifty lamps inside, don't light the backing, don't even look at it! You know, just "That's all right." But you start with the backing, first of all you've got to look at the backing to see which way it's lit, that's the first thing, otherwise the thing won't blend. And if you start with the outside - if we're sitting in this room, if you look at me now, I'm... there I'm half lit on one side of the face.

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now if I put some dew arcs out there I would get exactly this effect, absolutely exactly. Like the street scene I showed you.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now that street scene is - I have - that's in the library of the Rank Organisation as a shot of New York, and it has been produced by cutter after cutter in television series that I've been doing. And I've had American producers and American - you know they have a couple of front-men over here, saying, "Jeez I know that place." And they tell you where it is! I imagine it may be copied from a certain shot in New York, but it's Denham, period! And I defy anybody to tell it - quite literally, I mean even I can't remember. But it is strange that if you live in a studio and you don't ever open your eyes when you go out, you lose all contact with reality, you know.

Alan Lawson: Oh yes, yeah.

Colin Moffat: Hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I find that fascinating, on film.

Colin Moffat: Can you say something Penny about lighting on location interiors. Because at this stage, 1950, '51, a bit unusual to do historical films on interiors, with synch sound as well...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well, give you an example...

Colin Moffat: ...what were the problems there?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I'll give you an example. I shot 'Theirs Is The Glory'[NB AKA 'Men of Arnhem'], right. Now this was shot in Holland, not a single shot in the studio, not one. Every single shot was shot on location where the battle had taken place. We went out there in 1945 in September, just one year, exactly one year, the war was still on in Japan, and had just stopped in Europe. What was remarkable about that film is that we did not have one single round of ammunition issued to us, at all - Piet[?] bombs, hand-grenades, everything we picked up on the road, literally picked them up, that's very unusual. There were all the Jeeps with the bullet-holes in, bloodstained helmets, everything was there, parachutes still hanging up in the trees. Nobody had been in there, it was mined by the Germans, counter-mined by the British, counter-mined again by the Germans, nobody knew where the mines were, nobody had the faintest idea. We had six German prisoners with mine detectors who walked in front of us. We wanted to go to look at the set-up, they walked in front of us and swept the bit we were going to use, you see, they didn't always find them of course. And I remember once we were going and Brian Hurst was directing it and he said, "There's no need to risk the unit, Penny and I will go and choose the set-up." So he walked in front and I put my feet where his feet were, no messing you know! [Laughs] And another time, I'll come back to this natural lighting, but this springs to my mind. We had all these brave parachute officers, which they were, make no mistake of it, these had all been in the battle, every one of them. And I was standing talking to a major, a captain and a sergeant major, and myself. And we're chatting away and a little girl comes up, and she plucks at the sergeant major, saying something in Dutch. And he looks down and says, "All right love, yeah, run away dear." And he suddenly does a double take, she's got a hand-grenade and the pin's rusty, it's like that you know.

Alan Lawson: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: [Laughs] Well I was the second one in the ditch! I thought I was quick, one of the parachute officers beat me, I fell on top of him! [Laughs] And there was this little girl standing here with the hand-grenade. And so the sergeant major went up and says, "All right love, give it to me darling, that's it, there we are," and he pulled the pin out and threw it away, it went off, you know. Anyway when it came to shooting locations we had limited equipment of course, obviously, because we didn't take that much with us, we couldn't take that much with us, we just picked it up as we could. I'm not too sure, even, if I didn't work off the mains - no we didn't, no - we had a little generator, I remember it now. I've got a picture of myself having lunch on the back of the generator with a pair of pliers and a screwdriver, because we had no cutlery, picking the steak up and putting it in my mouth! [Laughs] And we shot in an

enormous hospital there, I don't know how the hell I did it to be quite honest. And we shot certain shots in Nissan huts, all that was shot - have you ever seen the film?

Colin Moffat: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That was all shot on location, not one single shot was done in the studio, not one. Where it was a Nissan hut, we shot in a Nissan hut. The headquarters, I think there were two hotels, The Taffelburg[?] and The Hartestein, and I think The Taffelburg[?] was the - I think The Hartestein was the headquarters and The Taffelburg[?] they made into a hospital, into a Red Cross place. And in fact when we were shooting, I think in The Hartestein down in the headquarters, these were the real parachutists who had been in the battle, one of them said, "I hope they dug up that Gerry buried under the coke." Apparently for some unknown reason he was buried under a heap of coke, but they hadn't. And so we put a lot of disinfectant down, we got a whiff of corpse and a whiff of disinfectant. But they were really tough those parachutists, you know they were opening the graves at that time and they'd buried the bodies, the Germans, but there were just thirty-six British soldiers or whatever, all in one mass grave. And these morticians were coming round digging them up for identification, a year later you know. And these parachutists were all leaning on the rails watching this and one of them said, I remember he said, "Cor, there's old Ginger, he'd make a lovely stew wouldn't he!" You know, they really were tough, no messing. And the stories you heard about the Dutch underground, how wonderful they were - they really were. And the rooms we used were exactly the same size as ordinary rooms, it was tough to do it really - it wasn't tough, I mean it was just, you had to find the key, you see.

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm, yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You see it's no good saying, "I'm in a studio" - I'm not. You've got to find a way of doing it and there's always a way of doing it, always, you've just got to think. It's no good going into a sulk and thinking you're going to float a wall out, because you aren't. And I wouldn't place any reasonable - or unreasonable - restraint on the director. If he suddenly said, "Well I'd like to pan from here to here" [???] "Well where am I going to put the lights?" Well, that's what makes it interesting isn't it?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's what is interesting to me. I mean I wouldn't be happy all the time without any challenge, I really wouldn't.

Colin Moffat: But the use of interiors, real-life interiors is a great saving financially isn't it?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh God yes!

Colin Moffat: Isn't that partly why Renown Pictures shot those two pictures that way?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, that's right, that's why they employed me in fact.

Colin Moffat: I was going to say! [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I am not - it's not an idle boast I promise you - it so happens that I like to do things that way. All these appliances I build are done that way, use something which nobody else uses. I have patents for instance, to give you an example, that door and another patent I've got outside, the patent agent for the first time in his life and against the judgement of his principles suggested that a search wasn't necessary. Now I mean they'd never done this because what you're saying in effect is that for a hundred years nobody in this country has thought of or patented what I've thought of. That's a hell of a feat isn't it? But he said "I will guarantee that no-one thinks along his lines," and it so happens that they don't. I have a patent in America, it keeps getting challenged, but people keep coming up against my patent but I go up against nobody else's. And it's the same thing exactly with anything, and I think filming was a bore, because you walked into a set and said, "Right, light 'em up," all these lights all the way round. The last place the light comes from is up there - that's the last place! Now you need co-operation to a certain extent from a director, you need a director who knows what you're trying to do, and Eddy Dmytryk did know. He knew where he had to leave me a little bit where I could put something in you know. And we worked wonderfully together, no question whatever. I mean it's - I've only once, we did one shot one evening, last thing, he said, "Penny can we get it?" I said, "Well let's go for it." And I had the lamp on top of the camera, Bobby Day was operating and I had two lamps, one somewhere else. And I remember I was working a dimmer and Bob, Robert Newton had to come right past camera which meant I'd got to dim. I couldn't - because it was a tunnel - I couldn't stand upright, I was bent over the camera and I had to work this dimmer with my foot. I had two dimmers, one with my hand and one with my foot. And having been in the dark I had to judge it optically and I missed it and it was under-exposed. And Eddy turned round and he said, "That'll be all right when it's printed up won't it Penn?" I said, "I'm sorry no Eddy, I've buggered it up." He said, "That's my boy!" [Laughs] And we shot it again you know. But you've got to take chances. That's why, before the war I thought films were photographically so dull, they were so dull, because it all came to - it was all the same old ABC and you know, if you don't take a risk you don't get any excitement.

Alan Lawson: Er, talking actually, taking you up on that point, didn't you rate some of the leading cinematographers at all?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Did I what?

Alan Lawson: You didn't rate the cinematographers?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh no, not that at all, no, their style is different. Oh in their way, if you want glossy - I can do it, I've done it, I find it a bore, it's as simple as that. I mean if the story doesn't have character. I made a mistake...

Alan Lawson: I agree with that...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...I made a mistake. I was offered by Ivan Foxwell... Oh God, the escape picture, the tower, what was it called?

CM and

Alan Lawson: 'Colditz'?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: 'Colditz', 'The Colditz Story'. I had done a film called 'The Oracle' which was low-budget, twenty-eight thousand pounds, and it did very well, for a man called Colin Lesslie. And Colin had asked me to photograph a film called 'Aunt Clara' which was Margaret Rutherford, all the low comedy, right?

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Not a cheap picture, directed by Tony Kimmins. And at the same time, or very soon after when I had agreed to do it, about next three or four days, Ivan Foxwell phoned me and he asked if I would go down and see him at Shepperton, which I did. And he said, "Look Penny, I want you to photograph 'The Colditz Story'." He said, "I know you want to direct," which I did, mistakenly, I wish to God I hadn't. I was much happier really, I mean you know, it was more my line - I just got bored walking round with directions, didn't know what the hell to do. That, quite frankly, is what it was all about. They'd waste all the time you could save you know. And he said, "If you'll do this, I will guarantee to give you a film to direct. I can't give you a name but it will be within a year." I had virtually - I had told Colin, I hadn't signed anything, I'd told Colin I'd do it and he wanted me to do it because of economy, and I knew that if I didn't do it he was going to be in financial trouble. And I did it and that was my biggest mistake in fact you know.

Alan Lawson: Hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: At that time, if I could have got a good film, by the time I came to trying to get films I had done a comedy and I got nothing but comedies, they were all comedies. I did a thing called 'Inn For Trouble' with Ted Lloyd, which was a fantastic success. It was a low budget picture but my God it made some money! They held it over, it was incredible. Ted and I wrote the script as we went through, quite literally, you know, and that was that. But I would have loved to have carried on with photography, really. But I got so bored, because what people were saying to me, I mean I've had this said to me - I had a producer, I had a day when I had nine pictures I had to choose from. They weren't offered to me on one day, but you know, "Will you let us know?" that sort of thing. I mean I've letters upstairs now. And so it got to the stage where one producer rang me up and said - and I think it was 'Valley of the Eagles' I'm pretty sure it was a man called - I've forgotten his name now, produced it anyway. And he pleaded with me to do this film and I said, "Well I don't know, I've got things to think about." He'd been told by the National Film Finance Corporation that if he didn't get me he wouldn't get the money, and he didn't get the money. I mean that's stupid isn't it? But people like the guarantors of completion, like Bobby Garrett, I mean I got Christmas cards from him for years and years and years you know. There was a time when I couldn't go wrong, I really couldn't.

Colin Moffat: What date did you switch to directing, can you give a date?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well very roughly, I did um, I think the last film I ever photographed was a 'Tarzan' film at Elstree - yeah. The only - the first 'Tarzan' film to be made in this country, I believe, and it was made in colour, at Elstree, in the winter. You see the boys sat in Hollywood and said, "It's much cheaper to do it in England than to do it here."

Colin Moffat: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: But what they didn't know, we started in November, they didn't realise there wasn't a bloody green leaf to be had, anywhere! So we started off, they dressed the set, forty-eight hours later they dressed it again, it cost five hundred quid for the leaves!

Alan Lawson: [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So we had the only 'Tarzan' with Rhododendrons!

AL and

Colin Moffat: [Laugh]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And they had just done, I must tell you this, they had just done 'Moby Dick' at Elstree right?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So they had done the whales...

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and they knew it all! So they said - they'd got a scene, strangely enough, where Tarzan fights an alligator, he always fights an alligator! So they said, "Well don't use that old rubber outfit again, we'll build you one." So 'Lucky' Humberstone, the director, said, "Well that's great." So we were ready - "No the alligators not ready yet," so we kept shooting around it, shooting around it, shooting around it. And finally, "Ah the alligator's ready." They brought this thing on, I promise you it was marvellous, you would have fed it! It had pipes hanging out of it, but it wagged it's tail, it's eyes, everything worked - God knows what it cost! So 'Lucky' Humberstone said, "Gee that's great, put that alligator in the water and let's shoot!" So they put the alligator in the water and it sank like a bloody stone! [Chuckles] It was so full of holes it went straight to the bottom! So 'Lucky' Humberstone went round and said, "Christ get that damn thing, get that rubber alligator!"

AL and CM [Laugh]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: But it was absolutely wonderful. I mean we all stood absolutely awe struck and [CPR makes bubbling noise] - finish! Oh God that was a film! And then after that I had an agent, MCA and they came out with this picture for...no, [??? maybe how it

happened...??? become famous], for Monty Berman and Bob Baker, they wanted to do a couple of pictures, which I did.

Alan Lawson: What as a director?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah and um...

Colin Moffat: Are we about at the mid 1950's now?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah somewhere about that, yeah it was about 19...well I can tell you what it is - no it isn't - it's '56, because I was buying my farm when the film was on, I remember that. And then after that I did - oh what happened then you see, and this is life, I bought the farm. Now it was on an estate called Fox Warren Park[?]. Now Hannah Weinstein who was producing the Robin Hood series, she owned Walton Studios and they used to bring these horses in, by the time they got to Walton they were so un-nerved they couldn't shoot [???]. So they said, "We must have stables." So they found some stables at a place called Fox Warren Park[?], at least actually before that I had found this little farm which was on Fox Warren Park[?] - they're looking for stables and they hit on Fox Warren Park[?]. Now the house had eighteen bedrooms, eight bathrooms, six reception rooms, thirteen acres of formal garden, beautiful! The man had had seventeen gardeners, and he'd only died about two months before. So I bought the little Carter's cottage and twenty-three acres and Hannah Weinstein bought the house at twelve and-a-half thousand, you know. This is on the best site in Surrey, a beautiful, beautiful house, unbelievable. I mean not pretty but beautifully built. So anyway I move in and we have a little bit of a problem with water, because we have no water, we have no address, no road, nothing, absolutely nothing. Beautiful place, I'll show you a picture of it in a minute. And it so happens we had to get the water from Fox Warren Park[?] which Hannah Weinstein owns, and she's been on to me to do television pictures for her. So Beau said, "Well why don't you go and do a few and make it easier to get the water put on!" [Chuckling] So that's how it happened. And I did 'Buccaneers' and something, I've forgotten what - no, 'Buccaneers' that's right. And then they made me executive producer at Twickenham studios, I didn't want it but Ralph Smart talked me into it...it's not my cup of tea, it's not my scene at all. But the funny thing is that we used to go up to Hannah's place, I don't know if you've ever met her?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: She was a little American typist, but she'd got megalomania, you know, suddenly she was going to have fourteen units working, fourteen stories at the same time. I said, "You can't get fourteen stories, the stories don't exist." So anyway I'm doing this stuff and she brings in her family, one brother's a lawyer and the other one's an American gog[?], you know, a sailor. She buys him out and he's suddenly an executive producer with her - knows nothing about it at all, but nothing! And one day we were invited up to the house to lunch by Hannah. So we go up there and, yes that's right, and we go up there, and there's Frank Launder and what's the name of the girl - his wife, and a whole string of people there for lunch. And we have lunch and Hannah says, "Penny and Beau you must stay to tea," so we stayed to tea. And then it comes to about six o'clock and we were going to go and Hannah says, "Oh you must stay

to dinner." I said, "No, no, we really can't Hannah, must go." And you knew, with the court that Hannah Weinstein played, you knew whether you were in or out...

Alan Lawson: Yeah...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...it was like a medieval court. You see when you walked in, it was usually in the smoking room, you walked in there, if it was "Hello Penn," and they turned away, they'd be talking about you, you see, and you're no good. But if they say, "Hello Penn, nice to see you," you know that Hannah's said something nice about you.

AL and

Colin Moffat: [chuckle]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So I walked in there and...what happened? Oh yes, I know, yes, the day before Seymour Dawner[lawyer?] had seen a cut of something that I had directed, you see, and I was the executive producer as well. And he saw it, he said, "Gee Penny, I'm very worried about that hanging scene." There was a scene where they'd got someone with rope round his neck and you know, it all turns out all right in the end. And he says, "Gee." I said, "Well it's shot as per script, Seymour." He said, "Well you know the American kids see that, they'll take junior out and hang him from the nearest apple tree." I said, "Oh goody-goody!" He said, "These are our customers, Penny." [Chuckling] So I knew I'd got a strike on me from that!

AL and

Colin Moffat: [Laugh]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And when I came out with Beau I said, "That's funny," you know. Oh Hannah said, as we left she said, "Now Beausey I want you to come here any time, regard this as your second home, and you Penny, come here any time you like." And we got outside the door, and I said, "I can't understand this, I'm sure I had a finger on me." That's a Sunday you see. On the Monday I go to the studio at eight o'clock in the morning, in comes Seymour, the brother. So he says, "Can I have a word with you Penny?" I said, "Yeah sure, Seymour." And I said, "[???] whatever it is." He said, "Yeah, Hannah and I have been talking and we'd like to make a change." So I looked at him, I said, "Seymour are you firing me?" He said, "Well now I wouldn't like to put it like that." I said, "Well how would you put it?" I said, "Do you know it's suddenly occurred to me if that meal we had yesterday was a bit later in the day we could have called it The Last Supper, and I know what part you'd have been playing!" [Laughs] As it happened, it didn't matter a damn because I got a film the next day, but they were terribly funny, they really were. You know they had a phrase - well, give you an example. I'm the producer, right, and Paul the camera operator comes to me and says, "Penny, is there any chance of a rise?" He'd been there for God knows how long, he was getting the minimum, you know. I said, "Well sure, I'll see what I can do." Seymour comes and I said, "Oh Seymour I want to talk to you about this...so-and-so, he's on the minimum, he's been here so-and-so and so-and so, he's asked about a rise." He said, "Fire him!" I said, "What are you talking about?" So he said, "Fire him!" I said, "What for, for asking for a rise? You fire him I'm not going to." And he didn't fire him actually, but that

wasn't right [???] you see. [I said, yes what a good idea, let's get him out, you see.?] And she went bust in the end, she went bust. Well she said something - now she was a Communist right, and she said to me one day, she had another house, she had a butler there and she had a butler up in Brompton somewhere you see, Brompton Road. Nice to have two butlers when you were a Communist, wasn't it? And she had gardeners, and the gardeners had to wait until she came back from the studio, which might be nine o'clock at night, to get their wages. She didn't know how to treat anybody, she had no idea how to treat a human being at all. So anyway, I was at this party with her one night at her place and I said, "Nice garden you've got." It was a beautiful garden, a sunken garden you know, a little way away from the house. She said, "Yeah, yeah, I'm going to get them to bring it up around the house, I just never get down there." So her little daughter said, "Mummy isn't that going to be difficult?" She said, "No, no, no, they can do that." [Laughs] If that's not megalomania, what the hell is? Isn't it marvellous? I mean it's a sunken garden, to bring it up! [Laughs]

Alan Lawson: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And then she put an enormous swimming pool in. And her husband who was a lawyer of some kind, I've forgotten his name now, but he wanted to be in the British choir you see, pastel shades, must have a Bentley. So he bought a Bentley from a local doctor for a hundred quid, but it didn't start very well. They had a little diesel dumper which they used for carting stuff around, and the chauffeur, a grey-haired old Englishman, you know, must have that, with gaiters and everything, and the gloves - he used to tow this thing down the drive to get is started. "Boom...boom...boom...boom..." off would go John down to the local pub where he was lording it you know, and then at two o'clock the chauffeur had an order to go and collect him. So he'd go down in the diesel dumper, you'd see this diesel dumper going down the A3 with a chauffeur on it! [Laughs]

Alan Lawson: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: [Laughing] You know, the full gear! So, gets on the Bentley, "boom...boom...boom..." back home again! Well anyway that's enough of that, it's all digressing, but that's how I became mixed up in television films. And then I did an awful lot with Ralph Smart, I mean I did the first - I used to do thirteen pictures, one behind the other, straight off.

Alan Lawson: Which series was that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That was 'Interpol Calling', 'Invisible Man', and I used to do the stunts on the stage, there were no tricks, the only trick in that 'Invisible Man' series was the taking off of the bandage, everything else I had to work out on the stage. And I mean I'd be cutting last week's, directing this week's, casting next week's. And if I stopped the picture at three o'clock I'd start the next one at one minute past, because you mustn't let the momentum die down you know.

Alan Lawson: Yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It's attitude of mind. I did a pilot for an American director, American producer, I've forgotten his name now. But we were going to shoot this thing and he said, "Well you won't shoot before half-past nine will you?" I said, "We shoot at half-past eight, so," I said, "We'll have the shot in before nine." He said, "You want to bet?" I said, "Sure I'll bet." He said, "I'll bet you a bottle of whiskey." So I said, "Fine." We had it in at twenty to nine!

Alan Lawson: [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was an attitude of mind. See when you start a film, people come to you and say, "You won't shoot much tomorrow will you, because it's the first day?" Now you've been talking about shot one for three weeks haven't you?

Alan Lawson: Yeah, yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know, you've been saying, "The opening shot is so-and-so, so we want this, this and..." you've been discussing it forever! You should be able to walk on the set and shoot it. The second one, maybe not, because you've got to discuss it you know, but the first one you have discussed - certainly the day before you've discussed it, with the cameraman, with everybody, "Have you got that ready for tomorrow?" "Yes." You know, it has to go, and I never, ever to my knowledge went over nine o'clock for the first shot. And in fact I had a bottle of whiskey from that director for years afterwards, it stopped after about five or six years! [Break in Recording]

Alan Lawson: Pennington-Richards, Side Four. Now you've made commercials haven't you?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Of my own, I have made commercials, yes, I did two.

Alan Lawson: Television commercials.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah two, yes.

Alan Lawson: How long ago was that?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh, fifteen years at least, if not more.

Alan Lawson: What's your feeling about them?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Not my scene quite frankly.

Alan Lawson: No, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...you know, it's making a thing by committee, in those days, I don't know what it's like today, but everyone has to have a look through. Now to ask people for a constructive criticism, you're asking really for something valuable. Most people can be destructive, they can say, [???], or, "That's a bit close," or "Don't think, this, don't think..." you know. But to make something constructive, and this is true of everything, scripts, everything else

- constructive criticism, valid constructive criticism is very rare, it's very rare. I found they would come up and say, oh kind of, things were so stupid it was difficult to keep your temper. Things were so trivial, the social significance of some bloody stupid thing like a spoon or [chuckles] you know! I don't understand it, it's a whole industry built on rubbish. There are so many - to give you an example of how easy it is, I'm going to go back to films. There was a chap at Pinewood, I won't name him, who at one stage came up to me and - or I can't remember whether he did or an electrician - came and said, "Do you want your meter checked?" So I said, "Oh I don't think so, why?" He said, "Well this bloke here, he's got a chap in the studio who does it for nothing." So I thought again, "All right I'll have it checked." When he came back he found it something like ten per cent wrong. I checked it against the master meter, his master meter was ten per cent wrong, so he was busy putting everything ten per cent wrong!

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now I went back to Pinewood some years later and this chap had an office! Now what the hell! What are we talking about? Now I went back and I said this bloke, whatever his name was, I went back to him, "Is he still playing around?" So he said, "No, he's in Hollywood." I said, "Really? What's he doing there?" "Oh," he said, "he's got a big deal now, he's got two secretaries!" He's been sent out to Hollywood to look at some technical thing you know. You have to build - you have to build the base. If you want to be a tall statue you've got to have a big base, and that's what it's all about isn't it? The civil service mind works in exactly the same way. You're not worth the money that you would like to earn unless somebody very nearly under you is earning almost that amount, supported by four or five others who are also earning an awful lot of money, so your money doesn't notice compared with all that lot. It's exactly as I said about a producer's fee on a film. To produce an expensive film is no more difficult than to produce a cheap film, in fact it's a bloody sight easier, because you get a lot more money, because it doesn't notice. You know, it's a very small percentage. And I found this with commercials, that I am appalled, particularly now, I watch these things and I think, "What are they advertising?" And it goes on and on and on, the lighting is all different now, it's all arc hard lighting, even in an office. The whole key has changed, I don't know why. And there's all kinds of things, if you think about it really deeply, and you have some imagination, you can weave a story through it. The average person looking at it wouldn't know what the hell it's talking about. And suddenly at the end of it, I'm thinking of one particular one, it's uncovered and...there's somebody hurrying to the theatre I think it is, it all goes on, the come-ins, the conductors, all the orchestra, all got to be paid, audience, all got to be paid. They come in, sit down, rather embarrassed, sliding up, and this bottle of Chanel perfume, now what the hell has that got to do with it? And particularly things that are meant to appeal to intelligent people with money, you start talking about bank commercials. All I want to know about a bank is what it's got to sell me, what makes it different to any other bank. I don't want to see a lot of comedy. It has nothing to do with the subjects at all, because it's supposed to make you laugh, because it doesn't, after you've seen it ten times it makes you yawn, you cannot play the same joke. And when they have made the film and they show it to 'Client' we don't call him 'the' client - Client with a big C like God with a big G. He says, "Oh that's frightfully amusing," you know. I wonder what he feels like when he's seen it about fifty thousand times? It's silly, it's just stupid, the whole thing. The best commercial for me is something which doesn't really - it will reveal things, it doesn't lecture

me but it makes me conscious of who is very kindly giving me this very pleasant commercial. Because some commercials I can't forgive, I won't buy the product.

Colin Moffat: You're talking as a director, aren't you?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I'm talking as a member of - a customer as well.

Colin Moffat: Would you feel the same if you were a cameraman on the commercial?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I would be very grateful for the money, I wouldn't think about anything else. But if I'm asked to contribute to it, and I presume I am as a director, you know...

Alan Lawson: Yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I mean it's like being a labourer feeding a bricklayer. You know, the cameraman brings a load of cement and tips it out, you know what I mean, that's his job, he's paid for it and he's very happy to take the money. I don't say an operator feels like that, but you can easily create that attitude of mind, it's not difficult. But if you're asked to direct something then your whole attitude is quite different because you're taking that stuff and you're trying to shape it into something which you will be blamed for. I mean it's - there are a lot of people who can just take the money, I found I couldn't do it.

Colin Moffat: Is it something do to with the length do you think? That they're so very, very short as a piece of film?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I like short pieces of film you know. I mean I love to tell a story in a short - I did some children's films which I loved.

Alan Lawson: Oh who did you do those for?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: The Children's Film Foundation.

Alan Lawson: Oh you did?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Hmm, oh I did quite a lot of them. I did a thing called 'Danny the Dragon' which I wrote, ten episodes. And a scriptwriter had already written a script, which was absolutely useless, I mean it really was, you couldn't have shot it, it was impossible on that budget, absolutely impossible. I did a complete re-write, I used page one, which was bloody awful and I kept it going for ten episodes. So I was paid to direct the film. When I'd done all ten episodes, which I may say, this film has won eight awards world-wide, and Frank Godwin will verify this, they had a hundred and eighty four pounds left in the budget, so I got eighteen pound forty per episode, so they gave me that! [Chuckles] But I loved it, absolutely loved it, I mean it was great, great fun.

Alan Lawson: You say Frank Godwin?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Frank Godwin, yes...

Alan Lawson: Oh, oh, yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes he produced it. I've done two, I've got another letter upstairs I'll show you, I'll show you these letters before you go, from a cinema manager. I did another one, Frank Godwin wanted to make a re-make of 'Turn About' - I don't know if you remember that story? It's an old story about a father who changes places with his son.

Alan Lawson: Oh 'Vice Versa' you mean?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: 'Vice Versa' yeah that's right, that's right. And I said, "Well that's no longer a joke," because no kids mind going to school now, if they don't like it they don't go, nobody can touch 'em, what the hell? It isn't valid any more. So he wanted to do a film so I said, "I'm a bit fed-up with all this namby-pamby stuff, Children's Film Foundation. I want to make..." He said, "What have you got in mind?" I said, "Well I've always had a feeling that you could make a child fond of the ugliest objects in the world. Because I know I had a teddy bear and it had one eye missing, an ear off and the sawdust pouring out, and I loved it!" So he said, "Well what had you got in mind?" I hadn't got anything in my mind at that time, and I said, "Well take something like a shrunken head..." He said, "Oh God, do me a favour!" And I said, "I'm serious." So anyway I went home and the next morning he phoned me, he said, "Do you think you could make the kids love this thing?" I said, "I'm sure I could." So I wrote this thing, it was seven episodes and I called it 'The Boy with Two Heads' but they called it something else, I've forgotten...'Chico'[?]. And I have a letter from a cinema manager upstairs saying that after the thing was finished he had a deputation - you know they showed the seven episodes, the next week it wasn't on, had a deputation from the kids saying that they wanted some more. He said, "Well there isn't any more." So they said, "Well we'll have it back." So they had it back, they had it back again, and in thirty-four weeks that was shown for twenty-one of them, three times. I mean there you are, there's your answer isn't it?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Because if you - it was a silly story, it was fun. It was fun, and this thing was a - well I won't bore you with the story. But it spoke with a Spanish accent, it was some kind of South American witch doctor or something, which was supposed to bring rain to his tribe and now he'd been pinched by some - a kid bought it! A kid went to have his mother's alarm clock fixed in a junk shop and this guy had bought, he'd found some spears and shields and things. And there's the box, and he was looking at these spears, and the man said, "I don't want those bloody things, you take 'em if you want 'em." So he took these spears in this box and when he got home he - no it was a drum that's right. It was a native drum, and he was tapping out some rhythm on the drum and suddenly it was answered from the box and when he opened it there was this head in there. And unwittingly he had decoded the thing, and it went on from there. And of course it becomes the usual struggle to keep the thing away from the grown-ups you know...

Alan Lawson: [Chuckling] Yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...and it's got to get back because his tribe haven't had rain for seven years or something. And it all worked perfectly, it really did. And finally he tries to convey to them what objects he wants and he can't, but he manages to do it by telepathy, so that as he mentions what he wants to make the ingredients for this famous - they come up on the wall of the cave. The kids loved it, absolutely loved it, you know it's silly isn't it? And 'Danny the Dragon' was an invisible dragon that lived in an invisible bubble. He'd been out on a school nature tour and got lost and run out of fuel and landed on earth. And it so happened - I shot it all on Wisley Common within a mile of my place, and it so happened that the night before we started shooting there'd been a fire on the common, it was in an exact circle!

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: So I made the kids find this invisible bubble in the circle. And it really was great fun, that really was. And every time the dragon goes, I said, "We must have an invisible bubble" because you cannot fulfil the children's expectation, they'll make it any shape they like. And I won that one and that worked very well, because every time the dragon went in he disappeared. And the village constable comes driving along and drives into the bubble - bang! And he can feel it, so he marks it, he said, "I don't know who you are but I know where you are!" And he goes off to fetch the sergeant and by the time he comes back the kids have moved it, an so on and so forth, it becomes that kind of a chase. And that was the most popular series they've ever had. In fact the - it got the top of the poll for the first year, the next year it wasn't eligible but it got more votes than the one that was so they had to give us a special prize. [Chuckles] It was great fun because you see here you're dealing with something... [Break in recording - technical hitch] Here you're dealing with children's imagination, which is already, I mean it's all there, you haven't got to fire it, you haven't got to overcome cynicism or experience have you?

Alan Lawson: No, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You know, it's all virgin soil, and that I find terrific fun.

Alan Lawson: It's a shame they've gone isn't it?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I did another one called 'The Fire Fighters' about some children who lived next to a fire station. And I went to Walton to see this, it was on a Saturday morning, and I spoke to the manageress and I said that I'd like to sit in and see it, and she said, "Has it got any dialogue?" I said, "It's full of dialogue." "Oh Christ, they won't listen to that you know, they'll be running up and down the aisles." Do you know I promise you it came on, not a kid went to spend a penny, quite literally, it was like being in a graveyard, they were just sitting there. Why, I have no idea to this day why, but they did. And it was a serious film, that's the odd thing about it. And right at the end, they showed it at Reading, they had two thousand kids there, and Frank Godwin went, he said, "You could have heard a pin drop." I said, "Well it was the same at Walton." He said, "Until the end, the villains got the hose turned on them and then there was an absolute roar, but up to that they did not move." And when the film was over they came out quite quietly and there were two women there, sort of keepers of some kind, they undid the door and as they undid it they said, "I've never seen the little buggers so quiet!" But it's great fun you know, it really is.

Colin Moffat: Were you er - the reason you were doing these sort of pictures, these children's pictures, and television and commercials, was presumably because of the state of the industry? I mean there weren't good pictures particularly coming your way?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No absolutely true. You see what happened was that I started, I did a comedy which was a success. I was then offered all/role comedy[?], which is not my cup of tea, I mean it's not fun to make, you know. And I suppose really through necessity, I wanted to work, I would have been offered serious films if I'd done a serious film, but I would sooner photograph a film that was worth photographing than direct a film that wasn't worth directing.

Alan Lawson: Hmm, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I'm absolutely. I mean I can look back in myself now and know that I was not as good a director as I was a cameraman, and in fact I was a better writer than both. I mean it sounds conceited but I know I was because of the things I did while I was writing.

Colin Moffat: Did you go back to photography?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I went back once. Eddie Dmytryk was in Hollywood, lived in Hollywood obviously, and, oh he went to dinner with Laurence Harvey, the actor you remember?

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And Laurence Harvey's secretary was an ex-girlfriend of mine. And they got talking about me and Eddie said did she think that I would go back on the camera for him? And she said, "Why don't you go over and see him and try?" Which he did, we had lunch together and I agreed to do it. It was a ghastly film, it was called 'The Reluctant Saint' made in Rome. At the end of day one Eddie had slipped so badly it was unbelievable, it was unbelievable. Max Schell was playing in it and he took the film over.

Alan Lawson: Yeah, ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: He was the guy - well, never mind - he took the film over and Eddie just went, didn't put his imprint on it. And I thought it was a terrible film and I went to John Sloane[?] after the first day and I said, "John, this film will be unshowable." Because I could see the way it was going. And he said, "Oh come, come, come, first day, you don't know as much as Eddie does," which is quite true, I'm sure I don't! But it was quite obvious what was happening. And that film was finished, it ran for a week in Dublin, it has never been released to my knowledge. I was driving through Hampton Court one night and there was a hand-written notice, crayon, on a board, "By kind permission of Columbia Pictures for one night only, 'The Reluctant Saint'" that's all. That presumably was 16mm you know. It was sad really, very sad, 'cause Eddie was a marvellous director at one time. Technically for me he was the top. When we were shooting the first picture, er...

Colin Moffat: 'Give Us This Day'?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No the one before that, 'Obsession', Bobby Day who was my camera operator, who was as quick as lightening, did you know Bob Day?

Alan Lawson: No.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh he was the tops. He's been out in America now for about twenty-five years. And Eddie would say "Cut" before the camera had stopped rolling, Eddie was in shot, Bob was coming in with the viewfinder and I was coming in behind him. Now that's it, and Bob would give Eddie the viewfinder, he'd say, "Right this is it boys here" move in - bang - that's it!

Colin Moffat: Did he influence you do you think?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes he did, tremendously, tremendously. He made a wonderful film called 'Crossfire' which he made in about twenty-three days or something silly. And it was a fantastic success and he couldn't go wrong then, you know he was top. Then he went to prison and when he came out of course we - Ken Horne who was the third member of the company Edward Dmytryk Productions, which was around for years...

Alan Lawson: Ah hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...he killed himself in a car, and that left Eddie and myself, and we just never got it going. He doesn't mention it in his book at all. It's rather extraordinary, because he tried like mad to get me out to Hollywood. I went out to New York but er...

Alan Lawson: Have you any regrets not going to Hollywood?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: On what?

Alan Lawson: Any regrets not going to Hollywood?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh no, no, it would have been nice, it would have been nice. I liked going to New York very much, but what I did, strangely enough, I did the backgrounds for the titles. And someone mentioned this film somewhere in the press and they said about the beautiful title backgrounds - they weren't at all, we just knocked 'em off you know!

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: But it was fun doing it because that was the challenge. You know I had the ceiling over the whole set and I was doing something, this was at Denham. And the rigger came up and he said, "Penn I've been trying to get hold of you, I didn't know how to rig this thing up." I've forgotten how the stages were numbered at Denham, I think there were numbers like one to four, I can't remember, but anyway it was on the big stage. And he said, "I've given you a box rig." So I said, "I'm sorry I don't want it." He said, "Well you can't do it any other way, I mean I've walked all..." I said, "I don't want a rig." And he looked absolutely - like

that - "God!" you know, "Riggers are going to be out of work from now on," sort of thing! And we had to take it down, and in fact with Vetchinsky, do you know Vetchinsky, the art director?

Alan Lawson: Oh Vetch yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I'm talking to him on that set, do you see it?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And the only time I said to him that I wanted scenery over the whole set and he was absolutely as happy as a dog, you know.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: In fact he only [??? with him, he forgot a bit!???] [Chuckles] But it's fun you see that - makes a challenge.

Colin Moffat: This switching, Penny, from camera to directing and then back again, when you first directed was it very tempting to sort of interfere with the [???]?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No it was very funny, no I'll tell you. You know Suschitzky?

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Right. I did this film called 'The Oracle', now he had never led a feature and he only agreed to do it if I would help him, you see, and I never had to help him in fact. I mean he asked me one or two questions and I told him. But the first shot was Robert Beatty, you see, and we got it all set up and rehearsed and the first assistant said, "Right, roll 'em!" So the cameras were rolling and I'm sitting there like this, I'm waiting for somebody else to say, "Action"! [Laughs]

Alan Lawson: [Laughs]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And Bob Beatty said, "Penny aren't you going to say 'Action'?" [Laughs]

Alan Lawson: Laughs

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was very funny actually, I got on very well with Su, he was a marvellous, marvellous man, and he did very, very well in fact.

Colin Moffat: You left him alone?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh yes, oh yes. I mean if - I made it as easy as I could because I knew he wouldn't be used to a lot of movement around the set, you know. I restricted that as much as I dared because, you know. Well now I'm shooting at... You know Johnny Coquillon?

Alan Lawson: Well I know of him, yes certainly yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yeah committed suicide, did you know that?

Alan Lawson: No, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I was in South Africa, when I went out on this South African picture, 'The Magic Garden'. They had no studio, they had a basement under a cinema. Now in the mornings we had enough electricity, but the sets were made of corrugated cardboard, the wrong way round, see? We had no crew at all, no crew. In the mornings we could do a sort of long-shot but in the afternoons when the cinema was running, we couldn't, we could only do close shots. So Eddie had a schedule like that [chuckles] and we had very few lamps, very few of anything. And I had...I went out there as a cameraman you see, but it was quite obvious that Donald Swanson had not had any experience in the studio, he'd done documentaries but he had not had any experience in studio, period, you know. So I took over after about three or four days, by common consent you know, he agreed it would be better. Now I had Johnny Coquillon who had been a focus puller, he had never operated a camera in his life, and so I was training him as an operator, doing the lighting and directing! So I'd be carrying lamps around and rehearsing these natives you know! And old Johnny, he was a quick cockney kid you know and he went from strength to strength after that...

Alan Lawson: That's right, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...that was his first start, ever. Anyway I did as much as I could to teach him of course, obviously, and in fact he shared a house with us, with Donald and his wife and myself and Johnny, we just got together and took over a house in Johannesburg. And it was great fun; it really was great fun. And I mean to find this home-made sound gear in that truck in the middle of Africa was a bit much!

Alan Lawson: [Chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It was a gem of an idea, an absolute gem of an idea, that some chap walked into the office in Johannesburg with, you know, and it was a simple, simple idea. That you open the film in a church and there's a man who is obviously a thief, and he's watching the collecting plate go round. And the people all leave, you know you see all the characters and they all leave. And there's one Zulu who stays behind to talk to the Priest, and he says, "And here I have my life savings, I would like to see them do some good before I go, could you help me?" So the Priest said, "Some good - it's very difficult to decide, there's so much needed in this township." So they put the money on the seat, kneel down and seek God's guidance. So they put it on the seat, turn to the altar, as they turned to the altar a thief comes and pinches it. So there's a bloody great chase through the township with all the natives and the dogs and everything chasing him. And the story is that the thief throws the money away and it lodges in the tree. And there's a young lad who's in love with a girl, but the father owes the moneylender money and he's going to have to let the daughter marry him so that he can get off that. And the money is stolen and re-lost all the way round the township, and it solved all these problems. And finally the police capture the thief - oh by that time the thief had hidden the money in the Priest's pocket, he's got into the

church, he's being chased, and he's hidden it in the vestry. And the next day the Priest is doing this funeral and he finds this money in his pocket, and they grabbed the thief, of course he hasn't got any money, so who - where's the harm? And they go back and seek God's [???]. And it's solved all the problems all the way through, because the moneylender had been paid, but the thief had stolen it from the moneylender again, so all these debts have been settled, you see. And it was a genuine idea, it really was - terribly crude of course you know, with non-actors and so on and so forth. In fact the Negro that we had playing the thief, he was, I thought he was very good and so I said, "Tommy I'm going to get you to play the big part, the thief." And he looked very upset, I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "I am not a thief." I said, "Well I know you're not a thief, it's only a play." He said, "Will the police know it's a play when they see it?" So I said, "Don't worry." I gave him a letter saying, to whom it concerned, that I had given him this job because he was the only man I could trust to come back with the money - then he was pleased! [Laughs] So there we are. Then of course I finished up doing these children's films, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I did quite a lot of them. Then finally I did another one called 'Sky Pirates' which has been shown on television several times actually, and in fact it's in the video shops.

Alan Lawson: Oh really?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Hmm. And then I - I'd had enough really and I said to my wife, I'd had a wonderful career, absolutely marvellous, so I said, "That's it, I've finished, I'm not going to do any more." I was then sixty-five I suppose. So she said, "Well what are you going to do?" I said, "Well I don't know, I'll find something to do." I had a couple of motorbikes and she was reading the local paper and she said, jokingly, "Here's a job for you, motorcycle courier." So I said, "Fine, I'd take it." So I went along to this chap, he's become a very great friend of mine, and I did it - he didn't know how old I was, of course! And I rode all over the bloody place, and then after a few months I decided to start on my own, and I said, "I won't go on your territory, I won't canvass your customers," which I never did. And I shouldn't think there's anything went out of Pleshey at Weybridgethat I didn't take, that was worth anything. I used to take four and-a-half million pound cheques and transfer them from one bank to another, you know, I'd take the rubber stamp with me, I was made a member of the staff for a day. And this went on until I was nearly seventy and I thought, "Well let's call it a day," because every time I fell off, the road got harder! But I absolutely loved it for the first year. I could have a powerful motorbike, I was eighteen years of age again - I'd do London, I used to do about twelve hundred miles a week in London. Perhaps London in the morning, Manchester in the afternoon, a hundred miles an hour up the M1! [General laughter] In fact when I was finally giving it in I said to Graham Coster, this chap who built up a very big courier service, he invited me up to see him take delivery of fourteen brand new BMW's in one day! And I said that I was giving it in and would he like to take them on, which he did. He said, "What the hell are you giving up for?" I said, "Well mostly age." He said, "Well Christ you're no age." I said, "Well I'm nearly seventy" - he wouldn't believe it! He said, "I don't believe it!" I said, "Well I am, when I started with you I was sixty-five." And he used to say to me, "God do you know Penny I had an old-aged pensioner in here today!" [Chuckles] It's been fun, so I've been doing all this now. And that in fact, that telephone call was an order.

Alan Lawson: Oh really?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes, from Cheshire Homes at Penge for a set of doors, a thousand quid. They won't cost that actually, I won't charge them that.

Colin Moffat: Would you never do any other picture? If somebody gave you a nice script to direct would you consider it or not?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: They wouldn't consider it.

Colin Moffat: Well...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: I would... I tell you what I could still do, I could still write a script. I have done many, many, many scripts, which haven't been under my name. I've rewritten almost everything I've ever shot in fact, and that I can still do. But it would have to be a solid story, it would have to rely on its own strength. I would not impose violence on it to make it palatable, if the violence sprung out of the situation, yes of course, obviously. But what I find so difficult is to - it seems that the story is a series of situations rather than a story, it does not progress generally now, you jump from one climax to another climax without a logical link between. I mean it's the logic that makes a story readable and watchable isn't it?

Colin Moffat: Are you talking about television?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Anything, anything - a book, television, particularly television. I mean nothing is - the cinema really - is it possible to write for the cinema today? What are your chances of getting it made? Nil, absolutely nil. See when I look back, a lot of stories were such trash. Because don't forget they had six hundred films a year coming out of Hollywood, six hundred! That's a hell of a lot of films, you know, every year. And when you've done that six hundred, in theory, it's like having a patent, once you've done it you shouldn't do it again should you?

Colin Moffat: Pre-television?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: At any time, but now with television what is left for you to do? What is there for you to do that isn't being done? At that time it was pretty hard to think of a - and for instance with Hannah Weinstein and 'Robin Hood', they couldn't get the stories. I said, "You cannot get fifty-two stories a year." And she was talking about eleven series - this is accountancy, this is rubbish, this is not based on anything! You should never be in a position - in fact you were in a position all the time with films - that you had to fill that screen. And that was a mistake, that they changed every week, the picture might run for a month but it was taken off after a week and they put another one which half fills the cinema.

Alan Lawson: Hmm, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now the man in Johannesburg, Boxer, he had a small cinema, underground, building on top, offices, very low overheads. And he would pay five hundred pounds for a film, five hundred, and he would put it on there and it would run as long as the public wanted to see it. And that's the way it should have been, but it wasn't, it didn't suit the

front office, it's not a situation that's easy to deal with. It's much easier to say, "Right, move them all round," like a game of musical chairs. It doesn't matter if the people want to see it, don't worry about them, sod the people you know, this is the way it's going to be, if they don't like it they can lump it, and they did lump it eventually. And that has been the basic problem, I think, all the way.

Colin Moffat: Do you follow television much?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Television?

Colin Moffat: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes.

Colin Moffat: I mean how do you rate it as against large screen? I mean if you see one of your own pictures come up?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well I rate it this way, I will never see in the cinema a picture as good as the picture I see on there - not in a suburban cinema, you might in the West End. What do they light the screen with now, arcs? I don't think they do.

Alan Lawson: No it's cold lighting.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right, that's point number one.

Colin Moffat: Oh you mean technically?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Technically, technically. I mean I will not, if I go into a cinema the sound is basically pretty bad, if the cinema is empty you're hard put to hear it, to decipher it. You'll never get - it's a technical fact that you cannot get a perfect projected image without getting it from a point of light. If the light has any area, you cannot have definition, period, because you have penumbra all the way, from the size of the light, and that's why they invented the arc originally. And if they can't find people to burn an arc they shouldn't be running a cinema.

Alan Lawson: That's right, hmm.

Colin Moffat: Hmm, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Because they should pay that man as much as is necessary to get a man to stand there and do it, or get an automatic arc of some kind. But you can't do it with cold light.

Alan Lawson: No, no.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: The fact that the screen is now an eighth of the size, you can get the light on there, you can probably get it in an intensing light, but you cannot get the light source smaller.

Colin Moffat: But are there not certain scenes on telly that don't go so well?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Oh many...

Colin Moffat: [???] stuff and day for nights and...

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...many, many, many, oh many indeed.

Colin Moffat: Electronic pictures are able to...

Alan Lawson: Well I mean there's the actual physical thing really I mean is - I mean grandiose landscapes are an absolute waste of time on television, meaningless.

Colin Moffat: Night scenes are very difficult aren't they? They nearly always [???].

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Well you see we've been through this screen size thing. You started off with an academy mask you know...

Alan Lawson: Yeah, yeah.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...almost square - correct proportions really. They brought in sound, that made it square. They cut off the top and bottom to reduce it again. Now then you go to this extraordinary lark about stereoscopy.

Alan Lawson: [Chuckling] Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Now there is no way of getting stereoscopy unless the thing has true depth. The Russians did it, but unless it has true depth there is no way without separation of the eyes. Now you can do it in two ways, you can do it with coloured lenses or you can do it with focal planes, you can do it either way, with the focal plane one way and the other way and the same with the projector. People will not tolerate spectacles, (A). (B) I have very weak sight in my left eye, therefore I probably don't know it but I probably have no stereoscopy at all virtually, so that's another limitation people don't take into account. It doesn't have - when television came out they thought they could draw people into the cinema by a different sized screen. Well you'd go in once wouldn't you, you'd go in once to see it...

Alan Lawson: Yeah, hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: ...it might be great, but it doesn't take the place of a good story. It doesn't take the place of a hell of a lot of things to do with entertainment.

Alan Lawson: Well it's the story really isn't it? Basically it's the story.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes that's right. Now I don't know what the time schedule is on a feature in Britain today, how many weeks, have you any idea? I have no idea now, it was down to something like sort of eight weeks.

Alan Lawson: It is about eight weeks.

Colin Moffat: It's seven or eight weeks.

Alan Lawson: Yes, seven or eight weeks.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's right. Well that seems to me an awful lot of time, because I'm sure that six of those - well three of those eight weeks are due to bad organisation. I mean I've stood on sets and I've seen, it's the same scale, shrunk a little bit - it used to be twelve weeks for a film you know. And because...[chuckles] it's an extraordinary thing, it's Parkinson's law, isn't it? Work expands to fill the time available. If you know you're going to start on a sixteen-week picture, day one doesn't matter at all does it? I mean who the hell cares about day one? You've got all that time. Now if you can get the thing rolling right at the beginning, see I'll tell you what happened. Now I did the first television series at Pinewood and there were two art directors, I can't remember their names - didn't want to work on it. They said, "Penn we don't want to do it, it just isn't our scene." They had no option, they had to do it. After about three weeks they loved it, they loved it! If you can get the enthusiasm going, they'd say, "Here Penn, we've got this, what do you think about this? We can borrow this bit off there," they could build - they loved it and they said so. They said, "We don't want to go back because of the urgency." You see the big enemy is boredom, it's not tiredness, it's boredom. I mean to the people behind the camera the film set isn't the glamour that people think it is, it's a half-eaten sandwich isn't it, and all the rubbish behind, and all the, literally, disinterested people involved, a lot of disinterested people. You find extras who are trying to spin it out and trying to - it's all these old tricks that they get up to. Now when we did this 'White Corridors' we knocked three weeks off it. Those boys were marvellous, they worked like dogs - "How are we now boys, all right?" Because I said, like an idiot, all right, you'll be out of work three weeks earlier, you'll be back in work six months sooner, because it becomes a business proposition, but of course it didn't, that didn't happen, that's the tragedy. I mean it should have happened but it can't happen like that in life, there can't be somebody saying, "God, suddenly there's money in it." You know, they've saved x hundred thousand pounds we'll say, or whatever it is, fifty thousand, they don't look at it like that, they don't look at it as a business proposition. They don't connect the money they spend with what they get back for it.

Colin Moffat: Do you still get paid incidentally, if you run under?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: If you run?

Colin Moffat: If you've got a contract do they pay you 'till the end of the original schedule?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: They used to pay me for the film, they'd pay me for the film. Um...

Colin Moffat: What about the technicians?

Cyril Pennington-Richards: No the technicians didn't actually, a lot of them didn't...at least some of them didn't. That's not quite true...

Alan Lawson: Depends if they're on a contract, they may be contracted hourly.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Yes I mean the hourly workers stood the risk of being laid off.

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: You see that's the tragedy of it. And um, I don't know what the cure was, the only cure is an expanding industry, which you haven't got. But the industry will contract much faster if you milk it too hard, you know, the cow won't stand the strain, that is as plain as the nose on your face. But this is like life. Now, give you an example, you get this all through life. I had a farm and we produced free-range eggs. Now if the price of eggs went up, now a lot of people used batteries, we didn't, we were free-range, but in batteries it was more flexible. If the price of eggs went up, they put another bird in the cage you see, because the price had gone up. If the price of eggs went down, they put another bird in the cage because the price of eggs had gone down! [Chuckles] You see what I mean don't you? One was greed and the other was necessity, the price of eggs went down, they needed more product to pay because the price had gone down, but they had caused it to go down because they'd been greedy when it was going up. That was the direct result of putting the extra bird in the cage. But all they would say is, "Well why don't all the other people do away with their chickens, then we'd have no problem." You see this is the discipline that you can't impose, it's as plain as the nose on your face you know.

Alan Lawson: Yes, yes.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: It's exactly like they're trying to say now, if you make a wage claim, you're going to put people out of work. It may not be you, it might be somebody else, you know, they can't prove that because you get more wages that you are in fact going to cause unemployment. You may cause the front office to take one rubber plant away, you know, the size of the executive cars might go down, the perks might go, anything might happen. They might catch at the top instead of the bottom you know. Very rarely will you be offered a wage rise. You will get it because you're better than anybody else or because you're defended by other people, by a trade union agreement. Now the tragedy of that is that you have to have a sense of responsibility isn't it?

Alan Lawson: Hmm.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: And that is the problem, there's the problem really, I don't know the answer, I'm just thinking off the top of my head. But I've dragged my weary bones through this world now for seventy-eight odd years and I've learnt an awful lot, you know, nothing has really changed, I'm still fighting the same battle I fought when I was eighteen, you know.

Alan Lawson: [chuckles]

Cyril Pennington-Richards: Nothing changes! I'll tell you what it's like, getting old, like you live in a shop and you never go out and look at the paint outside so you don't know what you look like. You know, as far as you're concerned you're the same guy, I feel exactly the same guy. I know if I look in the mirror that I can see somebody I don't know. And I know the way people talk to me that I must be old, but I don't feel old.

Alan Lawson: You're as old as you feel.

Cyril Pennington-Richards: That's exactly what it's like. If you go and look at the paint-work outside the shop and say, "My God it is a bit run-down, no wonder nobody comes in!" [Laughs] And I felt that I had been around the film business quite frankly long enough, really long enough.

Colin Moffat: Stop please.

[Tape Ends]