

Obituary

Jim Clark editor

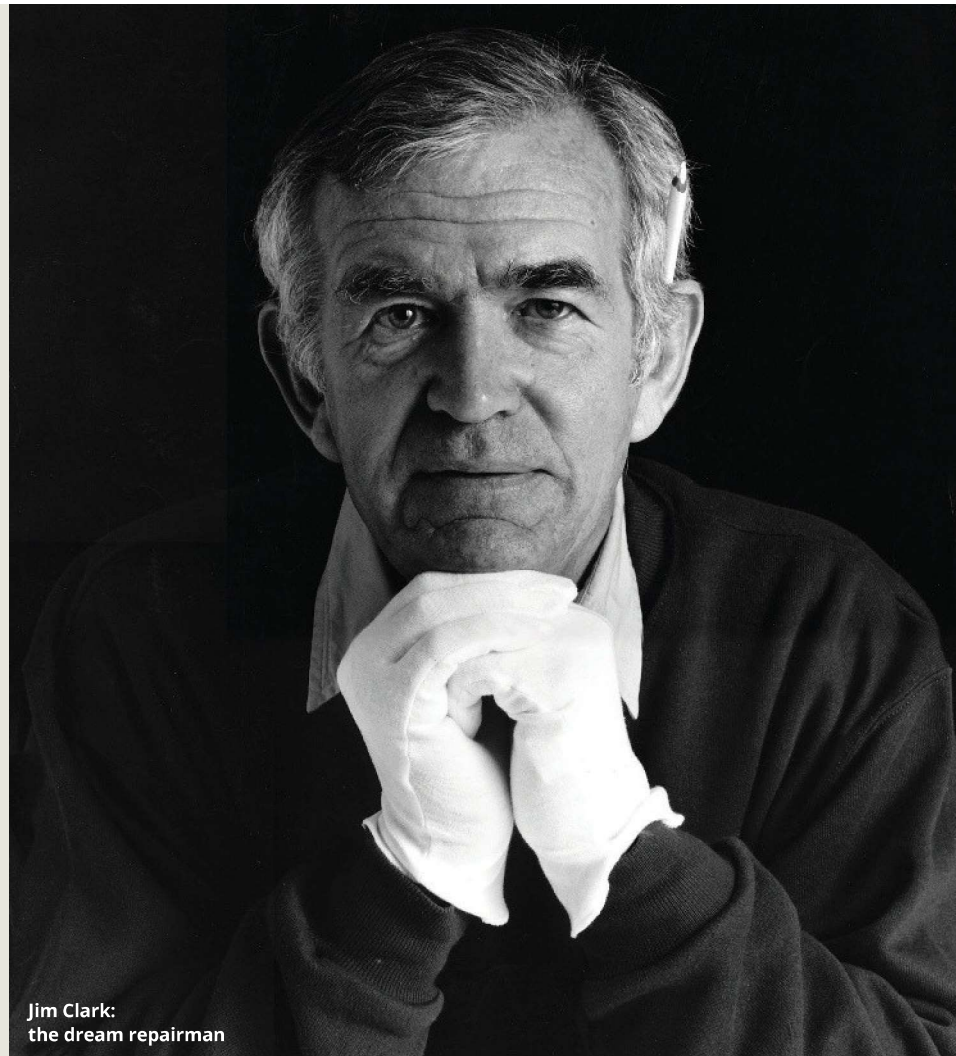
British film editor Jim Clark, who died on 25 February, aged 84, is best-known for his Oscar-winning work on Roland Joffe's Cambodian civil war drama *The Killing Fields* (1984). He worked with an impressive list of directors over 50 years including John Schlesinger and Mike Leigh.

Clark formed many close relationships with directors in the editing suite. Over time he met actors including Cary Grant, Audrey Hepburn, Dustin Hoffman and Leonardo DiCaprio. Tellingly, he admitted that if he had been a less discreet man, he could have enlarged his memoir, *The Dream Repairman*, with gossip. A skilled and instinctive editor, he was also a candid one: "If you're handed a boring load of old tosh, it's rather difficult to weave into a masterpiece, but often a fine film can be carved out of confusing footage".

As a young man working on *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957) at Pinewood studios, he witnessed the egos of Lawrence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe. He recalled that when Monroe was persuaded to retake scenes, she arrived 'quite pickled' on champagne and kept bumping into furniture resulting in only 2 feet out of 2000 feet of reel being useable. His job was to overlay the sound of footsteps.

Born in 1931 in Boston, Lincolnshire, Clark was a boarder at Oundle school where he set up a weekly film society. His interest in cinema had been fired earlier when aged 10, his father bought him a 9.5mm projector; he described it as "the great toy of my life, which changed it; one day it occurred to me that in some way the scenes changed from one angle to another and I became interested in the reason why. Then I became interested in the manipulation of images to tell a story".

Clark's grandfather, a shareholder in several cinemas, gave him a special pass but Clark was forced to admit that, in terms of the film industry, Lincolnshire was a backwater. He worked briefly in the family printing firm before moving to London and taking a job as cutting room assistant at Ealing Studios. He assisted on the sound for *The Cruel Sea* (1953). After several projects for Stanley Donen, Clark made his name with Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), which starred Deborah Kerr. His editing was instrumental in orchestrating the



Jim Clark:
the dream repairman

subtly ambiguous play of tension. Shortly afterwards, he worked with Donen again, this time on *Charade* (1963) starring Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn. It was on this picture that he met his second wife, the French editor Laurence Mery-Clark. In 1955 Clark had married his first wife, Jessie Holling, a secretary at Ealing Studios. Tragically, he was widowed when she died suddenly while eight months pregnant and he was left to raise two children: her son David whom Clark adopted and Kate, the daughter they had together. He married Laurence in 1963 and had another daughter, Sybil, who is now a design studio manager.

One of Clark's most significant professional relationships was with the director John Schlesinger for whom he cut *Darling* (1965) and *Marathon Man* (1976). Schlesinger admitted that Clark "saved my bacon many times". For *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967), Clark was given thousands of feet of film for the scene in which sheep are driven over a cliff. "I cut it silent as I always do with action scenes with no dialogue".

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Later Clark worked closely with Mike Leigh on films including *Vera Drake* (2004). Leigh said: "He really brought 100 years of experience to it".

During the lengthy cutting of *The Killing Fields*, Clark took a 'stress test' which showed that his arteries were blocked and he underwent a heart bypass operation. Many directors called him "Doctor" Clark for his ability to 'cure' sick films. He was credited with saving the 'unreleasable' film, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) when he stepped in as 'creative consultant' and recut the film. Outside the cutting room, he was an avid photographer and a keen walker. As a film editor, he described his job as being a dream repairman. That's what I do. I repair other men's dreams."

Catch a major on-camera interview with Jim Clark at www.historyproject.org.uk
Derek Threadgall