L.P. Williams (art director) 10/8/1905 - 8/10/1996

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BIOGRAPHY: After an early career as an architect, L. P. Williams began as an Art Director working for Herbert Wilcox at the Stoll Studios, Cricklewood in 1928. He remained with Wilcox, moving to British and Dominions at Elstree and working on films such as Victoria the Great (1937) and Sixty Glorious Years (1938), later going with Wilcox to Hollywood where he worked on Mr & Mrs Smith (1941) with Alfred Hitchcock. He returned during the war as a member of the RAF and saw active service in Egypt. After the war he worked most famously on Brief Encounter (1945) and later became technical director at Denham and Pinewood Studios.
SUMMARY: In this interview Williams talks to Rodney Giesler in detail about his career. There are extended discussions of the technical difficulties which the introduction of sound and colour (particularly Technicolor) presented to the art director. Williams recalls his involvement with David Rawnsley and the Independent Frame process, and discusses his memories of various colleagues, including Freddie Young, Tom Walls, Maurice Elvey and Herbert Wilcox. He gives accounts of the production of Victoria the Great and Brief Encounter (1945) and recalls his early involvement in the Association of Cinematograph Technicians (ACT) – the fore-runner of BECTU.

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Interviewer: Rodney Giesler
Interviewee: L.P. Williams

Tape 1, Side 1

L.P. Williams : It's not always easy to remember these things.

Rodney Giesler : Could you tell me when you were born, and something of your childhood, and then go on to how you came into the industry?

L.P. Williams : Well, I was born in 1905, in Slough, where my father was a doctor in practice. Er...He, my father became shortly after that the first school medical officer that Sheffield had. Then we moved and lived there until 1914, when we came and lived in London 'cause my father went to the Ministry of Education as a Medical Officer. I was educated at Dulwich College Preparatory School, in Aldenham, after which I went to the Architectural Association, where I did a 5-year course in architecture and in 1928 I became an associate of the Royal Institute of

British Architects. Uh, during the time I was a student, I happened to be walking to the Tube one day with a friend of my father's, another doctor, and he asked me what I thought I would do when I'd qualified, and I said I didn't know, I thought I might do this that and the other - whatever architectural students thought they'd like to do then. And he said "Have you ever thought of becoming a motion picture designer?" And I said "no, I hadn't, it sounds like a good idea". He said, "Well have you seen 'Robin Hood'?" which was then at...er...Drury Lane I think. And I said yes I had. He said look at that, marvellous to be able to design those sort of things. And I also thought what a good idea it was, so when I qualified, one used to put one's name on a register at the Architectural Association, the register of wanting a job and they had architects who came to them if they wanted drafts from them, that sort of thing. Anyhow, they said to me "Alright, what sort of job do you want?" and I said, "Well I'd like a job in a motion picture art department". "Oh yes" they said, "we have occasionally had inquiries from people like that". Anyhow, some months...was it?...Yes months afterwards I suppose, I was wanting a job, so I went to the Architectural Association and said "Anything going?" So they said "No, no, no, no we haven't got anything, nothing that would suit you, nothing that you'd like I don't think at the moment. The only thing we've got is a chap in motion pictures who wants an assistant". And I said "Well for heaven's sakes, that's exactly the sort of job that I asked you to look for!" "Oh" they said, "alright well anyhow here's the address, Stoll Studios, Cricklewood". So I got on the tram with my portfolio under my arm, went to Stoll Studios, where I met Clifford Pember, who was art director to Herbert Wilcox. He was a well-known stage designer - he'd designed a number of stage productions in New York and a number in London as well. He was an old Wykehamist and he had been at the Architectural Association in his youth, had been trained there. So anyhow, we talked for an hour or so, and he said "right, well when would you like to start?" So I said, "Oh, I don't know, wouldn't you like to look at my portfolio, see what I can do?" "No" he said, "Not interested in that - I've talked to you, we'll get along alright". And that was that. And that was in March 1928. Just before talkies came in. Herbert Wilcox was making...er...I think, 'The Woman in White', was what was on. We had what was called "the lower floor" at Stolls. [Coughs] On the upper floor was Welsh-Pearson, who was doing things like 'Yellow Stockings', and such like films. People like...um...Dickinson...

Rodney Giesler : ...Dickinson

L.P. Williams : ...whose wife, Joanna McFaddyen, had been a student with me. He was working for Welsh-Pearson, so was Francis Carver, who's now dead. Er...Edward Carrick, he was art director for Welsh-Pearson, and as I say, we were making 'Woman in White', 'Robespierre', with Nelson Keys, who was a director of British and Dominion, Herbert Wilcox's company. He was playing Robespierre, and 'When Knights Were Bold', that was another film that Nelson Keys was in. His son was John Paddy Carstairs. Nelson Keys had three or four sons - I've forgotten which, but they were all in films, technical side of film. Well anyhow...

Rodney Giesler : You didn't at that point have sound stages did you? There was no concern about sound proofing...

L.P. Williams : No no, no no, it was an ex-aircraft factory Stoll Studios were.

Rodney Giesler : And when you were working on two different floors, did you have a lot of height?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, yes, yes. Not as high as the sound stages were, usual factory sort of height you see, I suppose, what, 20 feet. But none of the overhead gantries and running tackle and all that sort of thing, that came with sound studios, we had none of that.

Rodney Giesler : Were the sets more like theatre sets in those days?

L.P. Williams : Much more, yes, a lot of stage bracing and canvas flats and ... Funnily enough of course, the sound people tried to make us use canvas flats, we'd progressed you see from canvas flats to plywood ones when sound came, and of course the sound people tried to make us go in for canvas flats again which we were much against. But of course the sound people they tried to alter everything when sound arrived you see, "Oh you can't, oh you can't record with that, you know, the sound will come bouncing off it"...

Rodney Giesler : Canvas flats were nice and soft, they didn't reflect sound...

L.P. Williams : Well that's right, but it's like all these people, they had to toe the line in the end. You see it was the same when colour came in. The colour people, the Kalmuses, they said, "oh you can't use that colour, you can't use this up near to another colour, and all this. Well Freddie Young and I decided when we made the first colour film in England, which was 'Sixty Glorious Years' we decided we weren't going to have any of this nonsense, but we'd just use the colours we wanted and they'd have to photograph or it was just too bad. Well of course it turned out there was no difficulty at all. There was nothing that wouldn't register directly. But they make a song and dance you see, to get themselves jobs as colour advisers and all this, which of course they all went out of the window after about two years. Course Mrs Kalmus she was the trouble you see. Dr Kalmus, who was the head of Technicolor, his wife, she used to turn up every spring if you were making colour films, in time for the racing and she would be a colour expert on the film but of course she'd always have an assistant, who when she was at the racing he would look after her interests - heh.

Rodney Giesler : Were you at Stoll when sound came in?

L.P. Williams : Yes. So we packed up.

Rodney Giesler : Oh you packed up, you didn't, um...

L.P. Williams : Everybody got the sack,

Rodney Giesler : They didn't think of converting the stages into sound stages or anything?

L.P. Williams : Well they didn't know what to do you see but what happened was that they were, they converted the stages at British International, at Elstree, and built about three new stages I think, three or four. And it was...well actually they were doing about eight, a block of uh...either six or eight, I can't remember. And we took one side of this block which was three

stages and BIP were RCA sound, but we converted ours to Western Electric. And we were the only Western Electric studio in England at that time. So I suppose...

Rodney Giesler : Just if I can pause - there were two different sounds: there was RCA...

L.P. Williams : Yes

Rodney Giesler : ...which was height or width modulated, and Western Electric was density modulated...

L.P. Williams : Well something like that, that's much too technical for me but something like that. It sounds good anyway. And...er...I think that Herbert Wilcox's company, British and Dominion, bought those three studios from BIP. And we were a completely separate unit of course.

Rodney Giesler : And you were obviously re-employed, once Herbert Wilcox had...

L.P. Williams : Well then Herbert Wilcox got going, I suppose it was about nine months because...six to nine months because I went and worked for a scenic studio which was also in Cricklewood, a well-known one, which was called (McConnery and Laverday?) who did work for the theatre and theatres in London you know, painting the scenery. But anyhow, of course we kept in touch with each other as one does in these circumstances and anyhow Herbert Wilcox started by hiring the Rock studio, which was a little studio in Elstree, which had been converted for sound. And he made a picture there called 'Wolves' with a lot of well-known actors in it, I believe Charles Laughton was one of them if I remember rightly. And we did that whilst they were getting the studio ready across the road and we moved into them, you know, with the builders still in there and all the trenches for the sound cables still open and all that sort of thing. And there we stayed until they were burnt to the ground one Saturday night.

Rodney Giesler : Which year was that - do you remember?

L.P. Williams : Ooh god, when was it? About 35, 35 or 6. And we then moved to Pinewood which was, that was just completed being built.

Rodney Giesler : While you were at BIP, did you come across Hitchcock at all?

L.P. Williams : Well, [laughs] not personally. I did a picture for Hitchcock in America, called 'Mr and Mrs Smith' with Carole Lombard and Bob Montgomery. No, that's the only time I had anything to do with Hitch.

Rodney Giesler : And Herbert Wilcox, had he married Anna Neagle at that point?

L.P. Williams : Ooh no. He hadn't even heard of Anna Neagle [laughs] That came afterwards. We were well established then, that would be in 1930...4 I should think - a film called 'Goodnight Vienna', with Jack Buchanan. And the story goes, I mean in Herbert's book, and Anna's book, and everybody else's book, how they hadn't got a leading lady, I suppose Herbert

didn't think that Elsie Randolph was suitable or something you see. He went down to the Hippodrome or somewhere, where Jack was performing and saw this girl in the front row of the chorus and said "what about her?" Jack Buchanan said "why not? Try her if you like, she's alright I don't mind." [Laughs] It worked; Herbert made it work.

Rodney Giesler : Who were the other personalities you remember from those days?

L.P. Williams : Freddie Young, he's my oldest friend, I expect you've interviewed him haven't you?

Rodney Giesler : Yes, I think someone else has.

L.P. Williams : Yeah, um - Teddy Carrick, Teddy Craig - do you know him?

Rodney Giesler : Teddy Carrick of course, he's been interviewed.

L.P. Williams : Yea, well yeah he was called, what did he call himself then - Teddy Carrick then, he now calls himself Teddy Craig, you know, he's taken his father's name again. Only in those days he rather, you know, it was fashionable not to trade on your father's name so, he called himself Teddy Carrick. But everybody knew he was Gordon Craig's son of course [laughs]. It made no difference.

Rodney Giesler : Well of course, during, you know, with the coming of sound, and so on, over these years, your technique of set building and so on changes, you mentioned you'd move from canvas to plywood...

L.P. Williams : Yeah, but not very much.

Rodney Giesler : Were they more three-dimensional than before?

L.P. Williams : Well, yes it became more elaborate you see because the cameras became more mobile and cranes were introduced and dollies and things which they virtually didn't have with silent pictures you see.

Rodney Giesler : What were the sort of hours worked in those days?

L.P. Williams : Ah well, I suppose they'd be about 8.30 until about 6, yeah. And of course definitely all day Saturday.

Rodney Giesler : Did they tend to go on working into the night as well, or not always?

L.P. Williams : Well when we moved into British and Dominion Studios at Elstree, we were certainly working all night and all day.

Rodney Giesler : But you weren't actually involved in quota quickies as such were you?

L.P. Williams : I was not, no, no. We made them; Jack Raymond was the sort of chap who used to direct those for us.

Rodney Giesler : Was Michael Powell working in those days?

L.P. Williams : I don't remember Michael Powell until just before the war. I've forgotten what he was before he was a director, what was he - a cutter or something?

Rodney Giesler : Yes I think so.

L.P. Williams : I knew David Lean of course was with us in the 30s at B & D at Elstree.

Rodney Giesler : He was actually there was he?

L.P. Williams : He was one of our cutters, junior sort of type. He was always funny, he was a loner you know, whereas Freddie Young and Francis Carver, and Keys' boys and all those, we were all friendly and you know had activities together outside the studio you know, social activities, but never David Lean, he was never part of that. Always a funny chap. Still he was good, no doubt about that.

Rodney Giesler : So you continued to work at Elstree with Herbert Wilcox until when?

L.P. Williams : Until it burnt to the ground. One Saturday evening...Saturday night.

Rodney Giesler : And you were saying that Pinewood was built at about this time.

L.P. Williams : Yeah, it was being built. And we moved in and did the first stuff that was done, shot there, we did - British and Dominion.

Rodney Giesler : Was that with Wilcox as well?

L.P. Williams : Yep. Then, we moved across to Denham. And there we did 'Victoria the Great', and the year after 'Victoria the Great' we did 'Sixty Glorious Years'. Which we had a great deal of government co-operation. Through Sir Robert Vansittart. And of course King George VI he was very keen on what went on with that because they had had a copy of 'Victoria the Great' sent up to Balmoral and the Royal Family had seen it there and they obviously enjoyed it. But of course they were upset by incorrect procedures in the palace, the way pages behaved, you know, that sort of thing. And so George VI was interested to see that those things were put right when we came to do 'Sixty Glorious Years'.

Rodney Giesler : So the King was in at the script stage?

L.P. Williams : Well I won't say that, but I mean, yes, he was interested in what was going on, you know. I don't think he ever read the script. I don't know how it came about but we had appointed an advisor on Palace procedure and things, a chap named Sir George Crichton[?] who had held, had he been [in] the Lord Chamberlain's Office or something you see. Very, very nice

chap, and he used to put Herbert right on all those sort of...you know, how pages behave, because everybody thought that a page is a sort of chap who works under the butler and that sort of thing. Well that isn't the case in the palaces, sort of gentleman, wears silk stockings and a sword and things, that sort [laughs]. But one interesting thing about that was that the King gave definite instructions that whenever Anna Neagle appeared at any of these royal residences (like Balmoral, which they lent us as a location, and Windsor Castle, all these places) there was definite instruction to the factors and agents in these places that whenever Anna Neagle appeared in costume as Queen Victoria, the Royal Standard must go up. Because he'd noticed that in 'Victoria the Great' that Queen Victoria had appeared around the place with no Royal Standards flying. He was very upset about this, he said the thing was quite impossible. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : You were saying this was the first colour picture.

L.P. Williams : That was the first colour picture made in England - 'Sixty Glorious Years'.

Rodney Giesler : And it was on the Technicolor three-strip system?

L.P. Williams : That's right - yes.

Rodney Giesler : ...with massive cameras,

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, terrific great cameras, yes. Great big blue blimps. Light blue blimps.

Rodney Giesler : And you obviously used more colour in your design, to take advantage of this?

L.P. Williams : Not really, no. No, we never used monochrome in painting sets.

Rodney Giesler : Even in the black and white days?

L.P. Williams : No, not really, no. The only time I've come up against that was in Hollywood, when I did 'Tom Brown's Schooldays'. We had a cameraman named Nick- Nicaraca [sic] or something. He was of Italian descent or something. And he'd come into being a cameraman by being a chauffeur at RKO and he...everything, for him, had to be painted in greys. Which of course is quite silly when you come to think of it because as soon as you go into the property room, to get some furniture, well I mean the furniture isn't in greys and ... [laughs]. If you want a desk, it's a brown colour, but that was all right [laughs]. He couldn't stand the set unless it was painted in grey. But of course it's not, I mean, the actors liked to have them in colour, I think. They liked them to be natural, you know...

Rodney Giesler : To show the costumes off after all...

L.P. Williams : Yes, yes.

Rodney Giesler : And Freddie Young you were saying, lit 'Victoria...'

L.P. Williams : He photographed it, yes.

Rodney Giesler : ...photographed it, yes, yes.

L.P. Williams : Yes, and then that came along, and then of course the war started looming over one's shoulder.

Rodney Giesler : Can I just hold you on the Technicolor system again because you were talking just now about Mrs Kalmus... and could you tell me a little bit more of the relationship on the set between Freddie Young and Mrs Kalmus, I mean were there a lot of arguments?

L.P. Williams : Oh no. No, no no. I don't know what happened. She hardly ever appeared you see, her name went on the screen of course, every picture had Colour Adviser: Natalie Kalmus. But she would leave her ... she'd be at the races. That's what she'd really come to England for. And she'd have her assistant, she had an assistant named Mordant Pemberton, who was an old Etonian, and his father I think had invested some money in Technicolor or something. And Mordant Pemberton was the sort of chap who didn't have a job, very nice sort of chap, and his father persuaded Technicolor to employ him, and they employed him as a colour adviser. Well of course he didn't know anything about it, he only knew what Mrs Kalmus had told him, anyhow, we made it pretty clear to him and, you know, we were delighted to have him around and see him and all that. We didn't want any interference from him and we didn't get it! And everything was fine.

Rodney Giesler : I worked with a cameraman recently who'd been a loader I think, a clapper loader on 'Henry V' and of course the colour crews were elaborately trained, it must have been a fearsome job reloading a Technicolor three-strip... I don't know how long it took - do you?

L.P. Williams : I can't remember, now, I can't remember. I might have known at the time. As far as I can remember they used to stagger with these magazines, terrifically heavy.

Rodney Giesler : So all the magazines were pre-loaded then?

L.P. Williams : Oh they were all pre-loaded...

Rodney Giesler : With thousand foot lengths of film...

L.P. Williams : Oh yes they were all done in the dark rooms. They may even have been loaded at Technicolor or somewhere, I don't know, or in the laboratory. Freddie Young of course would know all about that.

Rodney Giesler : It's probably all been recorded anyway.

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, I'm sure.

Rodney Giesler : Did you work on any other films at Pinewood before the war?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, lots of them, I can't remember what though, what they were, but lots...

Rodney Giesler : Were they mainly, Hitchcock, er, Wilcox films?

L.P. Williams : Oh Wilcox ones, yes. And one or two others, you know other directors.

Rodney Giesler : Who can you remember, other people?

L.P. Williams : Norman Walker, he was a friend of Rank's in some way, and he did a picture about a fishing fleet in the North Sea or something. It was a very well known picture at the time, sort of part documentary. And he used to run a religious, Rank's religious studio, which was at Elstree, what was that one called, down by the railway station... Whitehall Studios I think. And that made nothing but religious pictures. That's how Rank came into pictures of course, originally.

Rodney Giesler : Did he build Pinewood, or was it built by someone else?

L.P. Williams : Well, he certainly had a finger in it. Yes, oh yes, he was around but I don't think he was originally, I think he came into it somehow, and I'm not sure ... Oh yes, and John Davis of course, was always around...

Rodney Giesler : Not in those days was he?

L.P. Williams : What, Rank's stooge? I'll say he was! No, he can't have been before the war; no...Now I'm getting muddled. No because Rank only came into films, well he may have made some religious films before the war, I'm not sure. But it was during the war that he bought Odeon and those things, yes, that's when John Davis came along. No, Rank can't have had anything to do with it at that time.

Rodney Giesler : We've got records somewhere anyway.

L.P. Williams : Captain the Honourable Richard Norton, he was one of the directors at Pinewood Studios.

Rodney Giesler : Anyone else you can remember at Pinewood - any actors, other directors?

L.P. Williams : Oh god, I don't know.

Rodney Giesler : I suppose you're mainly involved in your own production, you don't bump into people not on it.

L.P. Williams : No you see them because they had a very good restaurant at Pinewood of course, which one used to use.

Rodney Giesler : And you were living where at this time? In London, or...

L.P. Williams : No, just after we started at Elstree, I took lodgings with a local doctor. That's right I had a sitting room and a bedroom. Because I decided you know that one had to live above

a shop and this sort of thing, because of the hours. You had to get there at night you know. If we went to London for the cinema, Freddie Young and I always used to call back at the studio on our way home from London you see. Because they were building a set for the next day you see. We'd finish in the evening, they'd strike the set and build a new one, paper it, paint it, and everyone ready to go at night. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : And did you stay, did you live over the shop at Pinewood as well?

L.P. Williams : Er, no, er yes I moved to Chorleywood then. I bought a house whilst we were at Pinewood in Chorleywood. And that was convenient of course for Denham or Elstree. Then of course, Korda, whilst we were at B & D, Korda came and rented studio space from us, he had one of our stages. So, what else can I tell you...

Rodney Giesler : Well the war terminated your time at Pinewood did it? What did you do?

L.P. Williams : In the March of 1940 ... when did the war break out? 1939 wasn't it? Well in March 1939 Herbert Wilcox went to Hollywood to make 'Nurse Cavell' and he took Freddie Young and myself and Anna's makeup girl.

Rodney Giesler : And this was for an American company?

L.P. Williams : RKO. And I went...it was very good; I went and when we finished, we were all going back you know, we had train tickets booked and all this. Freddie Young went and I've forgotten why but I stayed for another two or three days. And one day I got back to the hotel and they said there are all these messages for you in your pigeonhole, and I said "What's all that?" and they said "the studio have been ringing you up all day". I went down or rang up or something, to find out what they wanted and they'd got a film they wanted me to do. And that went on until 1941 when I couldn't stand it any more and I had to get back.

Rodney Giesler : Now one of those films was 'Mr and Mrs Smith' you mentioned just now wasn't it?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, yes. Herbert stayed of course. He did a number which I did for him of course but I did 'Mr and Mrs Smith' and 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' and ... ah ... I don't know, I must have done four or five or six or something, pictures. And I was in on the forming of the union there. My card in the Association of Motion Picture Art Directors of America is number 77. I was there at the Hollywood Knickerbocker Hotel the night it was formed. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : And there were no objections in those days to using foreign technicians and that sort of thing later on?

L.P. Williams : Well I don't know, there was but I was there and I was with an American art director named Bob Haass who was a personal friend. He was a Universal art director. And I mean it was just everybody who was in the room decided what they were going to do and they joined. And it was just like that!

Rodney Giesler : What were the differences, when you arrived in Hollywood, between working in an American studio and working over here? Were there big differences?

L.P. Williams : Yes well the big difference of course is that, before the war in this country I never had any idea what anything cost, that I did. I mean I never knew what money had been allocated to the art department when we made 'Sixty Glorious Years', nobody told me, I just did anything I liked. But when you got to America you jolly soon found that that didn't go. You knew to the penny what you'd got on every set and if you didn't stick to it there was trouble.

Rodney Giesler : That's interesting because one usually thinks of America in terms of bigger money and 'money no object' to get the right effect and so on. The fact that in many other ways I think, British budgets were very tight during the thirties.

L.P. Williams : Yeah, maybe they were! I never knew, nobody ever told me!

Rodney Giesler : What about working methods - any differences?

L.P. Williams : No, very similar because of course we were always employing American cameramen particularly - directors, cameramen. We had many, well the first film that I worked on, had anything to do with was, what was it, I said what its name was earlier on...

Rodney Giesler : 'Mr and Mrs Smith'...

L.P. Williams : Oh no no no, a silent picture...um, well anyhow... 'The Woman in White' - yes. Now that you see had an American cameraman, I think it had an American director. I'm not sure if Herbert Wilcox directed it.

Rodney Giesler : Can you remember some of the American cameramen you worked with?

L.P. Williams : Ooh, yes, Dave Kesson and Kronje, oh I can't remember, now, it's so long ago. Trouble was usually of course, they were working for us because they couldn't get work in Hollywood. And usually the reason they couldn't get work in Hollywood of course was alcohol. And so one got used to seeing drunken American cameramen about the place! [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : They were tough on alcoholics in Hollywood in those days?

L.P. Williams : Well I mean, they were unreliable because of it you see. I suppose, you know, that's what I always thought and I mean so many of them did have this trouble and they were available to come to Europe.

Rodney Giesler : What about the cameramen you met in Hollywood, you were talking about the ones you met in England just now...

L.P. Williams : Yes, yes, oh well ...

Rodney Giesler : Were there ones that impressed you or worked well with you?

L.P. Williams : Oh they all worked well with me, or I worked well with them, that's what I did I suppose. But I can't remember now, honestly I can't. They were all RKO ones. Lee Gardenson [sic: Lee Garmes], people like that I knew, but I never worked with them but I knew them because of Freddie Young you see. Freddie knew them

Rodney Giesler : James Wong Howe...

L.P. Williams : Jimmy Wong Howe, the first time I met him I went to a cameraman's society dinner. When I went to Hollywood as part of my contract, I had it written in my contract that they had to send me to Hollywood for a fortnight. And I went, and John Paddy Carstairs, Nelson Keys' eldest son was there, he was doing, he was a sort of reporter on the Hollywood whatever it's called, you know, the paper. He got me an invitation to this and I sat next to Jimmy Wong Howe. That was in 1934.

Rodney Giesler : Did you meet Gregg Toland?

L.P. Williams : What?

Rodney Giesler : Did you meet Gregg Toland?

L.P. Williams : No.

Rodney Giesler : Because he worked on 'Citizen Kane' didn't he?

L.P. Williams : Ah well, I must have met him, there were sets from 'Citizen Kane' still standing at RKO when we got out there - in the studio. Whether they were there for retakes or something, I don't know. But there were 'Citizen Kane' sets at RKO. Then of course, I worked quite a bit...well 'Mr and Mrs Smith' was shot not at RKO but at the Selznick studios, which were at Culver City. And that is where 'Gone With the Wind' had been shot. And there were many of the 'Gone With the Wind' sets on the lot when I was working there. In fact I converted some to make them into English streets for 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' I remember. Yes, the railway station at Atlanta was still standing and the streets in Atlanta where they'd imported tons of red soil - looked really good. Well I don't know what else I can tell you.

Tape 1, Side 2

Rodney Giesler : When did you return to England from Hollywood?

L.P. Williams : I returned to England... I went... I first of all...I suppose it would be in 1940, after a lot of correspondence I spent my summer two weeks holiday in going to...I went to Seattle and across to Victoria where I had an appointment to see the chap commanding the Canadian Royal Engineers in Victoria...an appointment for an interview to see if I could get into the Canadian Royal Engineers. I was already in the Royal Engineers, the British ones I had a commission in that...

Rodney Giesler : Before the outbreak of war?

L.P. Williams : Before, before. I was commissioned in the Royal Artillery in 1924 and transferred from Royal Artillery to the Royal Engineers about 1937 or 8. And so I was there...

Rodney Giesler : It was Territorial then?

L.P. Williams : Yes. And so I thought well, you know, everybody says that they want people and all this sort of thing, so I went there, it was a long journey, it's, what, a thousand miles each way I should think. When I got there they'd never heard of me. The arrangements had been made in Ottawa and of course they'd never got as far as the other side of the continent. So anyhow I had to come back. But in 1941 I'd been doing 'Tom Brown's Schooldays' and Sir Cedric Hardwicke was in that, you know he played the headmaster. And I knew him of course because he'd played Charles II in 'Nell Gwyn' with Anna Neagle and, you know, I'd worked with him a lot, and knew him, and knew his wife, Pixie And Pixie was going to drive to Canada where her brother was Chief Flying Instructor at Kingston Ontario where there was...the RAF were training naval pilots. [Coughs] And she was going to see him. So I said right, can I come with you? And she said "sure" and so I drove her, and Edward, her son, who was then I think ten, and he's a well known actor now I think, I've never seen him since. But I drove her...with her...well I did most of the driving, in Cedric's lovely Buick, drove across America to Kingston. And there...Pixie of course...Pixie Hardwicke knew lots of people in Ottawa including Billy Bishop and such like. He was a fairly well known Canadian VC in the First World War; he was an Air Marshall or something. Anyhow, through her I met him, and all sorts of people who were kind enough to busy themselves around and see if they could find some job for me. And it turned out through Billy Bishop that the British air people in Ottawa were looking for people who had my particular qualifications, which I happened to have - an 'A' licence, a flying licence you see. So they shipped me back to England on condition that I joined the Royal Air Force as a pilot officer. And I came back; they put me in charge of about eight young American chaps who were coming over to join the Eagle squadron. And we came back on a troop ship, the Louis Pasteur, which sailed unaccompanied. It was a very fast ship; it had the blue ribbon of the South Atlantic. But anyhow, we had a safe passage, thank God, and I came back and joined the Air Force, where I was at Uxbridge...the depot at Uxbridge...where they were teaching me to be an officer and a gentleman, which was a bit upsetting as I'd already got two pips anyhow [laughs]. But anyhow, there I was, and I was waiting for the second breakfast on 7th December 1941, when the news came over the tannoy that the Japs had attacked Pearl Harbour. And I thought "ah". I knew then, I'd got a pretty good idea before, but I knew then who was going to win the war because having spent about two and a half years in America, I knew that anybody who'd try to take them on would be an absolute bloody fool. How right I was proved in the end.

Rodney Giesler : Can I just go back a bit, I mean, when 1939 came, you were a Territorial Army officer?

L.P. Williams : Yep.

Rodney Giesler : Were you called to the colours?

L.P. Williams : No!

Rodney Giesler : Why not?

L.P. Williams : Well I found out when I got back when I was posted to Duxford, what they wanted me to do, my special qualifications were that they were running out of pilots who'd had been grounded for medical or other reasons to make into Controllers. And so anybody who could fly an aeroplane was considered good for the job. Anyhow, I hated the job because I didn't like the idea of telling fighter pilots up there what to do you see, but anyhow... I found out of course because the sentries on the gate at Duxford had got gloves with barbed wire wound around them, they hadn't got any rifles, they hadn't got anything. They'd got no arms; they didn't want people pouring in from American bases.

Rodney Giesler : But...when did you go to Hollywood? After the war broke out?

L.P. Williams : No, before...to make 'Nurse Edith Cavell'. Which again you see, the British government helped in some way over that no doubt. They liked it being made at that time; it was good propaganda you see.

Rodney Giesler : And it was made there because RKO backed it? That was the only reason was it?

L.P. Williams : Yes, they financed it.

Rodney Giesler : Anyhow, you got to Duxford...

L.P. Williams : I got to Duxford and after I'd been there some time, I was on leave at home and I got a phone call and it was from Elder Wills, who was an art director. And he asked me if I would like to have a job in a very special... he was very cagey and all that. And I thought yes this sounds like an intelligence job you see and all that sort of thing, just the job. So, he said, right well I'll meet you in room 38 at the War Office on Monday or something. I turned up there and it was, the room was a telephone exchange. Anyhow, Elder Wills was there, sitting behind a little desk, a little table or something with a cup of tea and he was running the camouflage for SOE, operations into Europe. And they were about to expand into the Middle East, dropping people into Yugoslavia and Greece and such like. And that was my job, I had a fortnight going around all their places in England, all the schools where they taught saboteurs and things, and was shipped out to Egypt where I set up the SOE camouflage department in Gazera just outside Cairo; just by the Sphinx...just beyond the Sphinx.

Rodney Giesler : What exactly did a camouflage operation involve? I mean, supposing you were given something like an airfield and you had to camouflage it - how did you go about it?

L.P. Williams : We didn't do... that wasn't the sort of camouflage I did. That's more the ordinary sort of camouflage. No, the camouflage I did was camouflaging radio sets...making uniforms, German uniforms, putting explosives into camel dung, dead rats... [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : So it was more disguise than camouflage?

L.P. Williams : Yes, it wasn't like the conventional...

Rodney Giesler : I mean, you'd make a radio set into a suitcase or something like that...?

L.P. Williams : Well yes, Wills put them into suitcases, I put them into petrol tins and olive oil tins and that sort of thing [laughs]

Rodney Giesler : So there was quite a lot of engineering involved was there?

L.P. Williams : Well it was like being in films very much, you know we had workshops and just like in films and plaster shops, made things look like things they weren't...

Rodney Giesler : Filmmakers are very good at that aren't they?

L.P. Williams : Yes, mind you, chaps got killed doing it. I had some bad accidents. People blown up with, putting the...camouflaging these explosives. Because they'd come to us unstable you see. You know you'd get a batch of unstable stuff, which we did, it killed two chaps on my place, and it killed two chaps, no about four chaps, loading the aeroplanes.

Rodney Giesler : Was there a reason why it came unstable, why couldn't they provide you with stable equipment? I mean, that was your job wasn't it?

L.P. Williams : Well, you see, making it in such a hurry, bad inspection, that sort of thing, I suppose, you see. When you're playing about with the explosives, you're liable to get those sort of things happen.

Rodney Giesler : What was the oddest requirement you had, can you remember?

L.P. Williams : Oh God I've forgotten now. Ah well of course, yes, the greatest fun one was Paddy Leigh Fermor who you may know of. And he is the chap who captured the German general in Crete. Well I was in on the planning of that. I went to a flat Paddy Leigh Fermor had in Cairo when he was on leave, having come out of Crete. And he told me the story about this general and how they knew he got in his car and went from where his office was to where his quarters were everyday, it's a drive of 25 miles or something. And he went home at night and they were worrying about how to stop his car. So I said, well I'll make you a dummy of a man who's collapsed, you don't know what, but anyhow, he'd be a German soldier lying in the middle of the road. And I said, "if you put that down in the middle of the road, that should stop him". That was great. We did that; we made that. But they never used it, they just flashed a torch and his driver stopped and they opened the door, stuck a gun in the General's ribs...[laughs]

Rodney Giesler : Micky Powell made a film about didn't he - 'Ill Met by Moonlight'.

L.P. Williams : Yes it's been made, yes. They brought him back to Cairo all right. It was a long trip though because you see the submarine didn't turn up. And so they had him for a fortnight, another moon period had to come up before they could get rid of him!

Rodney Giesler : Did you finish the war in the Middle East?

L.P. Williams : In Italy. I got amoebic dysentery. And so I had to come home.

Rodney Giesler : So you went back to the film industry when - in about '46?

L.P. Williams : Yes.

Rodney Giesler : Back to Pinewood?

L.P. Williams : Yes, I went to Pinewood, just went and walked around, and talked to Don White who'd been our production manager before the war and he was sort of chief production manager to independent producers. Ooh, he said, you want a job? Right, got one right away. I've forgotten what I did...yes, was it 'Brief Encounter'? Yes I was wearing uniform when I did 'Brief Encounter'. Yes.

Rodney Giesler : That was made at Denham I believe, wasn't it?

L.P. Williams : Yes.

Rodney Giesler : Can you tell me a bit about it? The details, it became a classic film of its kind...

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, well of course people think it was all shot at Carnforth, but of course it wasn't. Very few of the shots in it were shot on location.

Rodney Giesler : That was where the trains were actually shot?

L.P. Williams : Wherever you saw shots of the train coming into the station, but all the rest of it was done in the studio. I went up with David Lean and Tony Havelock-Allan to choose that as a location. I think it was the only one on offer. We had to have one that had a waiting room in the middle of a platform. You know...the platform...and a line's there and a line's there and a caf  in the middle. But anyhow it didn't have that. It had the two lines, I think that if the outside of that ever appeared at Carnforth, it was a set that we took up there and stuck in the middle of the platform. But I don't think it was, I think it was all done in the studio.

Rodney Giesler : And the town scenes - where were they shot?

L.P. Williams : Beaconsfield. Yes. Beaconsfield New Town.

Rodney Giesler : Were there a lot of challenges from the art director's point of view on that?

L.P. Williams : No. No, well I'll tell you what, that I did a lot of sketches and showed them to David Lean and he said "oh yes great, that's all right, yes". He said "we'd better show them to Noel Coward, see if he likes them all right?" He said "come up, we're going to London this afternoon so you come too, and bring them". So we went up to Noel Coward's flat in somewhere

in ... you know around the back of Victoria somewhere. And he said, "that's no damn good, that's not the thing at all! I don't want anything like that". So I said "well tell me what you want and that's what I'll do". So he explained what he wanted, which was, you know, a very ordinary sort of family, and all that sort of thing. So anyhow I redesigned the stuff, and that was that, and that was great. A certain amount of trouble of course with Mrs Calthrop, who was another of these people who'd always get up your nose if you had to do...

Rodney Giesler : Mrs?

L.P. Williams : ...Mrs Calthrop. She's the woman who used to design the sets for Noel Coward's plays. Well, couldn't do anything without having Mrs Calthrop around you see. So I had to make it clear that she was not going to be billed as the art director [laughs]. Anyhow, she wasn't, she was billed as artistic adviser to Noel Coward. And as far as I know, she never came to the studio! I never saw her!

Rodney Giesler : How much creative power did Coward have, because Lean directed it didn't he?

L.P. Williams : Yes, of course Lean was ... it was only about his third picture. Well, his second picture, no...

Rodney Giesler : He'd done 'Blithe Spirit' and 'This Happy Breed' hadn't he?

L.P. Williams : Well wait a minute, he'd done the naval thing 'In Which We Serve', which I think Noel Coward directed really, but Lean sat in to keep him right on the cutting angle of it. See they just got him out of the cutting room because he wasn't at the war, he was in the cutting room, so you know, he was a convenient chap to get, and he was presentable enough, spoke properly, you know, he wouldn't upset Noel Coward. Anyhow, that's how he came to do it - they just picked him out of a cutting room because he happened to be available. So he held Noel Coward's hand, and that's how he started. Then, I don't know, I suppose in chatting with Noel Coward they sorted out all these other things Noel Coward had written and it started with David Lean had sort of got a hold on all Noel Coward's stuff. Like that other chap, what was his name, had over Bernard Shaw...

Rodney Giesler : Oh...

L.P. Williams : ... What's his name...

Rodney Giesler : Gabby Pascal

L.P. Williams : Gabby Pascal. Yes. He was another one wasn't he... he had that farm on the hill, on the way to Beaconsfield from Gerrards Cross. Do you know, one night they were shooting late, they broke for supper or something, came back, this was 'Cleopatra', some beautiful eastern carpet - it had gone. So of course there was a hue and cry and get the studio police and all this. Old Gabby Pascal couldn't understand this. Anyhow, it was some weeks later, somebody went

round with one of the studio cars to pick Gabby up and take him somewhere, 'Oh come in whilst I put my shoes on' or something, they went in, and the carpet was on his hall floor [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : That was out of the production budget?

L.P. Williams : [laughs] Yes...but anyhow, he had a sort of hold on Bernard Shaw, all Bernard Shaw's stuff he had to do it. Amazing now. But anyhow it seems that David Lean had some arrangement with Noel Coward in the same way, he did three or four of them didn't he? 'Blithe Spirit'...

Rodney Giesler : 'Blithe Spirit', 'This Happy Breed'...

L.P. Williams : Yes...

Rodney Giesler : ...and 'Brief Encounter'...

L.P. Williams : That's it.

Rodney Giesler : And then of course they formed Cineguild didn't they?

L.P. Williams : Yes, then they started making Dickens.

Rodney Giesler : You weren't involved were you?

L.P. Williams : No, no, no, I'd become technical director then.

Rodney Giesler : Going back to 'Brief Encounter', can you remember anything more about it, about the casting of it or how it actually came together?

L.P. Williams : No. I knew nothing about that.

Rodney Giesler : Who photographed it? I can't remember.

Rodney Giesler : Ronnie Neame?

L.P. Williams : Oh god, no it wasn't. Ronnie Neame was producer and he and Tony Havelock-Allan were producers. Oh I think Tony Havelock-Allan produced it, and Ronnie Neame was getting on with the next thing.

Rodney Giesler : Ah, which would have been 'Great Expectations'.

L.P. Williams : Yes.

Rodney Giesler : Anyhow, after that picture, you became technical director at D and P didn't you?

L.P. Williams : That's it.

Rodney Giesler : And what did that involve?

L.P. Williams : Well, designing new camera cranes and things, for seeing that the things that David Rawnsley'd sort out for Independent Frame were used. And of course nobody wanted to use them because they were all very jealous of each other these film people, as you know.

Rodney Giesler : Were you involved in the setting-up of Independent Frame, or was that someone else?

L.P. Williams : Well that was David Rawnsley, it was his idea. And I don't know what, he got fed up with it, or what, but anyhow he disappeared and did something else. Rank was left with all this equipment and stuff, some of which I believe is still used. I believe the rostrums, the floating rostrums, you know, rostrums with wheels on and things, I believe they're still being used at Pinewood.

Rodney Giesler : Now this was a way of getting round travelling mattes, which was...

L.P. Williams : Well that and a way of building sets outside the studio and wheeling them in. So that you were using your studio space to make films in rather than build sets and you see you'd always have a stage hung up building the next set. Well his idea was to build them outside on rostrums that had wheels on and you could wheel them in.

Rodney Giesler : Didn't it also involve back-projecting slides?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, a lot of that.

Rodney Giesler : That would have been quite revolutionary.

L.P. Williams : Well it was and of course we had the job of designing the projectors, the still projectors. It was a hell of a job all these scientists were in on that and needed to be. They had to find a way you see of these slides not buckling under the terrific heat of the projector.

Rodney Giesler : But they weren't back projections as such, they were stills rather than film?

L.P. Williams : That's it, yes. We'd never used stills you see; we'd used back projection from the fairly early thirties.

Rodney Giesler : And that had no heating problem because the film in the gate was only running through.

L.P. Williams : Well they, it was not blimped for one thing. But of course they did have to blimp them eventually because you had to have sound going on you see. And...

Rodney Giesler : Were they projected from a booth then or what?

L.P. Williams : Well they used booths, and blimping, and then of course you had to blow cold air into whatever it was, oh a hell of a job. Especially the still projectors, they were very, very troublesome because they weren't even moving, you couldn't get them out of the way like film did, it went through the gate and that was that. But here you had a still picture about this size with a bloody great arc behind it.

Rodney Giesler : What, a whole plate size was it?

L.P. Williams : About that yes. As far as I can remember.

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned you had a lot of scientists, you mentioned earlier you had Sir Robert Watson-Watt.

L.P. Williams : That's it. Yes.

Rodney Giesler : What was he involved in, what was his speciality, I know he was a radar specialist...?

L.P. Williams : Yes, well these physicists, they'd do anything, anything you asked them, they'd have a slide rule, take it out and tell you the answer to anything you like. You know, any sort of...a physicist touches all the sciences really. You know they told the photo-chemists what to do and chatted them up, gave everybody ideas, it was great fun, people like that around.

Rodney Giesler : So Independent Frame didn't really last. Was it for mainly that overheating reason or were there other problems?

L.P. Williams : Oh no, there were other problems that people didn't like it. And didn't want to be tied down. They had to make up their minds before they started doing things you see because all this had to be set up for them. Well you know film people - they don't like that. They like to sort of come on the set and have a look around and get a bit of inspiration. That's out of the window you see - when you start this sort of thing you've got to have the inspiration weeks before, sitting behind a desk.

Rodney Giesler : Of course Stanley Kubrick used front projection didn't he, on '2001'?

L.P. Williams : Well yes, front projection is used as well as back projection of course...it depends you know, hanging mattes and painted mattes and model mattes and all sorts of things.

Rodney Giesler : Tell me a bit more about your work as technical director - what other things did you experience?

L.P. Williams : I can't remember [laughs]. All I can remember is that come 1948, when there was one of the usual recessions on, the first thing that Rank did was to fire everybody in the technical director's department, which of course...in any other industry, the technical director's department is always the last one to go because all the ideas for the future of the industry is tied up in that. But of course with Rank it was the first one out of the window. But of course he was

egged on by all the film people, of course, who didn't like it. They don't like other people giving them ideas in films, as you may know [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : Did you go back to art direction or were you one of the victims?

L.P. Williams : I was simply one of the victims, I had three years to go on my contract, they paid me every month for three years to do nothing, so I became a farmer.

Rodney Giesler : But you were telling me before we started recording, about the lenses - could you put that on record?

L.P. Williams : Well you see, Rank had so many companies that made so many different things that nobody really knew, you know during the war he bought everything, I don't know if he bought marmalade factories, but he might well have done. But anyhow he, cameramen at that time, no doubt still do, liked Taylor-Taylor-Hobson lenses more than anything else and I know that the camera department in Denham wanted some Taylor-Taylor-Hobson lenses, and so they wrote to Mitchell's in Hollywood who made the cameras and ordered some more lenses, must be Taylor-Taylor-Hobson, which they got. And it was then found by somebody who had superior knowledge, or knew more about what Rank did than most of the studio people, may have been David Rawnsley, I don't know, but they found out that Rank owned Taylor-Taylor-Hobson and that he'd sold these lenses to Mitchell Camera Corporation in Hollywood, and they had sold them back to the camera department at Denham, which is also Rank, at double the price that Rank had sold them to Hollywood. So it was also part of a technical director's department to see that the product of the other Rank industries were used where possible, or where appropriate rather than giving the work to one of his rivals, and that sort of thing.

Rodney Giesler : So you left there about 1952 did you? 1951?

L.P. Williams : Um...

Rodney Giesler : Having soldiered out your three years...

L.P. Williams : Yes, must have been about...about then. '48 or '49...yes that's right. Yes I suppose so, that's when I started farming.

L.P. Williams : So you weren't involved in any of the Festival of Britain presentations like the three-dimensional or anything like that?

Rodney Giesler : No, no.

Rodney Giesler : And you went farming where?

L.P. Williams : Aston Rowant, which is just, down the road from here.

Rodney Giesler : Did you know anything about farming?

L.P. Williams : Well we had a house at a place called Skirmett which is just over the hills here by, close to High Wycombe. And I, you know, kept calves and pigs and things. No, I didn't know much but I knew a lot of farmers because I'd had three years to go to market.

Rodney Giesler : How much land did you have?

L.P. Williams : Three hundred acres. Still got it.

Rodney Giesler : And you continued to farm? Or did you go back into the film industry?

L.P. Williams : No, no, never been back to the film industry since. No fear! Much more pleasant to be farming! You know what you're doing then. Well you know who you're responsible to.

Rodney Giesler : So you didn't miss the film industry at all, from the creative or work-satisfaction point of view?

L.P. Williams : Um, no not really because I had a full-time job, farming is a full-time job and I enjoyed it. It's something I'd always been interested in. You see I've been interested in all sorts of things and been able to do them. I've had a very pleasant life really.

Rodney Giesler : Going back over your film career, do you have any moments that you enjoyed more than others - films that you enjoyed working on more than others?

L.P. Williams : Well I was very, very lucky with Herbert Wilcox because he was the most wonderful man to work for. He never questioned anything you did, you had a completely free hand, if a film had a background of anywhere abroad, you'd only got to say to him "I'd like to go and see the place and, you know, get the feel of it" and he'd say "right". So I went all over Europe during the thirties. I went to Hungary and Italy and Germany, France, Spain; everywhere you can think of. On the firm, which was very pleasant. Beautiful times on location with Jack Buchanan at the Hotel du Cap d'Antibes. Lunch everyday at the Eden Roc - what more can you want? [Laughs].

Rodney Giesler : I wish I'd worked for Herbert Wilcox with that kind of budget! What was he like working on the floor? I know you didn't, he worked with the shooting crew, but I mean as a director, was he tyrannical, or was he relaxed?

L.P. Williams : Oh, relaxed. Nothing tyrannical, oh no, no, no, not Herbert...

Rodney Giesler : Did the actors like him?

L.P. Williams : Ooh yes, I think so, very much. Yes, I'm sure they did. We used to feel of course that he didn't know what he was up to sometimes but everybody's like that. And of course he used to have to spend a lot of time away from the job with everybody kicking their heels, finding the money for next week's wages.

Rodney Giesler : So production stopped? Or did someone else continue?

L.P. Williams : Oh often on Fridays things would stop about lunch time and you know, Herbert would get in his car and be whisked up to London. And he'd have an interview with the Bank of America or something, and come back with the week's wages secure.

Rodney Giesler : You were never sure, until a Monday morning started, whether you were going to be working?

L.P. Williams : We were rather unsure sometimes, yes.

Rodney Giesler : Now what was his position with suppliers? Labs and film stock suppliers, people like that?

L.P. Williams : Well I don't know. That was rather outside my...No I never knew anything about that, I expect, we always had stock to shoot with. As far as I know Freddie Young would tell you whether there had ever been any hold-ups on that, but I don't think so. Not that I ever heard of.

Rodney Giesler : Because I know that when I started on my production company I had to go through the hoops on credit rating and things like that. Kodak decided to give a private guarantee for instance.

L.P. Williams : Ah well I suppose they had all this you see. Yes. And still it was great to work for Herbert. You couldn't have had a nicer chap. And Anna was good of course too, of course she was a lousy actress, but she was very pleasant.

Rodney Giesler : Well it was a working team and you knew what to expect.

L.P. Williams : Well yes we'd worked together for years you see, we worked, Freddie Young and I worked together, I suppose from 19...I first met Freddie in 1928 and we certainly worked on the same films until 1938, 1939. Yes, which is an extraordinary situation really.

Rodney Giesler : And his films obviously made money, otherwise he wouldn't have made any more films?

L.P. Williams : Yes he must have made some money, must have done, yes. But then he'd go and lose it, you know, one would be successful and the next one wouldn't and ...

Rodney Giesler : Ok, 'So Well Remembered'.

L.P. Williams : Yes well, Johnny Mills, was in it, I can't remember...ah wait a minute. Who was the female star, I can't remember...and then Eddie Dmytryk came over from RKO. RKO asked for me to art direct it you see and they sent me a sketch artist Zuberano, who I knew well of course from working with him in America, and Eddie of whom I'm a great personal friend. Of course I met him for the first time on this. Yes Eddie, I spoke to him on the phone only the other day. You know, three weeks ago. He's still teaching films at the University of Southern California or somewhere, and he's over eighty. Yes now when McCarthy got hold of him and sent him to prison, Eddie told me the governor said to him "well, Dmytryk, what do you want to

do whilst you're here, what would you like to do?" And Eddie said "well I'd like to pull a caterpillar tractor to bits, I've always wanted to do that, and I see you've got some caterpillar tractors here, I'd like to pull one to bits and rebuild it". And he said, "right, that's exactly what you shall do". And Eddie spent his six months or whatever it was when he was inside for contempt of court, pulling a caterpillar tractor to bits and rebuilding it! [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : Now was he blacklisted in Hollywood then, at the same time?

L.P. Williams : Oh I think so, yes, for a time.

Rodney Giesler : So that was about 1950 wasn't it, that film?

L.P. Williams : Er...no, no, it was done at Denham. And it would have been done in 1948. I should think it was '48, perhaps '49 - '48 or '49. Either just before or just after 'Brief Encounter'.

Rodney Giesler : Of course before that in Hollywood he'd done 'Crossfire' hadn't he...

L.P. Williams : Yes, I can't remember what he'd done. I didn't know him in Hollywood. But he's been to England a number of times since, on his way to do things like 'Bluebeard' and things he did didn't he, in Russia or somewhere, didn't he, I don't know, I can't remember. Yes Eddie's a good director; I got on well with him. Well I got on well with everybody. If you know your onions, there's no reason why you shouldn't.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Rodney Giesler : This is a second interview with Mr L.P. Williams by Rodney Giesler on November 10th 1993.

Rodney Giesler : Can I just take you over some ground that we recorded in the first interview, particularly clarifying your time at Stoll Studios. You mentioned that the company operating there was Welsh-Pearson.

L.P. Williams : Welsh-Pearson was one of the companies operating there. Welsh-Pearsons [sic] had the upper floor, what was known as the upper floor, and we had the lower floor, British, that is, British and Dominion, Herbert Wilcox's company. That's, I didn't work for Welsh-Pearson at all.

Rodney Giesler : And Nelson Keys was there I believe?

L.P. Williams : Nelson Keys was working on 'Robespierre' [sic: possibly 'Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel', 1928], in which he played Robespierre, and it was directed by an American named T. Hayes Hunter.

Rodney Giesler : And then you mentioned that when sound arrived you were all sacked...

L.P. Williams : That's right. Of course there was another film we made with Nelson Keys also, which was called 'When Knights were Bold'. And that was directed by another American called Tim Whelan.

Rodney Giesler : Who else was in 'Knights were Bold' - can you remember?

L.P. Williams : I can't remember.

Rodney Giesler : Anyhow, you were re-employed by Wilcox when he moved to Elstree.

L.P. Williams : That's correct.

Rodney Giesler : And you worked on a film called 'Wolves'?

L.P. Williams : 'Wolves' which was made at the Rock Studios because the British and Dominion Studios were being completed and wired up for Western Electric sound. We were the only English studio, certainly at the beginning, maybe right the way through until MGM were built, that had Western Electric. Which of course we thought no doubt was the best sound system there was. And there we had finished 'Wolves' at the Rock Studio, and we started with 'The Loves of Robert Burns' with a Scottish opera singer playing the part, chap named Hislop. Now that was being made at night. We only had only had the one stage ready, so they were doing 'The Loves of Robert Burns' at night, and, I think, maybe 'Rookery Nook', the first of ... no - first of all was a Betty Balfour film, of which I can't remember the name. Then there was the first film I art directed on my own, which was...um...by Sheridan...what was it, I know the name as well as my own...

Rodney Giesler : 'School for Scandal'?

L.P. Williams : 'School for Scandal'. Which was directed by Maurice Elvey. I remember well that I was taking my sketches to show to Robert, to Maurice Elvey, in London. He was rehearsing 'The School for Scandal' in a scenic studio in Seven Dials. But anyhow, I remember that our production manager, Bobby Cullen, told me before I went, "Now you be very, very careful that when you show these sketches to Maurice Elvey that you get, when he says ok, that you get him to sign them." Because, he says, "there's been too many occasions when he gets on the set and he doesn't know what to do, and he'll turn around and say 'What's all this? I've never seen a sketch of this!' and blame the art director" [laughs]. So he said, "you make certain that you get him to sign the sketches", which I did. But after that came the Tom Walls films. 'Rookery Nook' was the first, and that was...the art director for that was...um...Clifford Pember. Which the set was virtually a copy of the stage set, which of course was great because Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn and Winifred Shotter and all these people, they didn't need any rehearsal or anything at all. That...after that, the next one they did was 'On Approval' and that is one which I did on my own, the second film I did on my own I think. And that ...I decided to try them on real up-to-date modern sets, you know, German, steel furniture and chromium plates and all the rest of it, which went down very well.

Rodney Giesler : Was this a sort of Art Deco style then? That we now call Art Deco?

L.P. Williams : Yes, 19, late 1920s, early 1930s stuff. And of course it was a great boost for the few firms in London who produced the type of furniture and that sort of thing because the public saw it and there was no doubt that the sale if that sort of stuff increased by what we did.

Rodney Giesler : Who directed 'On Approval' - was it with Maurice Elvey again?

L.P. Williams : No, no, no. 'On Approval' would be Tom...well Herbert Wilcox. Perhaps he co-directed it with Tom Walls, but it would be Herbert Wilcox because Tom Walls didn't really know anything about films then. Of course after some years of making a great many of these Aldwych comedies with us, let's think 'Canaries Sometimes Sing', and many others. But of course he went off to Gaumont's and started directing on his own. But I think that was us it was always Herbert Wilcox that was directing it. 'Thark', that's another Aldwych comedy that we did.

Rodney Giesler : Sorry - what was that?

L.P. Williams : 'Thark'

Rodney Giesler : Oh 'Thark'. Do you have any particular memories of Tom Walls, any anecdotes?

LPW [laughs] No I don't. Yes, he was a character of course. Of course he was very keen on racehorses, he owned April 5th that won the Derby, I can't remember when...1934-ish?

Rodney Giesler : What was the name of the horse?

L.P. Williams : April 5th, a well-known Derby winner. But...what was I going to say? Oh yes, the trouble with him was that he used to like to go racing, and he once or twice, he left the studio, say two o'clock in the afternoon. He said "right - everybody clock out, back at five". Which of course caused a...eventually caused a great trouble with the union [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : They weren't paid for...

L.P. Williams : No, they weren't paid whilst Tom Walls was racing. How they were meant to get their money I don't know, I suppose by backing his horse! Mind you, if you'd backed April 5th you were all right because all the art department put money on it because I had met Tom Walls in the hall, coming into the studios, the morning of the race...no...ah yes I think it was the morning of the race, and I said to him "you know what chance April 5th?" He said, "You're sure for a place". So when I went up to the art department I told all my chaps, draughtsmen and people, "Tom Walls says you're all right for a place". So everybody booked it each way, including myself, and I went off to...we were making a film about aeroplanes - 'King's Cup'- at the time, and we had various aeroplanes on call at...oh lord...doesn't matter...one of the aerodromes in the west of London, and a chap named Commander Ron was...who was a well-known socialite, was flying his aeroplane for us, he was on call. So I went down there and we flew over the Derby and when we got back, landed, the mechanics came out to catch hold of the end of the wings and park the aircraft. I opened the door and said, "who won?" because I'd thought that Lord Rosebery's horse had won from what I saw from the air. And they said "April

5th". I said "whooo!" And I had won forty pounds, which is an absolute fortune in those days. So next day I got back to the studio and said to my chaps "did you get my couple of quid on?" I think it was, or something. And they said, "yes, we all got paid out last night". And they'd put the money on with the outside property man, who needless to say was never seen again! He'd turned up at the evening of the Derby and paid out my chaps but he'd taken my forty quid off to Wembley, and put it on the dogs, and of course he lost the lot. [Laughs] The unfortunate thing was that I'd been...after we'd landed at...dammit, forgotten the name of the place...

Rodney Giesler : White Waltham?

L.P. Williams : No, it was nearer into London, there were two of them close together...no. But I went up to London and ordered myself a suit from my tailor, on the strength of this forty pounds I was going to get. So instead of Tom Walls' horse paying for my new suit, I paid for it myself [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : Which year was this - can you remember?

L.P. Williams : I think it was '44. Any racing man would tell you...

Rodney Giesler : '34 you mean?

L.P. Williams : ...'34. Because any racing man knows...it was a well-known, very popular win of course.

Rodney Giesler : Did Tom Walls have a habit of extending his antics into real life, I mean was he a prankster?

L.P. Williams : He was a prankster?...No, I wouldn't say he was a prankster, he was a womaniser, he was very keen on women. He always had one of his...not leading lady, because that was always...what's her name?

Rodney Giesler : Anna Neagle?

L.P. Williams : No, no.

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned her just now...

L.P. Williams : Yes - husband's name was Davis, nice woman...But anyhow of course it wouldn't apply with her, but one of the other actresses he always had as his girlfriend. And it was very funny - the one who was girlfriend died, so of course there were interviews for a new girl to take her place [laughs] and the remarks which were made about that were very amusing, although I can't remember them now. But I know it was...some outrageous remarks were made about the candidates. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : So, it was a real casting session then?

L.P. Williams : Yes, that's right.

Rodney Giesler : Did she ever appear in the films?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, she always had a part. Oh yes, quite good, she'd be second string. Yes I wish I could remember - what's her name?

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned earlier that it was the B & D Studios that burnt down - is that correct?

L.P. Williams : That is correct - yes.

Rodney Giesler : Not the BIP ones?

L.P. Williams : No, well, they were, there was a party wall between the two. They'd have been originally built, the whole lot, for BIP. But Herbert Wilcox bought half of this block, which was three stages, and so I presume yes, that part, that part of BIP must have been burnt down as well because the fire was terrific, there was nothing left, all the rolled steel joists and things were dropping to the ground on the Sunday morning when I went there after it had happened. I'd never seen such a mess. There was nothing left at all. That was the time they were building Pinewood, so before we knew where we were, we were there. One of our directors, the Hon. Richard Norton...no...Captain the Hon. Richard Norton, yes, Scots Guards, he was one of our directors. He was also director of Pinewood. I suppose that's how we managed to get space there.

Rodney Giesler : How did you find Pinewood after...

L.P. Williams : Ah well it was very modern you see, but again, that had not been finished. And so I was able to get in and I mean I couldn't do anything about the design of the studio, the layout, which was very, very good actually, designed by Robert Atkinson, a very well-known architect, firm of architects. But I was able to design the art department which was good. And of course, no sooner than we got stuck in there then off we go to Denham. Them of course the war came along.

Rodney Giesler : When you say that you were able to design the art department, can you go into a little more detail on this one?

L.P. Williams : I was able to say... I was given a certain space in a building for the art department and I'd say how much would be the drawing office, and how much would be my office, and how many offices there would be for other art directors and that sort of thing.

Rodney Giesler : But as you say, the actual stages were already complete?

L.P. Williams : Yes...

Rodney Giesler : So there wasn't an awful lot you could do.

L.P. Williams : The design of that was very good of course, that they had, certainly. The property room and the wardrobe and that sort of thing in the middle, and the stages round this. And there was...all the space between the stages and those buildings was covered in glass. So that rain or shine you could walk from one to the other. And of course the other workshops were very close to all the stages. Now Denham you see, was...they got Jack Oakie who was an art director over to design that, and he was an American art director you see, worked for RKO in fact. I came across him when I went out there and worked for RKO. He was working in the same building as me. But anyhow, he made a real mess of Denham. The site was not very suitable - it was a long, narrow site, and he had it so that the workshops were up one end, and away went the stages into the distance, up a hill, up an incline. And it meant that from the stage, whatever it was, five or six, if you wanted to go down to the carpenter's shop, of if you wanted a carpenter to come up on the stage for anything, it would take about ten minutes for him to get there. And as the art department happened to be always up the other end, seemed to be more often in the old house at Denham. It would take us a good twenty minutes to walk from our office and back from any of the workshops. Which of course was a very, very bad idea.

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned earlier on about converting studios to sound. Presumably you had the first blimp cameras in those days, and so on.

L.P. Williams : No, no, we didn't have blimps, we had booths. They were in, sort of rooms on wheels. So that actually tracking was out in the earlier sound pictures. You could move these portable rooms, which were very...well they were small, two foot by three foot, at the most. And how the hell these operative cameramen worked in them, I don't know. The heat and the lack of air, no air, they were shut in, clamped up in them. And of course they could be moved around in between shots because they were on wheels, castors. Move them from one set up to another, but you couldn't track them or do anything like that. And then, the Americans started building blimps for their cameras. And of course we were hot on their heels, but it was all experimental and the blimps were damn great big things, and of course now they're only about two inches thick and moulded to the shape of the camera. But it was very different in those days. I can remember the first tracking shots and the first dollies. I have photographs of the first dollies that we made - tracking dollies.

Rodney Giesler : Presumably the glass must have been of high optical quality? The camera was shooting through glass.

L.P. Williams : Yes, oh presumably, yes. Yes. Yes, mustn't polish it with a silk handkerchief in case you scratched it you see. Yes.

Rodney Giesler : And presumably the microphone had to be on a fairly large boom, because it wasn't as sensitive as they are today.

L.P. Williams : No, no, nothing like modern microphones, of course. It was a cylinder; about I suppose more than a foot long I suppose. With the mike on the end of it.

Rodney Giesler : Heavier?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, yes. And of course the mike operator was a very important person, well of course the sound people came in and made themselves very important of course, right away. Nobody could do anything unless they okayed it. "You can't have a set like that - you can't record in it. You get echoes" and all this sort of talk. And Freddie Young and I always took the stand that we would stick together and we would say "well that's it, we're going to have it like that and it's up to you to get round the trouble". And of course they always were. They always got round them if you stuck your heels in. The same thing happened with colour you see. Always the same, "oh god, can't photograph colours like that, ooh". If you said all right well we haven't got time to worry about that, that looks good to us here so if the film can't resolve that, it's just too bad - and you always found it could. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : The sequence in the film 'Singing in the Rain' where they're trying to shoot sound, where they hid the microphone in pot plants and things like that - that's a pretty accurate representation then?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, all that sort of thing went on. I bet there was some trouble over 'Singing in the Rain'. I don't know anything about it but I'm quite sure there must have been!

Rodney Giesler : Well it's about the era of the coming of sound...

L.P. Williams : Oh, sure, yes. Well the sound people would have found lots to moan about there I expect. Of course, mind you, I expect he was singing it to a playback, I expect.

Rodney Giesler : You've mentioned Freddie Young a lot as a cameraman, you worked with him a lot before the war - he's a particular friend of yours...can you tell me a bit more about your working with him, and how you worked together?

L.P. Williams : Well I first met Freddie in 1928, March 1928. When, I think, it was a film called 'The Bondman', that we were about to make, and Fred was going to photograph it. He was then working at Gaumont - on 'Victory' perhaps, something of that sort. But he and his first wife, who is now dead, Marjorie Gaffney, who was a writer, came over one evening to Stoll's. Because Clifford Pember was away doing something, I had to show Freddie the set, and ask him if there was anything he wanted altered for his lighting and that sort of thing. Freddie, at that time, had been ten years in films, and I had been about a month, or six weeks. But anyhow, we got talking together and we hit it off immediately. After which, we worked together for, well, right up to the time we went to Hollywood and did 'Edith Cavell'. Oh no, I worked on a film after the war with Freddie. A thing with Johnny Mills in it. I can't remember what it was called...

Rodney Giesler : Was that 'So Well Remembered'?

L.P. Williams : Ah yes, that's it.

Rodney Giesler : Freddie photographed that?

L.P. Williams : Yes, 'So Well Remembered', that's right. Yes, no, that's the last one I did with him. Eddie Dmytryk, he was also an old friend of mine - still in touch with him. Had a letter

from his wife, three weeks ago. Yes, Eddie directed it, and Freddie photographed it. And I art directed it. Should have been a smash hit shouldn't it? I shouldn't think anyone's ever seen it hardly. It was a terrible film I think.

Rodney Giesler : So, the fact that you got on so well as people, made your working relationship very good?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, it was marvellous. Easy, never had any trouble, we never, ever had any trouble, never any argument. Everything was a pleasure. It was a great time of my life, I can tell you that. Herbert Wilcox never questioned a drawing - everything you showed him was okay. Everything you showed Freddie was okay. What more can you ask? [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : Now one film I don't think you mentioned last time was 'Nell Gwyn', you worked on that did you?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, sure. That was made after 'Goodnight Vienna'. So, I suppose it would be Anna Neagle's second or third film. Because 'Goodnight Vienna' was her first film. Yes it would be her second or third film. Yes that was a good film. It was great fun to work on that. Nice research and that sort of thing, to get it accurate.

Rodney Giesler : Was it a challenge, the art direction on that?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, sure. Yes. Oh yes, we used to...great trouble was taken to get the setting right for these sort of things. I had a letter, which unfortunately was burnt in the fire at B & D, when B & D was burnt down, from a woman who was lecturer in English history at Bombay University, an English woman, saying that she had seen this film and congratulating me on the accuracy of the atmosphere and such. Which made me very pleased. I wish I still had the letter.

Rodney Giesler : Shame.

L.P. Williams : Oh yes.

Rodney Giesler : Was it all shot at the studio, or was there location work?

L.P. Williams : Yes, we went to Hatfield House for some location work. But otherwise it was all in the studio.

Rodney Giesler : And of course shot in black and white unfortunately.

L.P. Williams : Yes. Yes.

Rodney Giesler : Who played Charles II?

L.P. Williams : Oh Cedric. Cedric Hardwicke. Yes. Funny, his son Edward, I motored he, when he was ten years old, and Pixie, Cedric's wife, from Hollywood across America, to Canada during the war - in the summer of 1941. When I was trying to get into the Canadian forces.

Rodney Giesler : I remember you've covered that in the previous interview...

L.P. Williams : Yes, hmmm. Yes. Now that boy is a middle-aged actor [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : Now 'Nell Gwyn' was the film before 'Victoria the Great' wasn't it? Wasn't 'Victoria the Great' the next one, or was there something in between?

L.P. Williams : Ah, may have been something in between. Well, there were all sorts of films - lots of Jack Buchanan things, and musicals, Jack Buchanan musicals. No 'Victoria the Great' was shot at Pinewood. Let me think...was it? You see, we made 'Victoria the Great' and then within a year, we were making 'Sixty Glorious Years', which was virtually the same thing but in colour. It was a sort of sequel. 'Victoria the Great' was black and white. I think we made them both at Denham. Do you know, I can't remember!

Rodney Giesler : It will be on the record...

L.P. Williams : Well I know that 'Sixty Glorious Years' was made at Denham, and that was the first full-length colour picture in England.

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned last time about 'Sixty Glorious Years' and the co-operation of the government and the King. Is there any more...thoughts you have on that - memories?

L.P. Williams : I don't know - now.

Rodney Giesler : You mentioned the fact that the Royal Standard had had to fly all the time on Windsor Castle when Anna Neagle was walking about.

L.P. Williams : Yes. Particularly at Balmoral because we had, you know, Balmoral and the grounds all to ourselves. You know, we were miles away up in Deeside and the Royal family were in London or somewhere, they weren't there. But even so, there were...there was great trouble there because the first time we started shooting, I think they arrived, Herbert Wilcox and the actors - Anna Neagle and people, arrived after we had got there, after the unit had got there, day after or something. But anyhow, they got up on the night train, they thought they'd go and have a look at Balmoral, so...and shoot something. Not really for the picture, but just to get Anna Neagle in the mood. And so that afternoon they got there and Anna Neagle appeared and of course up went the Royal Standard, and of course Herbert had laid on, although he'd been told not to, he'd been told it was absolutely out - no press. But of course Herbert Wilcox could never stand that; he really understood publicity. But anyhow, he'd got photographers there of course and unfortunately, so was the Factor. You know, he's the agent, the agent who ran the estate. Well of course he took objection to this, and you know, he saw ... although cameras were not in evidence and he said to Herbert Wilcox "what are these people doing here? You've been told there are no photographs to be taken at all". Herbert Wilcox said "Oh no, they're just extras". I remember the Factor said "don't be so silly - this fellow comes from the Ballater Times, I know him personally!" [Laughs] Yes, he said "he's a photographer for the Ballater Times". Yes, of course, he got himself into great trouble too for letting the press in when we were at Buckingham Palace shooting the Queen leaving Buckingham Palace for the St Paul's service of celebration -

her jubilee. Beautiful June day, and there we were, shooting away, and suddenly an upstairs window's flung open and there are the two princesses, sticking their heads out, watching what was going on. Well of course, Herbert Wilcox, he'd again been told - no press on the Palace premises - absolutely out. Well of course he'd got Dempster or one of these people, I don't know, I think it was the Sunday Express film correspondent. He'd got him a pass as an assistant director, well of course, on Sunday he writes an article saying "there I was with the unit, and this that and the other happened". And I happened to be sitting at the opposite side of Herbert Wilcox's desk on the Monday morning when the telephone came through asking him how he could explain that this chap had seen this happen, when Herbert Wilcox had been told that there were no press to be there. It was an interesting exhibition of Herbert Wilcox wriggling out of a situation I can tell you! [Laughs] Yes.

Rodney Giesler : Now presumably Herbert Wilcox had some connections with the so-called establishment...

L.P. Williams : Well, what had happened is that the King had seen 'Victoria the Great'. I think they'd had it sent up to Balmoral when they had films sent up every week and...Well they used to - no doubt still do. And he had been impressed by this, but he'd been upset by small things like the Queen running around and no Royal Standards flying and pages not behaving, or being dressed like Royal pages are. I mean, pages in Royal household at the time were not like pages in a ducal establishment, where they wore wigs or breeches and things. They were sort of...they'd been to Eton and Harrow and places like that. They were much higher up the establishment than Herbert Wilcox had realised when he was doing 'Victoria the Great'. Anyhow, small things like that. And, you know, he asked that these sort of things should be put right, and volunteered that, you know, he'd make Windsor and Balmoral and all these places available if they did the thing right, took some trouble to make it right. And well of course Herbert Wilcox backed the debt. Now that...Sir Robert Vansittart was the man who, who handled the liaison, and a chap named Sir George Crichton[? Could be Charles de Grandcourt] was appointed by the King as technical adviser - charming old chap. You know, he'd been a colonel in the Grenadier Guards, and all this sort of thing. And he'd been a servant of the Royal family for years. I think he'd been in the census department, what do they call it? The Lord Chamberlain's Department, perhaps, or something. Anyhow, and I did the liaison with the Palace from our point of view, and the film's point of view. And I used to go out to...and see Sir Michael Adeane, who was the King's secretary and that sort of thing, at Buckingham Palace. I used to put my Anthony Eden hat on, umbrella...[laughs]...couldn't tell me from an officer in the brigade of guards! [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : Did you film inside any of the palaces?

L.P. Williams : No. But I was fortunate that I was shown over them all. Buckingham Palace - went in the Queen's private sitting room, well it was her mother's private sitting room. And, oh I went everywhere, all over - servant's quarters - everything.

Rodney Giesler : For you re-create it in the studio then?

L.P. Williams : Parts were. Windsor, I went over all the staterooms, which were not open to the public in those days. The white drawing room, red drawing room, green drawing room, all that

stuff. Balmoral - went into the King and Queens' bedroom. Yes the housekeeper at Balmoral showed me over. Yes, the others didn't go in there, only myself.

Rodney Giesler : Where, when you were shooting at these places, where were the crews looked after - in a local hotel, or what?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, at Balmoral we were not at Ballater, we were in the town, little town the other side of Balmoral. Oh god...Braemar. And some of us were in one hotel and some in another.

Rodney Giesler : Did the King himself visit any of the shooting?

L.P. Williams : No. No. Of course the Queen became very keen on theatricals you know. And in the war, Vincent Korda and Ferdy Bellan they used to design the sets for pantomimes they put on at Windsor you know.

TAPE 2, SIDE 2

Rodney Giesler : I'd like to move on, if possible, on the subject of colour on this film 'Sixty Glorious Years'. You mentioned last time, the famous Natalie Kalmus was over, but spent most of her time at the races. But can you tell me a little bit more of the involvement of the Technicolor company, with, say Freddie Young and his crew on the floor? I mean, how did they keep their fingers in things?

L.P. Williams : Well, I don't know. The only connection I had with it, with the Technicolor company, was through Natalie Kalmus, or her assistant colour adviser, who was a chap named Mordant Pemberton.

Rodney Giesler : Mor, Mor...what was the name?

L.P. Williams : M-o-r-d-a-n-t.

Rodney Giesler : Oh Mordant.

L.P. Williams : Mordant Pemberton. Now he was a chap whose father, I think, had put money into the Technicolor company. Mordant Pemberton had certainly been on a picture - doing what I don't know, with Technicolor in India I think. But anyhow, he was appointed assistant colour adviser. And I don't think he knew anything about it. He didn't know anything about Technicolor, technically, I don't think at all. He wasn't a technician, he was a man, he was the sort of chap that died out in the late thirties. He was a chap who had money - he did nothing. That was his ambition in life. And fortunately, he had the money, so he was able to do nothing. But his father thought it would be good for him, I think, to do something. So he got him this job with Technicolor, and he...well he caused no trouble to us at all, because we soon got to know more about it than he did. And he was quite willing to take a passive role in things. And as Natalie Kalmus was at the races, and Mordant Pemberton didn't want to interfere, or cause any

trouble, everything was great. And so we just used the colours as we wished, and they were photographed, and they all came out great.

Rodney Giesler : And you had this huge, three-strip camera you had to hump everywhere, I suppose?

L.P. Williams : Oh gosh, yes. It was a thing painted light blue, sort of colour. Yes, oh good lord yes, the magazines - you could hardly lift them [laughs].

Rodney Giesler : Even after the blimp, it was a pretty...

L.P. Williams : Oh sure, yes, about twice the size of an ordinary Mitchell. I think it was made by Mitchell.

Rodney Giesler : How many grips were needed to handle it - do you remember?

L.P. Williams : No I don't know. Can't remember now. I'm sure there were more than for an ordinary black and white.

Rodney Giesler : Now, another point you mentioned to me was the time that MGM came to Denham, and you were seconded to them for a picture.

L.P. Williams : Yes, that was the first picture that MGM made in England, which was called 'A Yank at Oxford' with Robert Taylor and Maureen O'Hara was it?

Rodney Giesler : I know it was Robert Taylor, yes.

L.P. Williams : ...or Maureen O'Sullivan, or somebody. Well-known Hollywood stars. What was the name of the chap who directed? I can't remember now - an American.

Rodney Giesler : Cukor was it?

L.P. Williams : No. Was it Hunter - no, not Hunter.

Rodney Giesler : It'll be on the record anyway.

L.P. Williams : Oh yes. Oh yes, it was a well-known film, at the time. But I don't know if it did anything in America, I don't know, I don't know. Well I suppose they can't have been too displeased, because they...they came and built a studio here.

Rodney Giesler : At Elstree?

L.P. Williams : Yes, but that was after the war wasn't it, yes. Was it?

Rodney Giesler : Can you remember the cameraman on 'A Yank at Oxford'? Was it someone you got on with all right?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, I got on with him all-right. He was an MGM cameraman, imported for the job. I don't know how it was that Cedric Gibbons allowed an Englishman to do the art direction without having an American shipped over, but he did. All the other people I think...I don't know if they sent a soundman over...They certainly sent a cameraman and a director. The producer was English, it was produced by Mickey Balcon. Who, I believe, was unhappy with MGM. But of course, soon afterwards, Victor Saville went out there and worked for MGM, didn't he?

Rodney Giesler : Are you saying that Victor Saville directed 'A Yank at Oxford'?

L.P. Williams : No. No no, no no. Victor Saville was another...well he was a great pal of Mickey Balcon of course. He was on the Chief, going out to Hollywood when I was. When I was going out to do 'Nurse Cavell'. Victor Saville and his wife and his son and daughter were on the same train. And he was out there all during the war. I don't know if he ever came back to England, I don't think he did.

Rodney Giesler : Was Denham very busy when you were there?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, before the war, just before the war, Denham was very, very busy. And it was after the war too - well during the war of course, it was terrific. Although I only visited during the war, but... Well the war was still on when I did 'Brief Encounter'.

Rodney Giesler : Yes. You mentioned that, when you were taken on as art director of 'Brief Encounter', you had to have your designs approved by Noel Coward's stage designer.

L.P. Williams : Yes - ah. No...she didn't. What's her name - Calthrop? She never saw them, no. I stuck my heels in.

Rodney Giesler : I think that was a matter of credits wasn't it?

L.P. Williams : It was credits, that was the trouble. But of course he wouldn't, Noel Coward always had her as art director and that sort of thing, when he was doing a film. But I wasn't going to stand for that. No, she never saw any drawings. I showed them to Noel Coward and that was that. And she was called 'Artistic Adviser to Noel Coward', and I was called the art director.

Rodney Giesler : Did you have a lot to do with David Lean on that picture?

L.P. Williams : Oh yes, oh every day of course. Very...well of course we'd known each other for many years. But, you know, he was very easy to work with I found. No trouble with him. Never had any trouble with anybody. [Laughs]

Rodney Giesler : How much do you remember of Bobby Krasker?

L.P. Williams : Nothing - funny isn't it? No. So obviously there was no aggro there, otherwise I'd remember!

Rodney Giesler : I'm not looking for aggro...I'm just interested in personal recollections, and a sort of...character description.

L.P. Williams : No. Actually - has Krasker been interviewed for this?

Rodney Giesler : I don't know. I happened to look up the credits.

L.P. Williams : It'd be interesting to know how many people have, a hell of a lot I should think.

Rodney Giesler : Over three hundred now.

L.P. Williams : Is it - over three hundred? That's very good isn't it? Very sensible.

Rodney Giesler : In fact I interviewed the three-hundredth one.

L.P. Williams : Did you?

Rodney Giesler : It was Joe Mendoza, Humphrey Jennings' assistant...Another thing you mentioned - you were involved in the early days of ACT, weren't you?

L.P. Williams : Yes certainly.

Rodney Giesler : Can you tell me a bit about that?

L.P. Williams : Yes. There was a chap...the secretary was a chap named Captain something or other - forgotten. Well he died, or got the sack. He was rather...nothing happened with him you know. We'd have meetings, you know. I think I must have been on some...was I on the council, or committees or something? We used to go up to London and have meetings in the evening. Freddie Young, I think, we used to go together. And there was a cameraman there who was, sort of chip-on-his-shoulder chap, who always wanted to cause trouble - what was he? I think he was a newsreel cameraman, or had been. Can't remember his name - awful isn't it?

Rodney Giesler : Can you describe me some of the sort of things that prompted the formation of the union? I mean, why were you involved in the formation of it?

L.P. Williams : I think...I don't know...well of course one was young and enthusiastic, and that sort of thing, so one didn't mind much. But one did get rather fed-up with the hours that were worked. And I think that's what we thought needed putting right. You see it was every Saturday afternoon was normal. And of course at that time, in Hollywood they worked on Christmas Day. That didn't worry them at all. New Year's Day was important in Hollywood, and New Year's Eve of course, but not Christmas. And we didn't work on Christmas Day as far as I remember - we weren't as bad as that. But certainly you were expected to work until 5 or 6 on Saturday. Which becomes rather a bore after some years, especially when work, as usual in the British film industry, wasn't all that plentiful, and so if you got a job, you weren't likely to stick up on your own and kick up a row about it. I think that was the sort of thing that was behind it. You see, you'd work from 8 'til 6 every day, and...I mean more than that, because one was keen, I know

that Freddie Young and I used to go up from Elstree to see a film, or something in London, come back and then go to the studio in the middle of the night, and see the set that was being built for the next day.

Rodney Giesler : Actual shooting time - it could often go on into the night, through the day...

L.P. Williams : Oh lord, yes, sure, there was an awful lot of that. And of course there had to be somebody from the art department there always, you see. Although, it was very seldom one was needed, and when one was asked for, it was generally something absolutely foolish like "can we have a bolt put on that door?" Which, if they'd asked the stand-by carpenter to do it, he'd have done it without any trouble. Oh no, send up for the art department, get them...No, but anyhow, I think that was the sort of thing that was behind it... But anyhow, this chap Captain something or other, he got the push, or he died or something, and they advertised for a new secretary. Well I was employing a chap named Elvin. And he had a brother, and in that ways, Elvin, who became the secretary of the ACT, heard about the job and got it. Both Elvins were very left-wing. The one I employed was, he went off...he was one of these people who went off on cycling tours of Europe. And sure enough when the war started, there he was. And he was in Norway when the war started. So I got a frantic letter from him, could I get him a job in Hollywood? I was in Hollywood you see, when the war started. I wrote back and told him no - there's a union here, and they're not very interested in draughtsmen in the art department, who can't...they've got plenty of draughtsmen of their own here. He wouldn't run a chance. And I said to him "why don't you go to Russia and get a job there?" Plenty of film studios in Russia. And my god - he did! He went to Russia and he got himself a job as Hall Porter in the British Embassy or something.

Rodney Giesler : Once the union was formed, I mean, do you recall the frictions or difficulties that arose when they were seeking their first recognition; when they tried to correct these practices?

L.P. Williams : No. You see, you didn't hear a great deal about the union until the war I think. And when we came back from the war, there was the union, well established.

Rodney Giesler : Was Herbert Wilcox the sort of director that pushed on into the night as well? Or did he tend to work at a reasonable day?

L.P. Williams : No, he'd push on into the night if, you know if he was losing an actor. If he'd got to he would. He didn't normally. You know, these people were all working in the theatre as well you know, and so you'd work at the weekends and that sort of thing.

Rodney Giesler : You told me also that Herbert Wilcox's money problems were such that he'd disappear for a day to raise more money to pay the salaries...

L.P. Williams : That's it - yes. Oh yes, he used to do that. Yes, things used to come to a halt on Fridays, whilst Herbert went up to the city. And he'd come back, with a cheque I suppose, so they'd be able to issue the pay cheques on the Saturday. [Laughs] Must have been awful for him.

Rodney Giesler : Generally speaking - were people paid fairly promptly in those days, or did you have instances of producers...

L.P. Williams : Yes, we were paid promptly, we were paid well. And I can remember, we only got into trouble in about 19...during and after 'Sixty Glorious Years'. I think money troubles started then. Certainly, at the end of '38, and the beginning of '39, we used to go up on Friday mornings to head office - we were not working you see, we were under contract - we used to meet up in the secretary's office in...um...Wardour Street, to see if there was any chance of getting a cheque. Sometimes we'd hear good news; sometimes we'd hear bad news. But it was worrying, because when you're under contract it's a bloody nuisance when you don't get your money.

Rodney Giesler : I know, working as a freelance myself, there was always money problems...

L.P. Williams : Yes. Well no, normally it was...we did get paid, but this...towards coming up towards the war, there was real trouble and we didn't get paid. There was a lot of money owing. And Herbert got this arrangement going with...erm...RKO to make...'Nurse Edith Cavell'. And he took us all out, well he took myself, and my wife and Freddie Young and his wife, the makeup girl and the hairdresser, he took us all out there as well, because he owed us a lot of money. And I think he was afraid that there'd be bad publicity or something, but he arranged with RKO for us to go out there, and we did. And that's where we were when the war started.

Rodney Giesler : And you got your money in the end?

L.P. Williams : Well, you see, the ACTT got the money in the end, because Herbert Wilcox came back, and what did he make? Something about the 'Yellow Canary' was it, or something? With that chap...good actor...always drunk poor chap.

Rodney Giesler : Robert Newton?

L.P. Williams : Yes, Robert Newton. No, he came back to do that with Anna you see, and the union stuck their nose in and said, "No you can't - until you've paid everybody up - you don't start." And of course, during the war, they'd become strong enough that they could, you know; they could call everybody out - that's what happened. I got a cheque for four hundred quid I think. I think Freddie got a cheque for some thousands of quid...That was that.