HP0103 ROY WARD BAKER – Transcript.



DATE 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th, October and 6th November 1989. A further recording dated 16th October 1996 is also included towards the end of this transcript. Roy Fowler suggests this was as a result of his regular lunches with Roy Ward Baker, at which they decided that some matters covered needed further detail. [DS 2017]

Interviewer Roy Fowler [RF]. This transcript is not verbatim.

SIDE 1 TAPE 1

RF: When and where were you born?

RWB: London in 1916 in Hornsey.

RF: Did your family have any connection with the business you ultimately entered?

RWB: None whatsoever, no history of it in the family.

RF: Was it an ambition on your part or was it an accidental entry eventually into films? How did you come into the business?

RWB: I was fairly lucky in that I knew exactly what I wanted to do or at least I thought I did. At the age of something like fourteen I'd had rather a chequered upbringing in an educational sense and lived in a lot of different places. I had been taken to see silent movies when I was a child It was obviously premature because usually I was carried out in screaming hysterics. There was one famous one called *The Chess Player* which was very dramatic and German and all that. I had no feeling for films. I had seen one or two Charlie Chaplin films which people showed at children's parties in those days on a 16mm projector. But apart from that nothing at all until the pure accident of going to the opening night of the Empire, Leicester Square which had been bought by Metro—Goldwyn—Mayer and was meant to be their flagship cinema in London, possibly in Europe. It was very, very grand indeed.

RF: Was it the original Empire as a music hall or was it rebuilt?

RWB: It was rebuilt. There was a tremendous architectural stir up at the time over the Empire being ruined. It was according to my father a great factor in London social life, particularly the promenade where all the birds used to hang out. There was a great hoo-ha about the Americans coming in with their films and going to ruin the whole thing.

RF: As a sideline, the cinema completely obliterated the musical theatre and the music hall in central London because the Warner stood on the Gaiety sight and the Odeon on the Alhambra and the London Pavilion became a cinema so eventually they just took over.

RWB: Certainly MGM did their best. It was unbelievably lavish and wonderfully appointed. They must have spent a fortune on it. There I was at the first night of the opening of this

thing and Iwas fourteen and I thought it was the most wonderful thing I'd ever seen. I was bowled over completely. I declared then and there to my parents this is what I was going to do.

RF: Were they surprised and were they benevolent about it?

RWB: They were entirely benevolent. I think they realised if you had a child who knows what he wants to do it makes life very much easier.

RF: What did your father do?

RWB: He was a wholesale fish merchant. That's how we got the tickets for the first night. Because he used to hang out occasion— ally in a pub in St. Martin's Lane and the Metro office was in St Martin's Lane and he got to know some of these chaps and they were raving on about how wonderful the new building was going to be and there was this and that and the other thing, a marble fountain, etc. My father said, kind of as a leg pull, oh you'll have to have some fish in the fountain, won't you. They said what a wonderful idea, we hadn't thought about that. They said you know all about fish. He didn't know about goldfish, he knew about halibut and lobster. He said fine, I will supply the fish but I want three tickets to the first night.

RF: Do you have a clear memory of that night?

RWB: Quite clear. I can remember the symphony orchestra, complete, 90 players. There were two organists and they were both famous Reginald Foort and Sandy McPherson who were big stars. The odd thing was you'd expect the opening night to be *The Broadway Melody* but it wasn't finished. So we saw *Trelawney of the Wells* which was a silent picture. I vaguely remember shots of Norma Shearer sitting in the back of a pony and trap. Then was a lot of newsreel stuff with live sound and up to that time I'd certainly been very interested in listening to music. I'd never become an executant sadly but I was always, and still am besotted with music of all kinds. So, I listened to the wireless a lot. I was interested in sound and I built a shortwave radio, the usual things a boy does, and so my first ambition was to become a sound engineer. So that was the intention. When I got to the age of 15 I decided to fire off some letters to studio managers and I got an interview at BIP with P.C. Stapleton who said "yes, yes, come back when you've left school" which is what they all said, quite sensibly. "That doesn't matter I said".

I finally got an effective interview through a friend of my father. My father had an acquaintance there is no doubt there was some influence parental in the sense my father was always very interested in the theatre and the stage. I think if he could have been George Robey or a red nosed comic he would have been in seventh heaven. It was a secret ambition. He never did anything about it thank heaven.

RF: Did it make him a business success? Was he jovial with his customers?

RWB: He was very jolly and had a marvellous sense of timing. When telling a story, he would crack the joke at the right moment. He had great charm and that was why he was a wonderful salesman. He could sell almost anything to anybody and they just couldn't resist him. He was a very amusing man, an entertainer in a sense. There's a strong element of entertainment in salesmanship. This friend worked for George Black at the Palladium. He was one of his assistant production managers  He had a younger brother called Ted who was the studio manager at Gainsborough. It was possible to engineer that when I sent a letter in, Mr Black would see me which he did. He took me onto the set, the first set I'd ever walked on, where there was Cicely Courtneidge and a huge bevy of chorus girls, a full orchestra it was all sync[hronised] recording in those days which I was primarily interested in at that time. Mr Black couldn't have been nicer and again he laughed and said let me know when you've left school. In the due course of time I left school and there was nothing doing, blank.

But I got a postcard from my housemaster saying there's a post going in the mailroom of the Columbia Gramophone Company in Farringdon Road as an office boy or mail room boy. I did that and got very interested in it because it was all to do with sound, records. Parlophone were in the same building and they were publishing marvellous jazz records, Ellington and Louis Armstrong and I was taken by all this. I started doing translations for Parlophone catalogues. All their stuff was imported and a lot of it came from Germany. There was German translation and French translation which I could do. I was getting along quite well.

Within a few weeks I rose to be head of the department over the other boys which they didn't like very much and I didn't blame them. Eventually came the fatal late-night telephone call, "can you start tomorrow morning at Gainsborough". This was Thursday. I handled this extremely well. I said well I am in a job and I'm quite happy there. How much are you offering. They said 25 shillings a week. I said I'm getting that now. There'd be no point in moving. I got thirty bob. I put them off for a week because I had to give a week's notice. I was unbelievably grand about it. It was the first and the last successful negotiation I ever had with a film company. From that point on it's been total disaster.

RF: How old were you then?

RWB: 17, just. The job was to be a runabout, a production runner, not in the sound department but I was in a film studio and that was all that basically mattered. I used to sit in the booth with the recordist, Bill Salter, I made friends with him.

RF: Was your ambition at the time to be a sound recordist and to specialise totally in sound? You weren't at this time thinking of being a director?

RWB: Not till I saw what was happening. I was in the production department which I regard as a great piece of luck. If you get tucked away in a cutting room you learn all about that or if you were on the sound camera you were tucked away in another room. The only way to learn is by getting as close to the camera tripod as you can without being told to eff off and

keep your eyes and ears open and you hear everything that's going on. You hear the director muttering about the leading lady's terrible performance, etc. You pick up all this wonderful information.

RF: You're also seen to be doing [?] if you're dead keen?

RWB: Yes, and I was as keen as mustard. I was dreadful. I was efficient. I had a good tidy mind for administration and I was dead right for the production department and I did extremely well. I made a lot of friends, particularly the man who was first assistant but he was almost immediately made production manager, Fred Gunn, who became an elder brother. He took me under his wing and he was absolutely wonderful. He covered up my mistakes. He made sure that when I did something well, Ted Black knew about it. He'd come to me and say I've just been talking to Ted Black, I've been building you up no end. I don't know why. He'd served in the First World War in the tanks sector so I suppose by that time he was about 45. He would push me out. Throw me in the deep end.

We had a picture called W*indbag the Sailor*, a Will Hay picture, I worked on nine of them altogether, and in this he's a master of a tramp steamer and he has to come into harbour and bash into a jetty and knock it down. Somebody had to go and organise a tramp steamer in a jetty and a harbour and I was pushed into it. I discovered if you wanted to hire a ship you had to go to something called the Baltic, a shipping exchange, and I went to the Baltic and when I appeared they thought it was the biggest joke they'd ever heard. Will Hay was very famous so that was an introduction but here was this boy of 19 negotiating for the hire of steamer. They were very good, charming and I got the tramp steamer. Then I pulled a fast one on Fred. I said the only way I can see of getting the right harbour is to start at Dover and motor along the South coast till I get to Land's End. He says really, alright, off you go. And off I went on this wonderful motor trip all paid for. The upshot was we finished up in Falmouth. We built the jetty. We negotiated with the harbour authorities. I one thing I then came unstuck on was that I then found myself trying to find accommodation for a unit of nearly 80 people including actors and they were all going to arrive on August Bank Holiday which was great timing. And because there was a scene on a South Sea Island, six of these people were black and it was very difficult to find somewhere to put them.

RF: I didn't realise a colour bar existed then.

RWB: I don't think it was a colour bar it was just that ladies who ran boarding houses tend to be a bit prim. I wouldn't say they were putting up a colour bar but I would say they were worried about other people in the house who might object. People were totally unfamiliar with black people in those days. You hardly ever saw one. A place like Cardiff or the sea ports you would see some Chinese or some Egyptians or some blacks, but very few blacks. You would tend to see more Chinese.

RF: In films, black people and yellow people were depicted as villains or idiots or servants.

RWB: It was very difficult to make such a picture. There was another Will Hay picture called *Old Bones of the River* a satire of *Sanders of the River* and that took place in native Africa where he's a district commissioner and it was very difficult to get enough black people who looked like African natives.

RF: Have you any idea where they were found?

RWB: No, I don't. I should imagine most of them came from the docks in the East End of London. The film was made at Shepperton which had been occupied by Korda to make *Sanders of the River* and he left a native village there. There was a terrible accident. One of the native's grass skirt caught fire. The first assistant, Thomas McConnerty was marvellous. He grabbed hold of a blanket, threw the man on the ground and wrapped him up in it. The outcome was not very serious. He didn't get badly burned.

RF: Maybe we should talk about Gainsborough a bit. Given the reputation the British film industry had in the 30s, do you think it was an efficient operation at Islington. Did the people on the floor know their jobs?

RWB: I would say more than most. I joined in February 1934. I worked on 40 pictures. I was never out of work. It was in permanent employment. That was one reason why there was so little interest in ACTT at the time. If you worked at Gainsborough or BIP it was more or less regular employment and you took holidays when there was a gap and if there was going to be a gap of ten days you were told to lose yourself and you still got paid.

RF: Paid fairly?

RWB: I think so.

RF: It was owned by the Ostrers but very much operated by Ted Black? He didn't stand interference?

RWB: No, he was very much his own master. Maurice Ostrer was the boss. I think - but I was only a lad around the place — the impression was that Maurice Ostrer realised Ted Black was running a very efficient ship and there was no need for him to interfere.

RF: Did you form any opinion of the various Ostrer Brothers?

RWB: Bertie came under my wing. He was the wife's nephew. He'd come down from Oxford. He'd ski'd for Oxford. He was quite a playboy. He was about my age. He might have been slightly older. But he was put with me and I was to show him how the thing worked. By that time, I was certainly doing second assistant and occasionally first, assistant production manager, stills man, location manager, which is one of the wonderful privileges which no longer works. I'm not suggesting it should be continued, be reinstituted. But it was a characteristic of those times which was wholly beneficial as far as I was concerned. I worked myself to death but I knew what I was doing at the end of it. Bertie turned out to be absolutely

charming, delightful fellow. We got on like a house on fire. After about two or three days of showing him round and showing him how to make out the dope sheets, as we called the break down and showing him round the whole operation, he said how much are they paying you. I said £2-10 shillings a week. He said I'm dining with my uncle on Friday. I think, we'll see. The following Monday I was called into the office and my salary was doubled to £5. That was a good screw in those days. In the last couple of years it went up to £6. I went to Ted Black and protested. He said do you realise a working man can keep a wife and 3 children on your salary. I said yes but look at the work I'm doing. I got away with it. I got £6. That lasted till I joined the army.

I think production in those days was very slap happy. When I look back we had seven or eight weeks to make a Will Hay comedy and in those days all feature films only ran about 70 minutes and if you went over 80 it was looked upon as being a great long bore which it usually was and to this day still is. Pictures are far too long. You can't expect people to sit there with their asses burning a hole in their seat. There's no opera, no play which has an act longer than about 40 minutes.

RF: We'll come on now to the Gainsborough comedies, which really move. They're a delight to see now.

RWB: They were very funny in a classic sense because they were comedy of character. The problem with comedy, particularly on television, is that you can put a man on who can spout very funny one-liners. And that is considered apparently as comedy and apparently is accepted by the public. But that is superficial. There's nothing behind it. The very success of Tony Hancock was that he was a character and there is a whole world around him, not just his own character. They created a substantial tangible world. Will Hay, Tom Walls, were all tomfoolery of one sort or another but it was all based on character. Certainly, the Tom Walls was. I worked on about four of them. They were a piece of cake because he just filmed them as if it was a play.

RF: From being a runner you progressed to second and then first assistant in rapid progression?

RWB: Very rapid. I never officially became a first assistant but unofficially I was practically everything. I used to direct second unit in the end.

RF: This raises a question. You're indicating there was no great demarcation of areas within the technical grades but that did not apply to the NATKE grades or ETU, they were rigorously organised were they not?

RWB: Yes. There were no severe lines of demarcation when you were working together. You didn't pick up a lamp to move it because it wasn't done. The electricians were always about and they moved the lamps There was never any problem with prop men. People used to move things about.

RF: Did you have to ask permission because when I came to this in the States I always had to say do you mind if I move it and invariably they said no. Others would say I'll do it and they wouldn't let you touch a prop.

RWB: I think that arose after the War in the late 40s and early 50s and then it was rampant. There was a classic case at Denham after the War. I made my first two or three pictures at Denham and that was a class studio. They were the people who knew how to live. There was the classic story about them holding a set up for 20 minutes because they wanted to move a potted plant and they had to send for a gardener and he was on the back lot mowing the lawn.It may be an apocryphal story.

RF: Probably not, it sounds reasonable for the time.

RWB: Today that's all gone thank God. Everybody mucks in together.

RF: But to a certain extent there was that mucking in together in the 30s.

RWB: I thought so.

RF: Professional courtesy and consideration rather than doing other people's jobs?

RWB: Yes. I think it was just good manners. There was respect for other people's trades.

RF: As the third or as the second you could just as easily take stills.

RWB: I wouldn't take stills on the floor because there was a dear old chap called Fred Carter who used to dive underneath the cloth of a Ten by Eight. He used to say to say "Sir Cedric Hardwicke, hold your head up Sir Hardwicke". I took a lot of stills as a location manager and some of them were used for other purposes, publicity purposes. I wasn't a stills man. It was all unofficial.

RF: Was the sound crew, the sound crew, and the camera crew, the camera crew?

RWB: Yes, but they would help each other with their grips and their bags and all the rest of it.

RF: Back to the question of efficiency, the competence of people working on the floor. Did they generally know their craft?

RWB: I think so. It's a little difficult to recall because I was 17 and 18 at the time and it's not the sort of thing one really assesses at the time. But as I recall it I think that progress was quite slow. As I said we were taking seven weeks to make a 70 minute picture. We worked until Saturday midday so it was a five-and-a-half -day week. I don't think if you talk of efficiency in terms of dispatch and speed which is the great cry nowadays, then I think there was a delinquency there but it was an easy-going atmosphere. We didn't go over schedule. The directors were usually very efficient men like Marcel Varnel or Bill Bodeen who were

quite good directors in their own way but were also jolly efficient. There were no great hold ups for that but there were things like the cameraman would call for a fresh makeup on somebody and the girl would be trotted off to the makeup department and come back an hour and a quarter later. We'd if possible fill in with something else but quite often there was nothing to fill in with and there would be a hold up, that was the sort of thing which wouldn't happen today.

RF: Were there front office pressures, in as far as there was a front office. The front office was presumably the executive producer?

RWB: The front office was Ted Black, George Gunn, the first assistant and me.

RF: Was there an accountant?

RWB: I don't remember an accountant?

RF: There was a book-keeper somewhere?

RWB: There was somebody who did the cash for the wages at the end of the week, a real dragon. She kept the books.

RF: Who kept the production accounts?

RWB: I suppose they must have been kept in the same office. I don't think there was another one.

RF: Why did an eighty-minute picture take seven weeks to shoot? It couldn't have all been tea breaks.

RWB: I don't remember tea breaks. It was just that the general pace was very leisurely. A director like Bill Bodeen was always decisive and ready with the next setup. He knew exactly what he was going to do. It became a cant phrase of his when he had the print take, he would shout out cut, print, over here with the 50. I used to use it a lot when I was first directing. I just inherited it from him. It was one of things one did. When I was a director I realise what the game was. He didn't particularly want the camera over here with a 50, as the scene ran out in the rushes the producer would sit there and hear this voice and it sounded so decisive. When he'd said that everyone could go out for a smoke. It was a leg-pull in a way. I know a number of younger directors who have stolen it from me.

I think it was just leisureliness. There was no great hurry. I'mperfectly certain a picture like that could have been made in five weeks.

RF It probably related to British life generally?

RWB: Very much so.

RF: It was the way of industry, not just the film business?

RWB: Certainly. Motorcars were practically made by hand still in this country. Beautiful workmanship.

RF: At what stage were you aware of Ted Black as a person rather than a shadowy figure or the boss?

RWB: Very soon after I started. He was always around. He didn't come onto the set very often, but he was always in the studio restaurant for lunch. There was no such thing as tea-breaks then but I remember I could always find ten minutes in the morning when I hadn't anything to do to pop up to the restaurant for a cup of coffee and a slice of anchovy toast. Nobody would say where the hell have you been.

RF: The era of bacon sarnies hadn't arrived?

RWB: No, we were all much slimmer. The cameramen were fairly efficient and they worked to very simple formulae. It was the era of a great deal of back lighting because they were obsessed with the problem of the flatness of the image in black and white and you had to make it as round [?] as you could and the only way you could do that was by cross lighting and back lighting and they all went in for that.

RF: Was Gainsborough well equipped technically?

RWB: I would say rather poor. The sound equipment was probably OK because it had to be modern. There was a great day when the Mitchell camera first arrived. Certainly for the first year or two we were using Cinephon which was a Czech camera which had a marvellous gadget. It had a big wooden box in which the motor was and you put that under the tripod and there was a long flexible pipe which connected the motor up a tube into the side of the camera.

But as far as I know it was a perfectly good camera. The lenses were reasonable for their day. The mechanism was pretty good. We used to get a camera jam occasionally which rarely happens now.

RF: Who were the camera men and were they permanently at Islington or did you share them with Shepherd's Bush?

RWB: To a certain extent they were shared with Shepherd's Bush.
They would float between the two, particularly if they were the more eminent ones. Mutz Greenbaum who later became Max Greene became one of the best. He was very good for that Hollywood style of backlighting of period pictures, he always got all the period pictures. He was very good. He was quite slow but the results were there. Then there was Bernard Knowles whose brother Cyril was an operator. There was Arthur Crabtree who was a dour Yorkshireman but very good, very quiet. Charlie Van Enger, we used to call him flat light Charlie. He was a great two-reel comedy cameraman from Hollywood. He used to put, I

think they used to call them King Cans, they were a floodlight of a sort, it looked like a wastepaper bin with a wider mouth. He put two of these either side of the camera and say “I'm ready, let's shoot”.

RF: What about Curt Courant?

RWB: He was around but I never worked with him. He was very good but as far as I can recall he was always at Shepherd's Bush. I only went over there on loan when they were short staffed. Otherwise I was entirely Gainsborough. We were always fiercely loyal to Islington.

RF: Was it entirely self-contained, say the art department?

RWB: Islington had its own art department. You went up some stairs to it and it overlooked the entrance of stage one. They had some very good art directors, [Oscar] Werndorff, [Alex] Vetchinsky was the assistant to all of them and then became an art director in his own right and I worked with him on a number of pictures later after the War. He was a very close associate. I was very fond of him.

RF: Was Alfred Junge there?

RWB: Yes, but they didn't do a lot because they were too good for the Will Hay comedies which we were doing. They would build enormous and elaborate sets. Everything was built sets in those days. The wonderful thing about location in those days was that if the sun didn’t shine you didn't shoot. The cameraman would say there's no point in shooting without sun, you’ll never match it. Now we shoot in anything which I think is rather sad.

RF: Was there a lot of squeezing a quart into a pint pot in terms of the facilities of the studios and the size of the stages.

SIDE 2 TAPE 1

RWB: I've always taken the view the bigger the studio the bigger the set will be because art directors love big sets. There was a lot of discussion over the size of studios. It was pointed out that one of the things which was making production very difficult for everybody was that you could never get round or through a set because it was right up against a studio wall or right up against a door. Many times in studio one, for instance, we had a big door which led out to the canal and a yard where the props came in. At the other end there were big double doors which were the main entrance to the stage and we would run horses through and camels.

It was felt production would be more efficient if the floors were bigger and the sets smaller. The art directors and everybody said what a wonderful idea. It didn't last five minutes. The moment the art directors saw the floor space they started to expand. It was in no way efficient as we would now look to efficiency. The equipment was minimal. There was enough

but no more than enough. You had to improvise a great deal. On location you had little transport.

RF: Yet you say on the Will Hay film you had a unit of 80 down at Falmouth.

RWB: That included the actors. Labour was pretty cheap so it didn't matter if you wanted an extra make-up man or wardrobe assistant which is what it would be on that. There was a lot of wardrobe and doubling — people had to fall in the water.

RF: Was there anything of this period which comes to mind which epitomises the kind of life you lead. Let's take a typical day.

RWB: Theoretically I had to be there at half past seven or eight o' clock to sign in the extras, check that the actors had all arrived and were sitting in the make-up chairs, if somebody didn't turn up I had to trace them. Then the next question would be what are we going to do which would be on the call sheet which I made out the previous night. I'd check the set generally and then get the actors on the set as required from time to time. I would probably spend the next bit of the morning working out how far we'd expect to get done today and what would be needed to be done tomorrow and start planning for that.

RF: This was operating as a second?

RWB: Yes. As a third I was just running to do what I was told — fetch Mr so and so. Or the director's forgotten his watch, go and fetch that. Mr. Sinclair Hill has forgotten his pipe again, will you find it. Things like that. Into the wardrobe department, somebody has left a scarf or handbag behind. My memory is much clearer during the last two years before the start of the war because I was doing so much more. 1938 and 1939. Taking those two years, my memory is that by that time I didn't know if I could be a director or a producer. I don't think in the end I would have made a good producer because I'm not good at bargaining. I was always good at organising. I would have been a tiptop production manager, there's no doubt about that but that doesn't make you into a producer. We've never really had any entrepreneurial producers except two: Balcon and Korda.

RF: They were executive producers rather than a line producer working under the studio system where one had control of the money but less concerned with raising it unless one was an independent.

RWB: Yes. Let us say to be more precise what we've lacked is executive producers. I 've always had a feeling that the distributors have been so anxious to keep them poor because they don't want them acting like say Stanley Kubrick acts with distributors, bossing them about and telling them what to do. Destroying publicity and rewriting the whole thing which is what they need. They've got away with murder simply because of the duopoly. To my mind that is the key fault in the whole system, always has been. It worked well during the thirties and there was no need to disturb it but that was the era of studio production when it was the studio.

It was rather like they say about Hollywood. You go there and direct your first picture and it's a wonderful professional atmosphere, everything you could wish for. You realise ultimately that the studios making the picture not you. Now that's changed in Hollywood.

RF: That wasn't true here in the thirties. The studio didn't have a life of its own. It was up the individual unit making the picture, wasn't it? Or in the case of Gainsborough it was up to Ted Black giving the impetus.

RWB: It was very much formula production. The thing ran to a pattern. It was a Will Hay pattern. There was costume picture pattern and there was a Tom Walls pattern. One or two others, Crazy Gang for instance.

RF: They were the Islington genres. Let's talk about Will Hay and Marcel Varnel. There was a constant stream of their pictures and they are now perceived as quite good.

RWB: *Oh Mr Porter* was certainly a good picture and so was *Windbag the Sailor*

RF: But at the time they were largely looked down upon.

RWB: Yes. Vis-a-vis Gaumont-British, we at Gainsborough rather grudgingly looked at their flashy stars and big budgets and they always lost money. We were looked upon as the poor relations and we were making money. Gaumont got into trouble and there was a marvellous moment when the Ostrer brothers sold to John Maxwell who was the original Scottish tycoon and a very hardnosed man indeed and the Ostrers managed to sell him 100,000 shares in Gaumont-British for a large sum of money. When he got them, he discovered he couldn't vote, they were non—voting shares. There was a terrible row, lawsuits and all that. They eventually settled their differences but it was a wonderful con trick. Isidore was as sharp as a tack. Maurice was nice. He was nice to me. He wasn't outstanding but he was intelligent, he had taste. Isidore I never even saw. He was too grand. He was the dynamo, he knew the market. He was a City man through and through and very good at it. It all came from a mill in Bradford. Then there was Harry Ostrer, who was in charge of the story department at Gaumont-British. He was looked upon as being an amiable duffer. He was a quiet sort of man who like reading books.

Back to Will Hay. Whenever you meet a first-class comedian, you always find a morose, paranoid individual, irascible, bad tempered and never satisfied. In many cases, inclined to drink. Will Hay was never inclined to drink. He was the opposite. He liked astronomy. He built an observatory at the back of his house. He discovered a comet which nobody else

had seen. He was a member of the Astronomical Society from the early 20s. He was considerably older than any of us. He flew his own aeroplane. He was very keen on yachting. He had a beautiful motor yacht built I think in Norway.

He was always very nice to me. He was a boor. He was hypochondriac. You learnt very early on don't say good morning, how are you because he would tell you exactly, in detail.

But he was very funny. He had an enormous problem because it was a three-handed act. It started as a music hall act. But the two stooges began to take over. Will Hay had a constant battle with Val Guest and George Marriott Edgar, the writing team, Val was tiptop, George was a very charming man, very quiet, Val was rather a flamboyant character. George Marriott Edgar wrote Albert and the Lion and all those Stanley Holloway monologues apart from the other stuff he did. He was a genuinely funny writer and had a deep sense of character. In the writing, it was inevitably Will would find he was [to] play a scene with the two stooges and he was feeding them lines. This was one of his constant nags. To a certain extent he was right but also you have to sympathise with the writers. Where the jokes are coming from they're going to put them down. The other two were very funny and very good. The boy, Graham Moffatt, was a page boy at Shepherd's Bush. They had six page boys in those days with brass buttons. Somebody one day said come here and say this line. He did and was riotously funny and so he became an actor. Then he became the boy in the Will Hay comedies. Moore Marriott played the old man. He was absolutely delightful, one of the nicest men you could ever hope to meet. So modest and quiet and a very good actor. He was an actor, a genuine actor. I've discovered only recently he'd been doing it since 1902 in front of a camera.

This was now 1935. Marcel Varnel was an excitable "frog". He was very nice. He had a great sense of humour. He was very efficient as a director. He didn't hang about. In fact he was always pressing on all the time. He seemed to drive more than the others seemed to do. I remember there was a camera jam once and the assistant cameraman struggling to open it up and Marcel was jumping up and down saying what is it, what is it? The voice of the fellow behind the camera came "if I was bloody Tom Thumb I could get inside and look couldn't I?" I learnt one very important thing from him. He used to direct sitting in the director's chair right under the camera and when he got a print take he would jump to his feet with great excitement and once or twice he hit himself on the matte box and hurt himself quite badly. I've never done that.

Also, I think it's a very bad policy vis- a-vis the actors because once the actors start playing the director should disappear round the back somewhere where he can see everything which is going on and not make himself a presence. You don't lose control of things, you can always do another take. But Marcel was always grumbling why don't they give me a good picture, I'm always doing these lousy comedies.

Jack Cox was a cameraman. He was very formidable figure. He made two or three of Hitchcock's early pictures, the ones which were made at BIP, *Murder* he came back with Hitch when we did *The Lady Vanishes* which was 1938. He had a dry, sardonic sense of humour. I met him once in Piccadilly towards the end of war and by that time I was in the Army Kinematograph Service and I was very excited and I'd become a director. I bumped into him in the street and I was delighted to see him and full of what I was doing and how marvellous it all was. He looked at me straight into the eye and said "who's teaching you then?" That rather punctured my ego. He was right of course. We were teaching ourselves and falling over each other like a basket full of puppies. But we were getting somewhere. Jack was

quite a figure. He was a man of status and stature. He was the one who used to call the Will Hay comedies bloody Tiny Tim weeklies.

RF: Was that just his persona or did he actively resent being tied to that kind of picture?

RWB: No, I don't think he was bitter about it.

RF: If you worked in the British film industry in those days really you had to accept whatever came along, whether you were freelance or with Korda. Whatever the studio made, you made. You couldn't be choosy. I don't think the directors could, could they? Weren't they really assigned to a project?

RWB: They could choose only where they brought in a project. Bob Stevenson was originally a writer. He wrote the original story for *Windbag the Sailor* but he didn't want to direct it.

RF: Do you think Varnel was talented or was he just lucky to be on those pictures at the time? Did Marcel Varnel contribute to the pictures? Did he do more than move people around?

RWB: I gather he had some reputation in France. He was originally a theatre director. He was more competent. The first two or three Will Hay films were directed by an American director, William Beaudine. A tall moustachioed fellow from Hollywood who was a wiz at two-reel comedies. He had come up through the silent era and directed many of them. How or why Marcel was brought it I don't know. He just appeared. There wasn't a great deal of space for contribution because Guest and Edgar did the script with, increasingly, Ted Black. Originally, he was studio manager but he began to take an interest in the films. He then took an interest in the scripts and became a kind of associate producer under Micky Balcon. Then he became a full-blown producer at Gainsborough and produced everything. He worked with Guest and Edgar.

RF: Did they shoot the script?

RWB: Meticulously. Occasionally there were odd bits of dialogue changed but little improvisation. It wasn't necessary. It was all there. When it came to doing a slapstick scene Varnel was perfectly happy doing that but it wasn't a situation where a director was ever going to express himself. The characters were set in concrete and God forbid you should ever change them, there would be a riot. In many ways Varnel wished he hadn't done so many, that he'd broken away and gone and done some theatre. We all go through that. But certainly he became the staple comedy director. He did three Crazy Gang [films].

RW: There was a writers' department at Gainsborough. Did you have much contact with that?

RWB: Launder and Gilliat came in with *The Lady Vanishes* which was their script. They wrote it from a book and Hitchcock initiated it. Hitch even in those days had a close association with the writers and how it was going to be. They contributed to characters especially the two cricketers.

RF: They weren't long standing people?

RWB: They came in at that time and delightful they turned out to be. I liked them very much. People like Angus McPhail and Jock Orton came in to do things occasionally.

RF: Specific assignments?

RWB: There was a writer's department at [the]Bush which is where most of these people came from. But Guest and Edgar were permanent and they had an office on the first floor.

RF: Did they have specialisation, for instance was Val the gagman?

RWB: I wouldn't know. I'd guess probably Edgar would have been the story man and Val would have contributed to contriving situations
e.g. how do we get them into a bus?

RF: Were they there during the shoot?

RWB: Hardly ever. The floor was left very much to itself.

RF: The pictures weren't made inefficiently but leisurely.

RWB: The assistant director's rest cure was a Tom Wall's picture.

RF: Were there a lot of retakes on the Will Hays?

RWB: Not that I can recall unless it was for a negative scratch.

RF: They didn't get second thoughts during rushes.

RWB: Hardly ever. Will had the talent and intellect. He was a very bright man and he became quite rich. He created a lot of good stuff.

RF: They let him go to Ealing, do you know why?

RWB: They probably ran out of ideas.

RF: You were on *Oh Mr. Porter.* That was a fairly elaborate location shoot. What do you remember about that?

RWB: I found the locations. To find a disused railway line you'd go to the Great Western Railway at Paddington Station and ask to see the managing director. That's how you start. That became a great giggle. People are usually very co-operative and very happy to join in. They were in those days. Now they want a fortune for doing it. I found recently with *Minder!* it became such a national name that location managers only had to knock on somebody 's door and say *Minder!* and it would be “come in”. You could go anywhere with that show. It was very useful.
It was an elaborate organising job which I can claim to have done. I found a disused line and got the necessary engine and the art department tarted it up and made it look funny.

RF: You built all the platforms?

RWB: No, they were already there.

RF: The signal-box?

RWB: Yes, that’s there.

RF: Where was it?

RWB: Alton in Hampshire. People stayed at the Swan in Alton, an excellent pub. The proprietor was a dazzler. He drove an Audi B25 and one got taken out in it. He was a great showman.

RF: What about the Crazy Gang?

RWB: That was Varnel again. They had original story lines to hang it on but they were set pieces. They were always looked upon as great fun to work on but I found some of the off-set jokes were a bit boring and tiresome, but I was very young and very priggish.

RF: Crude and cruel?

RWB: Yes. Bud Flanagan was not a nice man. He was very funny. Ches Allen was charming and had very little to do with the others. He rather Looked down on them. That was the role he played. Charlie Naughton was a riot. He was a tiny tubby Glaswegian. He was a clown and a good one. Jimmy Gold, who was his partner originally had the reputation of being the meanest man on earth. They were always pulling his leg about the cost of a telephone call. Nervo and Knox I don't remember much about them. They were always buzzing around.

They were all a bit jealous of everybody and each other. Each was jealous of the other five. Bud Flanagan was always trying to establish himself as the boss, they were always trying to top each other. It was good from the point of view of comedy. Nervo and Knox had some good ribald comedy songs which they used to sing.

There's not a great deal to say about them. Sometimes I might be working on two, even three pictures at once. I might be preparing one, doing a break down, finding locations while

this one was on the floor so as a second assistant on a particular film I was often missing for two or three days.

RF: Where there ever two pictures shooting simultaneously?

RWB: You couldn't shoot simultaneously but certainly they overlapped, particularly when one was on location, we'd then bring in the next one. There were very few long gaps in production although it was on a shoestring. The Ostrer brothers sold it virtually to 20th Century Fox in 1938.

RW: The Crazy Gang really do seem very mechanical pictures and very remote humour nowadays. Jack [Hulbert] and Cic[ely Courtneidge], were they at Gainsborough?

RWB: Yes. *Everybody Dance. Jack of All Trades.* That was directed by Bob Stevenson. He was allowed to be co—director with Jack Hulbert. Hulbert was a nuisance. He was a theatre man all his life. He never arrived before 12 o'clock and then would want to work on till two in the morning. We had to go with him and we got half a crown supper money. The usual.

RF: I worked with Jack quite a lot and he could never get ideas unless everybody was there. Do you remember that?

RWB: Yes, the whole thing for a dance routine. Everything had to be as it would be. He was very tiresome.

RF: Untalented I thought.

RWB: Yes, very strange. In the 1920s you had the matinee idol and all they had to do was walk onto the stage beautifully dressed and just walk about and say a few lines occasionally. The corollary was that was the leading man who was supposed also to be funny, a light comedian. He was that. He got a rowing blue at Oxford and never got over it. He was an appalling snob. But then everybody is to some extent. I don't regard that as a human crime, it may be a human folly.

RF: I found him quite a pleasant man other than this extraordinary misreading of his own abilities.

RWB: He really thought he was mustard. Cicely was the one who had the gusto to put over a number. She could sell a number like Ethel Merman. She had these boyfriends lined up all the time.

RF: Would their pictures have been different from the ordered script of the Will Hay pictures?

RWB: Very much so. The script was being altered every day. They'd come in with blurred carbon copies and blurred faces as well. It was very much an ad-hoc operation. In a limited way the pictures were reasonably successful, so who's to argue? They found an audience somewhere. But those pictures were more a waste of time than anything else I worked on at Gainsborough.

SIDE 3 TAPE 2

RWB: One of the Gainsborough directors I've left out is Maurice Elvey. I worked on two or three pictures with him. I didn't realise it at the time but he was a director of considerable stature during the silent period and he made some big hit pictures with the then stars. He was rather short tempered. Fred Gunn who my mentor always used to say he didn't trust him. I gather sometime in the past Fred had had some upset with Elvey. Fred said he was the sort of director who would know perfectly well he would want a certain prop for a scene the following day and wouldn't tell anyone and then would say "where's the whatever?" He would say "I told you I needed it" and he hadn't told them at all. Whether he forgot, whether he was untidy, Fred always felt this tended to leave the assistant director standing there looking rather silly. Be that as it may there is no doubt about it that Elvey was a good director. He was very good with actors.

This is one of the keys to the British cinema of the 1930s, the whole question of the actors. The actors were exclusively theatre actors. There were very few cinema actors. They all came from the stage. They all had theatrical habits. They had no understanding of how a film would be edited so you would often find a case where an actor would give a stunning performance in a remote longshot and then do nothing in a close up. There was a bit of a ritual you did the long shot and then you did the mid shot, then the medium close shot and then you did the single close up if it was merited or desirable. That routine persisted practically up to the present day with very little movement of the camera. Almost always on a fixed tripod, which made life very easy for the cameramen because anyone can light a fixed photograph but very few people can light people when they're moving about. That's when it gets tricky. If you take the Will Hay comedies. They were all set piece comedy scenes or action slapstick which was staged and photographed in a straightforward manner. But then it came to making dramatic pictures like Elvey did. One I remember was *The Man who Changed his Mind* which had Karloff in it and Claude Rains [I think RWB is mistaken here; he may be referring to *The Clairvoyant*, directed by Elvey with Rains in the cast but not Karloff. David Sharp] who was very good indeed. It was when those kind of people started arriving from Hollywood one could see these people were not only good actors and had a theatre background, a lot were English ex—patriots who had gone to Hollywood and were coming back occasionally — that you had an actor who knew what to do with a camera and their performance would depend on that assembly. They knew about continuity. A lot of the stage actors who were stars in the West End, very grand, had no idea on continuity at all. Quite often they would say afterwards "was there something wrong with my performance". And what had probably happened was that they had made so many bad mistakes in continuity that the editor had had to put the thing together in a way which did not show them to their best advantage in that scene. Elvey was a filmmaker. He wasn't a pleasant man. I never crossed swords with him. I was just a boy and if he ordered me to fetch him a cup of tea, I fetched him a cup of tea and that was that.

Robert Stevenson, after starting as co-director with Jack Hulbert became a director in his own right because he wrote a script called *Tudor Rose*. That was the first good picture I

ever worked on. It was magnificent. It was the story of Lady Jane Grey. It had Flora Robson and Cedric Hardwicke and all sorts of class actors. He'd done something on film technique but he was still basically a writer. He then went on and did *Owd Bob* and one or two others I worked on. Then somewhere around 1936 the really top-notch man arrived and that was Carol Reed. He started in the theatre as an actor. He was Basil Dean's factotum. Basil Dean was apparently a very tough cookie indeed but he was one of the biggest names in the London theatre and he was responsible for more of the good plays than you could imagine on the lines of H. M. Tennant became later. He was really top-notch. He was a ruthless tyrant but my god he was good. His names gone completely out of fashion. Carol Reed-came from a very good background and he knew about acting and he knew about the theatre. He also knew about films because into the Dean-Reed orbit around 1930 Edgar Wallace arrived and he was a man ambitious to do everything. He was a phenomenon and he started to make films and Carol was the assistant. I think Edgar dressed himself up in riding boots and shouted instructions but Carol was the assistant director. Then he got to make a picture at Ealing called *Mr. Midshipman Easy* and that was a big success. Out of all of them he was the top-notch man and he was the one I watched and listened to every step of the way. I thought if I could get next to him I was there. I was like a fly in his earhole all the time. There were no schools to go to in those days so I never went to any kind of film school. I think film schools are a good thing in the same way acting schools are a good thing. They are very important and essential to the structure of the art we all try to do. But they can only go so far and if there isn't one you have to steal ideas and methods from your seniors. And always steal from the best people. So I've stolen a great deal from Carol. He was an eccentric man in many ways. He was very tall, very good looking. Always beautifully dressed. Everybody was beautifully dressed in those days and that persisted right up to 1955, even 1960. It was David Lean who introduced the cardigan to film directing. It was a great contribution. Otherwise you wore a suit. A proper one, Saville Row, no nonsense.

RF: You're talking about the director?

RWB: Yes, and the heads of department.

RF: The camera crew was also all collars and ties?

RWB: But they would wear pullovers. I always wore a tweed jacket and dark grey trousers. That was my general appearance. It was rather like bank clerks who turned up in tweed jackets on Saturdays but it was proper suits for the rest of the week. We got away with it because we were considered rather racy being in films.

I don't know how to describe Carol's influence on me. He would have been extremely surprised if he heard me saying a lot of this. Much of the time he hardly noticed I was there.

RF: Did he lack vanity?

RWB: He was quite vain. He was very assured and very much aware of his own presence, his own capacities and his own achievements. Even early on. His father was Herbert Beerbohm Tree. He was illegitimate. He was very grand. I don't think it was anything except the Ritz for tea or the dirty weekend. There was a Rolls Royce somewhere nearby. He was a rich, successful actor of his own period but highly talented with instinctive good taste. Simple elegant good taste. Whatever you're doing, even if it's a Crazy Gang comedy you need that instinct. That is one of the great qualities and he had it. I had great respect for him and still have. He became a successful
commercial film director in the same say David Lean did. But *Odd Man Out* is a first-class film beautifully done. He took his time, he spent the money, he went over schedule but nobody interfered.

RF: Do you rate *Odd Man Out* higher than *The Third Man*?

RWB: It's a deeper picture. It's political. I would put the two on a parallel but not the same. *The Third Man* was a sensation when it came out. You must remember.

RF: Yes, I was at the press show.

RWB: They all said "the music's too loud" Carol. Because there was no school I modelled myself on Carol and Stevenson.

The first picture I worked on, I can't say I worked on it, I was just a runner, was *Chu Chin Chow*. That was the great music hall hit of the First World War. It ran for years. Wonderful music and wonderful songs. George Robey and Anna May Wong, Pearl Argyle who was a ballet dancer, one of the most beautiful creatures I've ever seen. She went off and married a barrister and was never heard of again. It had a German actor, Fritz Kortner. I didn't know it at the time but he was one of the eminent Austro—German actors. He ran his own theatre in Vienna. He couldn't get his lips round some of the numbers because he was singing in English. That was directed by Walter Forde who was always accompanied by his wife who lived in his right-hand pocket. She was called Cully and she kept asking for endless trays of teas. She was rather a bore but he was rather delightful. He always had a grand piano on the set. Wherever the set was you had to find room for this piano somewhere because while he was waiting for a shot to be set up he would go off and play it. He became quite good because he was practising for two or three hours a day. He would juggle with oranges and things like that. He was amusing and I think he knew what he was doing.

The next thing was *My Old Dutch.* The director was Sinclair Hill and the cameraman was Leslie Rowson. That had Gordon Harker and Betty Balfour and a lot of old music hall people, Florrie Ford and people like that. A sentimental story. Sinclair Hill was a man of considerable reputation and I only found out later.

Then there was *The Camels are Coming*. This had been on location in Egypt. It took weeks. The director was Tim Whelan. The cameraman was Glen MacWilliams who was also an

American. It was a 78-minute picture and they'd had already three weeks in Egypt. I see from this note that they were shooting in the studio from 14th June to 6th September. That was Jack Hulbert changing his mind all the time.

Then there was *Oh Daddy.* That was Leslie Henson and Frances Day. I didn't work on the floor. There were going to be four or five weeks when the studio was going to be dark. I wasn't going to be sacked and I said “what can I do?” Then I said “can I be put into the cutting room”. So, I was sent to the cutting room at Gaumont-British where Charlie Frend was editing *Oh Daddy* and next door was Hugh Stewart who was editing *The Man who knew too Much* for Hitchcock. I got on the joining machine and made a complete mess of it so when the director came to view the cut it snapped every two or three cuts and everybody went raving mad. Charlie Frend wasn't particularly pleased and I don’t blame him.

Then we did a picture which was ultimately called *Heatwave.* There was a dance band singer of considerable success at the time called Les Allen and this was really a vehicle for his talents which I think were quite thin. We had the experience of recording direct sound with the orchestra while he sings a song. It was a spy story. Then we did a Tom Walls picture, *Fighting Stock.* That was absolute pie.
Ben Travers always sat on the set. He never said a word to anybody.
But if TW felt anything was needed in a scene he would stroll over to Travers who would scribble like anything and they'd shoot it straight away. He was purely a man of the theatre and he shot a stage play. He set a camera up metaphorically in the centre of the stalls. Then he would go in for a close shot. There was always one of him. He never worked before half past eleven in the morning because Tom always had to have a canter on the Downs. He was a great man with racehorses. He won the Derby one year and we were all on it. He was very grand, chauffeur, Rolls—Royce.

RF: The life style of some of these people was quite extraordinary.

RWB: He had a big house at Epsom. He didn't have a big string but certainly he had two or three race horses. He was delightful and charming to work with. He didn't arrive till about half past eleven. You did a rehearsal of a scene which was usually half an act of a play. Then it was time for lunch. Lunch was a huge Fortnum's hamper in the dressing room. All that sort of thing. The afternoon was spent covering this and he got the itch when it came to about five o' clock. Usually there was a boxing match at the Albert Hall or some first night for which he had to change. Not much more we can do today. See you tomorrow. Delightful. A rest cure. Nothing to do.

Then we did *The Clairvoyant* It was a jolly good melodrama. Then we did the first Will Hay film, *Boys Will Be Boys.* The continuity girl was Muriel Baker, no relation, who at that time was married to Sidney Box and they were writing plays together. Lady Gardiner as is.

The Aldwych films were all made with the stock people, Tom Walls, Ralph Lynn, Robertson Hare and the other people. Muriel Brough had already retired. She was the Irene Handl

type character which went through all the Aldwych farces on the stage but she was only in one or two of the very early Tom Wall films which weren't made at Gainsborough.

RF: Did the characters they played spill over into real life.

RWB: Robertson Hare was not at all like his. Tom Walls character was like his. He wasn't acting. He was just being himself. Matinee idol- stuff himself.

RF: You see some of those pictures and he is throwing everything away. The impression is that he couldn't care less.

RWB: Very underplayed.

RF: Less underplayed, more a total lack of interest in what was going on around him. Was he more committed in the shooting then?

RWB: I always felt he scrupulous and concerned about how a thing was coming over to an audience. He would always have quite long chats most of the time he was directing himself so he would ask Ralph Lynn or the cameraman what they thought and to a certain extent the first assistant director, he was an interesting man, Robert Dunn. He had been with Walls from the year dot as a sort of gloryfied stage manager and he was very much part of the Walls team. He stood in tremendous awe of TW. He was a very good assistant director and he was very quiet — nobody made any noise on those sets. Bobby was charming and very funny and knew all the theatre jokes. He was very nice and very kind to me. He had a son who turned up in Dad's Army, Clive Dunn.

*Boys Will Be Boys* was directed by Bill Beaudine who was very much an eye opener. He was very brisk and to the point. Again, he was very funny. He knew all the jokes which had been in any two-reeler which had been made.

RF: Why were people like him and Glen MacWilliams over here? Were they brought over or were they no longer able to find work in the United States?

RWB: They were brought. The overriding struggle of British films, the main obsession of the whole industry was to get a showing in America, how can we get our films shown in America. They brought in American cameramen so the girls would look like the American people like to see them. They brought in the American directors and writers. I always felt that instinctively if Hollywood lets anyone go they’re not particularly interested in them anymore. I don’t think they would have sacked them. They would have kept them going with general run of the mill chores.

RF: When William Beaudine went back it was to Monogram and PRC, it wasn't to Warners or MGM.

RWB: He had had his day in the silent era. Nothing phased him. He could solve any problem straight away. A nice guy. He was very kind to me.

RF: Did any of the Americans pull rank, let you know they were American and so knew more?

RWB: No, certainly Bill didn't. He was extremely well mannered. He had a side kick with him called Robert Edmonds who was really a gagman. He was an Englishman who had spent many years in Hollywood writing jokes. Marcel could get irritated at times if you weren't quick enough for him. I remember once he had to do a scene where the three Will Hay characters had to climb up an enormous factory chimney and they had to change positions. They had to be directed to do this. He gave me the megaphone and I had to repeat everything he said because he thought they wouldn't understand his French accent. I don't think people pulled rank too much. Hulbert did. People like me were less than the dust. But that was alright because there was very little contact.

RF: Modes of address, was it Mr?

RWB: Yes, always or sir. None of this Christian name nonsense. It was quite a formal operation. It was an ordered society. Nobody bothered about it. I just wanted to be a director or producer.

RF: It was hierarchical but there was upward mobility if you could deliver.

RWB: I had no idea how to go about it or that during the war all these other things would happen which made me into a director. How I would have gone about it if that hadn't happened I really don't know. I never worked it out. But I made such rapid progress in that one little corner I thought that in due time, five or six years, I'd be nudging someone out of a director's chair and sitting in it myself.

RF: The War was a catalyst for change. It had an effect on career structures?

RWB: Fundamental.

RF: Not just the renaissance of the British film industry but it released talent which had been bottled.

RWB: I've never believed in talent being unseen. It comes out. I think there's a lot of pseudo-talent which thinks it should get more attention than it gets.

Back to the 30s. Next was *Stormy Weather* another Tom Walls picture. Then *Jack of All Trades* with Jack Hulbert and Cicely Courtneidge. It was based on a German play and had a good idea.

Then another Tom Walls picture, *Foreign Affairs*.

RF: A saucy title for the period, double entendre.

RWB: Ben Travers was always full of them. That was the great thing about the Aldwych farces. If you could read them right there were some very naughty things going on, very fast in its day. Travers was a damn good writer and one or two of the plays have been revived. The next was the weirdest I ever worked on. I think what happened was that someone went to Paris for a business weekend, whatever, got drunk and somebody persuaded him that he could take a French picture, dub it into English simply by retaking all the close ups with English actors wearing duplicate clothes in duplicate sections of set. Use all the long shots with the original French actors. It didn't work. It was a hopeless mess. Herbert Mason was the poor devil who got that one. It was the first thing he was going to do. It had Lilli Palmer. The first thing she did. She was quite a little madam, she was all of seventeen, beautiful. She was the original Viennese china doll, perfect. She was quite delightful. She turned out later to be a very good scout indeed and a good number but in those days — well she was frightened out of her life, she could hardly speak a word of English, dumped here.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

They realised a lot of it had to be retaken, the long shots as well because nothing matched. We went up to Norfolk on that. It was one of the first times I went on an extensive location. We went to Mildenhall because in Norfolk you can find long straight roads with Poplar trees along it so it looks like France. The shooting in a factory was a factory which eventually became W.H. Smith on Western Avenue, a derelict factory. There wasn't even a telephone in the place, no facilities of any kind.

Then we did *Lady Jane Grey.* That was the first real class production I worked on.

RF: That was a big production for the studio?

RWB: Yes, it was.

RF: Was it entirely shot there rather than locations?

RWB: Yes.

RF: Did they ever move into the Bush if they needed a larger sound stage or did they scale it down?

RWB: It was scaled. It was an Islington picture and that was it. I don't think we ever went. Just a minute, yes, we did on *Chu Chin Chow* There was a big set on that, a most elaborate hook up you've ever seen. It was meant to be a Chinese dance routine with a man who was

a musician in front and behind was a chorus line of girls all dressed in fancy Chinese costumes and they were all wired up with rubber tubes and at a certain point they all turned into a fountain, water came spraying out of the tubes from their fingers, from their toes. You can imagine the mess.

We've covered *Lady Jane Gray* I worked on the script of a remake for ages and then too late discovered someone else was going to make the picture at Pinewood and that ruled me out completely.

RF: That was the Trevor Nunn film?

RWB: Yes. I couldn't bear to go and see it

[…Brief discussion of remake…]

RF: We've mentioned Robert Stevenson several times but never really talked about him.

RWB: This was the first film he really did on his own. He'd written the script completely and had taken it to Mick Balcon at the Bush and was allowed to go ahead and do it. He was fascinating man. He was very much a product of Oxford or Cambridge. He had the habit of smoking enormous cigars which didn't do much for his teeth and he always had a plume of dark brown oil at one side of his face where he had this cigar stuck in his mouth. He was a young man. He was an eccentric. He was very academic which fascinated me. One of my lost lives which never happened was to be a don at Oxford. I would have liked that very much. I would probably have hated it. He was a hi-brow and read great reams of poetry. I was just getting into that then. I never went into university, I went straight into this. I don't regret it for one second. He fascinated me. I adored him. I used to follow him about and imitate him. He had a marvellous cast. It was stagey. I went to see it when it was on at the London Museum. It had been badly cut about in any case and some of the performances were inept. But some were just what you'd expect from Sybil Thorndike, Leslie Perrins, Felix Aymler, etc. They couldn't give a bad performance if you asked them to. It would come out naturally as a proper statement of the character and the scene. They impressed me tremendously.
Then we did *Pot Luck* with Tom Wall, followed by *Where there's a Will* with Will Hay. Then Stevenson came in for *The Man who changed his Mind* with Boris Karloff. This was about a brain transplant. He was wonderful. It had John Loder who was the tallest, most handsome, black haired, wonderful looking man you've ever seen but that was about all. He was a matinee idol again. That's what people wanted to…

RF: John Loder personified the actor whose performance was somewhat wooden.

RWB: Stilted.

RF: Did you keep records of the time.

RWB: Don’t remind me, it was a tragedy. I had a complete copy of every script. I had stills. I had signed photographs. All kinds of stuff. When I went into the army my parents moved from one flat to another and it all disappeared. It was either thrown away or it was down in a cellar and got bombed. I've never traced any of it since. It broke my heart when I realised it had all gone.

The next one was *Everybody Dance.* That was a Cicely Courtneidge picture. It had Kathleen Harrison who was the sweetest woman you could ever imagine. I called her one day by mistake and she arrived and Fred Gunn said to me what have you done. I said it's my mistake I called her. He said you'd better go and apologise to her. I threw myself at her feet. I said I’ve made a mistake. I shouldn't have called you. The upshot of it was she took no pay, she said if somebody will pay for a taxi to take me home, that's the finish of it.

RF: Was that a serious matter?

RWB: It was a big mistake. It would have been a day's pay for
Kathleen Harrison and, in those days, she was a very well-paid actress.

RF: Would you have run the risk of being fired for it?

RWB: No, it would have been brushed under the carpet. I wouldn’t have been sacked because by that time I’d been there over two years and had done quite a lot. I was part of the team. I think people would have said don't ever do that sort of thing again. I wouldn't have done it again either. In those days if you were ticked off you remembered it. You didn't do it again. This was another attempt on the American market and had an American director Chuck Reisner. He was a real loud mouthed American director who used to blaspheme a great deal. Holy Christ, that sort of thing. The songs were by Max Gordon and Harry Revel. They were very big. I can remember them demonstrating the numbers. There was a piano in the rushes theatre.

I remember making it my business to have to go in there at that particular time. That’s how you got around and found out how things were done. That's about the time Bertie Ostrer arrived. I remember we were on location in Essex. I found the locations a huge Tudor farmhouse, beautiful. There is a section of Essex called the Rodings. Bertie was terribly grand. He had a Jaguar, an SS, really smart. He used to drive me to and from the location.

Then we did *All In* with Ralph Lynn.

RF: Was he the silly ass he always played?

RWB: No, he was a very shrewd man. He was very reserved. He only played the one thing. Then there was *Windbag the Sailor* which was one of my great triumphs. It was great feather in my cap. Ted Black came down to see the location and he looked all round it and we were walking back along the key and Mr Black said you've done very well with this one boy, good show.

RF: Have you any idea how much these films cost?

RWB: I wasn't involved in the finance but I think they cost around £40,000. That would be worth around £400,000 today and probably even more. I've never been involved in costs and budgets.

RF: When you compare English budgets with Hollywood budgets at the time they were reasonably comparable because people don't realise that the dollar was five to the pound in the thirties.

RF: I suppose it's the equivalent these days into the millions. You can't make a picture these days for two or three millions. I suppose it's the equivalent to two or three million. When you compare the production values of *Windbag the Sailor* or *Oh Mr Porter* to a Channel Four film and the 1930s picture has far more in it in terms of cast and action, studio sets, than anything now being made for two or three millions.

RWB: They all looked skimped these days. They're short changing the public. The overheads are overweighting the thing.

In the 1930s the money was adequate to do what we had to do and we were never terribly conscious about cost. We were naturally scrupulous about costs. You didn't walk into a shop and say we'll have half a dozen of those without asking the price.

RF: I think at that time the inefficiencies were elsewhere than the studio floor. It was the people feeding various sections of the business. It's the distributors who were getting away with it.

RWB: They're still the biggest thieves of all. You've got no control over them. People are banging their heads against a brick wall when they say how are we going to save the British film industry. There isn't one and there never was one. It's an illusion. We make films when we get a chance and some of them were very good. We haven't got the audience.
We've only got 50 million people and the Americans have 350 million people.

We went onto another Will Hay picture, *Good Morning, Boys* It had Will Hay Jnr in it. Then there was the Crazy Gang fooling around in a film studio, *OK for Sound*. It was run of the mill Crazy Gang stuff. Then there was *Said McRiley to McNab.*

RF: Where they directed at specific audiences?

RWB: I think they were general notions. I don't think anyone was bright enough to slant a picture for a particular audience. They were aiming for the biggest audience they could get and Will Fife still had a following.

In April 1937 George Arliss appeared for *Doctor Syn.* Margaret Lockwood was in it. She had just made a couple of pictures at ATP. She was an exact contemporary of mine. George Arliss appeared with his butler. He always turned up at 4 o'clock and said tea Mr. Arliss and that was the end of the day as far as George Arliss was concerned. He sauntered off and we polished up a few close ups and bits and pieces to finish the day.
RF: Why did Arliss turn up at Islington? Hitherto his pictures had been made at Lime Grove. Was he fading?

RWB: I think he was fading. Also, it was a small-scale picture. When he did *The Iron Duke* there was a lot of battle stuff. He had had a great success in the silent days. He was an Englishman who went to America and made his fortune simply by being able to speak Shakespeare and such acceptably. He was a big star of the New York theatre. A number of his successes were filmed in Hollywood as silent pictures. They were almost always historical recreations such as *The House of Rothchild* and *Disraeli*. Then when sound came in, Warners with great alacrity summoned him to Hollywood to make these things as sound pictures. He was very successful for a number of years. Then he came over here and made a couple of pictures at the Bush. Then he came to us for *Dr. Syn.* His right-hand woman was Maud Howell who looked after the scripts and general management, she was a sort of agent. She co-directed with Roy William Neill who I thought was a bit of a whipper-snapper. He was an American director. Jack Cox was cameraman. I had another great success as location manager. It was based on a book by Russell Thorndike, Sybil's brother. It's set in Rye in Kent. There had to be a great chase through the marshes and only the smugglers knew the way through the marshes. I went down there and found the most wonderful marshes. Reeds growing up. I went down there in February and came back with photographs. Everybody said terrific. We'll go down there. So, I put them all up at the Mermaid Inn but it was now April and there hadn't been any rain and all my marshes had dried up.

The man who owned the Mermaid was a solicitor and he had a large drawing room at the back totally panelled and it was full of plan chests full of engravings and he took me round this. He could see I was intrigued. Every one of these prints was in the form of a medallion. They were of all the kings and queens, and other eminent people. There must have been 200. I'd never seen anything like that before.
George Arliss was charming to work with. He was meticulously polite. He would arrive on the set dead on 9 o'clock, fully made up, he'd know all the lines. He'd stand in front of the camera and say it.

Hollywood training, I suppose. None of this fluffing about we had with almost all the actors in those days. Going back to what I was saying about actors from the theatre, when they were playing the scene they thought they were doing the third rehearsal. Indeed there was a sickness with people like Hulbert where they would rewrite the script and rewrite the script and it got to the point where the actors didn't bother to learn the lines because they thought it was going to be rewritten anyway and they thought if I learn it them I'm going to be muddled when I learn the right ones. It led to bad results.

RF: Did Arliss take direction?

RWB: Not at all. He knew when he was going to be centre stage. He had Maud Howell and Roy William Neill all directed towards that. This brings up a point about direction. A little while ago I saw a programme about RKO Studios and they interviewed Katharine Hepburn who's a great star and a good actress. She was asked about various directors who had made her films and she fastened on George Cukor and said one of the great things about Mr. Cukor was that you always knew that you would be well presented. This is a fundamental theme to film direction, particularly if you are talking about a star performance in a star part. If you're talking about a star who is lending his presence and it's not a star part, you direct the film accordingly. But in any case, any actor, even if he's not a star must be properly presented, otherwise the effect isn't there. Once you've done the script and designed the set and chosen the locations, costumes and make-up and everything down to the last detail is already to go, the last remaining factor and the key factor is the actor. You've got nothing else to tell the story with. I know this is an old-fashioned concept and a lot of people would argue with it.

There is nothing like the confidence and trust between an actor, even if he only has one line, if he knows the director is willing to place that in the editing and on the screen in an effective manner then he has total confidence. He relaxes and gives his best and plays it beautifully. If you are going for photographic effects all the time _ you see it a lot in television, the way they play key plot lines on the backs of peoples' heads.

RF: There is a middle way. If you have George Arliss or a picture made around the same time, *Jamaica Inn*, both were star vehicles. Really, it's the story which should prevail. But if it's George Arliss centre stage or everything distorted for Charles Laughton you have a problem with what ends up on the screen.

RWB: I entirely agree. But either you're making a star vehicle in which case the story doesn't matter or you're making a story. Then they all fit in or they don't and that's when the battle starts when they think they are being short changed. I've had it on a number of occasions when stars want to be the dominant factor in every scene. That's fine as an ambition but when you read the story you may find three or four scenes when the star has to be there because he needs the information but he's not effective in that scene and I give the scene to the other people. It's a form of being a ring master and you have to hold the ring for all the guys, particularly the little guys because they can be overrun by big stars if they're allowed to get away with it. It's very important that you hold the ring for everybody, absolutely equally without fear or favour, according to the story. The story is what you have a bound duty to respect. You have to accept it, even if it's absurd or cockeyed, you have to accept it as a real thing. That is always my argument if you have a star who gets nervous, often because he thinks he's being a stooge feeding other people lines. He has every right to do so. I don't object to it. But my response is "look ducky, it's not your scene, it belongs to the other fellow. You'll get your turn and it's your picture anyhow so shut up and get on with it". Usually they agree once you explain what's going on and they have confidence they will

be properly presented. That's the key phrase and is fundamental to the whole exercise and you neglect that at your peril.

Then we did a picture about sheepdogs called *Old Bob* I had very little to do with it because it had an extensive location.

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RF: You had ambitions to direct the second unit on that. How did that go?

RWB: I was only 19. It was a bit strong but I couldn't see anything to stop me but they had someone else and that was the end of that. I did go out on location. It was a lovely summer and I hadn't been out much to the country before that. I was very impressed with it. Now Carol Reed appeared and did *Bank Holiday*. It was a *Grand Hotel* picture, a magazine picture, four or five different stories running in parallel.

RF: Were contract players used and the story accommodated to these contract players?

RWB: No. The idea for the film came first. Then I did get a bit of B unit direction. I made out my own call sheets and signed them as first assistant. I had to do some background stuff which meant digging up roads. and stuff like that. I was fascinated by Carol Reed. He clearly had command, he was self-assured. He really knew what he was doing. He knew who he was.

RF: He worked with the actors. Did he know where he wanted the camera?

RWB: Yes, surely.

RF: Was he shooting it to edit himself?

RWB: No that didn't happen till Hitchcock who had it all worked out. The picture was finished before we ever started.

RF: What would Reed do, shoot a master and singles?

RWB: Yes, he would cover a thing rather more elaborately than I would do

RF: Was that the studios way to give the editor that amount of material?

RWB: It was not the studios way.

RF: Did Varnel shoot like that?

RWB: It was a general, slightly slovenly way. Providing the editors with a lot of material and seeing what they could make with it which I don't approve.

RF: It's a very dialoguey [dialogue heavy??] film. The plot is carried all with dialogue. The plot is carried all with dialogue so he was doing lots of over-the-shoulder was he?

RWB: Yes. All that.

RF: Did people imitate Hollywood pictures consciously in stylistic terms?

RWB: They were heavily influenced. And the effort always was to try and make a film in the Hollywood image so it would be shown in America.
A hopeless quest but this was the guiding keynote of the whole
operation. A waste of time in my opinion. Ealing rumbled it and they started making parochial pictures. They were good pictures but they were parochial pictures. There's nothing wrong if the parish is characteristic of a wider world.

RF: I agree but economically it doesn't satisfy the quest for enormous returns. Even in our day, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, say, was supposed to have been a great success but only earned about 3 million dollars, lunch money for the distributors.

RWB: I agree but the art circuit can be extremely lucrative. Nowadays the art circuit combined with the video and cable circuit can offer a big market. Look at the success of *Jean de Florette.* It played on the art circuit and was never seen on a big circuit. Perhaps they're right. They want the television audience but they're never going to get that because they're staying at home.

Now we came to *Alf's Button Afloat* based a script of the Daily Telegraph drama critic. It was interesting from the technical point in that we made a genie appear by Pepper's ghost. It was all done with plate glass and mirrors. You had a separate set which was a black velvet set at right angles to the action set. The camera was on the action set shooting through a thin sheet of glass and in the glass you can see the reflection of the black velvet set except when there are no lights on when you can't see anything. Then when you put something in the black velvet set such as the genie and dim up the lights on him he appears in the glass. the actors all have to have crosses stuck up on blackboards as to where their eyelines are. Then you can fade him up and fade him out, bring him in on a trolly and bring him up closer and all that. The one thing that stuck in my mind was that there are some very fine fellows doing special effects but some of them are inclined to say "ah yes I know what you want, we're going to do this and we're going to do that, it will be marvellous". You won't see anything for three weeks later because it all has to be done in a laboratory and then when you get it, it doesn't work. Now you have a thing like Pepper's ghost when you say "cut" print on the take, you've either got it or you haven't and I'm much happier with practical solutions to problems. I like to see a man pulling a string.

*Convict 99* was Will[Hay]again playing two parts. Then came Alfred Hitchcock. I think everybody was shaking in their shoes even before the man appeared in the studio.

RF: He had a formidable reputation by then?

RWB: Yes. He was a big noise.

RF: What was his reputation, an unkind one?

RWB: Not as later emerged, later he became an absolute monster, a very nasty man. Far more than was necessary but that was him and he had to be as he was. Being as he has produced all those pictures and some of them were absolutely marvellous. He was a superb director. He bored himself to death by making the same picture over and over again and said so. He was a formidable figure. But in those days, he had made four pictures in Germany before anyone in this country would trust him with a picture. Mickey Balcon got the job.

RF: I think he was out there to make English versions or he was out there to do English inter-titles.

RWB: He then made a couple of pictures for BIP which were very successful. Then he went to the Bush had a series of pictures and the one picture which nobody ever mentions was *Waltzes from Vienna* which he absolutely hated.

RF: He was regarded by BIP as a contract director and just given assignments without any regard for his aptitude.

RWB: But *Murder!* and *Blackmail* were good pictures.

RF: But things like *Waltzes from Vienna* he was very naughty in that he was given pictures to make and would screw them up.

RWB: That's what you've got to do. If they don't know, they've got to be told. By this time, he was recognised as the top dog British director although Reed was coming up rapidly on the inside and in a different category in any case. Stevenson clearly had the marks [?]that he was going to make it. But Hitch was top dog and we all wondered what he was going to be like.

RF: I'd heard that *The Lady Vanishes* was not originally his subject but somebody else was going to direct it and for some reason they had to drop out and Hitch took it on at short notice. Launder and Gilliat say the script as they wrote it was the script as it was made and hence it was not one of the subjects where Hitchcock had a great input into the script.

RWB: I know nothing about it. It doesn't surprise that the Launder and Gilliat script was the script and he shot it. I don't see why he shouldn't because it was a damn good script and he’s no fool.

Perhaps later he practically dictated the scripts but certainly at this time he would have been so shrewd and so sensible that he would realise that he had a darn good script he would go ahead, shoot it and don't argue. He was already quite dictatorial and there was no interference with what he was doing or how he was going to do it. He never looked through the camera. He just drew a little caricature for Jack Cox and gave it to him. Jack Cox had previously worked with him.

RF: Did he do the drawings at the time or was there a full story board?

RWB: No he didn't storyboard. One of my duties was to go to the art department and get them to give me the set plans for the next day or next two days. It was a railway train story and I had seen so many people fall down dead with railway train stories where they are really ropy. I've warned people you'll get yourself into such a muddle unless you're careful with orientation, general management. You're very restricted in any case as to how you could stage it. Then your coverage gets funny indeed with scenery going one way, tunnels, etc.

My job was to get a plain plan and put them in Hitchcock' s office before lunch every day. After lunch I would go into his office and collect these plans and they would have on them the scene number and lens of the camera and the angle would be drawn, just a V. And the people sitting in the compartment walking through the station would be indicated on the plans as well. So, I knew exactly who had to be called for the following day. But he didn't do a storyboard, no. He kept it in his mind. He could memorise the whole thing. He could sit there and see it on the screen, cut for cut going through. That' s one thing, not to an obsessive extent, but certainly with important scenes one has to be able to do, you have to train yourself to do that. On the set, not always, but occasionally if there was a query he would do a little drawing for Jack and he would say I'll go away and come back when you're ready.

An example of this attitude: The cast was marvellous, all top-class people. Basil Radford and I used to be very chummy and we would go to the pub on the corner called The Bricklayers Arms and in the back room you could have lunch for 2/6d. We took Dame May Whitty [?] over one day it was a bit like taking the queen mum. We had the scene in the compartment of the railway carriage. It was compartmented, it wasn't an open car. Hitch set up a scene with Linden Travers and Paul Lukas. Hitch set it up. She was sitting on one side of the carriage and he was on the other. Off he went and he came back and Jack said run the plate, old fashioned back projection of course. The camera was on a rostrum because the railway carriage was on a rostrum because it had to rock, etc. He took one look at it and he put on an act. He started to grumble and worry. He could give a very good imitation of a spoilt baby. His face could crumple up as if he was about to cry. He kept saying there's something wrong about all this. They're still sitting there but Linden Travers is on the other side of the carriage. Then eventually the dam broke and he said who put her over there. Everyone had to confess it was Miss Travers who had said this was my wrong side, I'm

much better on left side. It won’t make any difference to the scene, and it wouldn't but Hitchcock had said it had to be that way and that was the way it was going to be and he roasted that girl alive for 20 minutes.

RF: He'd known from the beginning what had happened?

RWB: Yes.

RF: It is often said about Hitchcock that there is a streak of sadism running through everything he did.

RWB: He was a very cruel man. He went in for all these practical jokes but some of them were quite funny. He had a production manager called Dicky Bevill who'd been with him for years. He told me a story that Hitch used to read timetables for amusement. They were discussing this and Hitch said you’re coming to lunch on Sunday. Lunch was down at Shamley Green. Bevill asked how do I get there. Hitch said there's a green line bus which passes your door. Bevil said I’ve never seen a green line bus. Hitchcock told him to be outside at five past eleven and of course a bus came along. And Hitch had laid it on just to prove it was right.

That was funny but others weren't. And he certainly could roast the actors. But he was very nice to me. I had no problems with him. I ran around like a startled rabbit. I learnt more on that ten-week picture with him than all the rest put together. He really had to direct.

RF: How did he communicate with the crew and cast?

RWB: Very laconically. Hardly anything to do with the crew, just the cameraman and to a certain extent the first assistant. He would speak to Jack Cox and that would also incorporate the continuity girl and they're really the only people you need to speak to. I was the second assistant director and he rarely spoke to me. He would speak if I said excuse me Mr. Hitchcock, I’m not quite clear about such and such and then he would give it a moment. He didn't want to be bothered. There was no need really. You have to be very careful with your effort when you’re a director.

RF: Yes, but you can't expect it all to happen by osmosis.

RWB: But your cameraman is the only other man on the set. There are only two people they can never really get rid of. One is the cameraman and the other is the director. All the rest can go.

RF: Maybe they know what is going on but other people need to.

RWB: It's the cameraman's responsibility to run his crew. That's the photographic side which is the be all and end all of the operation. The first assistant is the organiser. He tells

the first assistant to tell the second assistant to tell the production manager that this is happening and that isn't happening.

RF: Did he talk to actors?

RWB: Oh yes. All he wanted to do was to ensure that the photographs were exactly in the right order exactly as he envisioned them with the actors within the photographs doing exactly what he envisaged. He gave them full instructions, again very laconically. I think it was a good way of handling actors. He was inclined to dictate to actors and of course sometimes you have to.

RF: What did he say, would he give them moves, would he tell them how to read a scene?

RWB: I can't remember that. I don't think so. He would say things like "when you come in the room you've read the script but the one thing you must be totally unaware of is that there's a gun in that drawer so forget that". He would make sure they played in the scene as the scene required. But he wasn't an actor's director by any means. He wasn't sympathetic. He hated them because none of them were ever good enough. One of the things I always lay at his door is that it is noticeable that he never played any of these hoity-toity tricks with the big stars like Cary Grant. He started them on an old pal basis and it was all very jolly but he didn't try to be funny with them. It was only with the lesser fry that he indulged himself a bit and that was reprehensible. You have to be the ringmaster who has an implacably direct balanced approach to every single one of them. You don't do favours for any of them.

RF: And you don't set out to humiliate any of them.

RWB: No if you humiliate any of them you won't get anything out of them, they'll just die. You can't afford that unless you can afford to recast.

RF: You say he roasted Linden Travers, what did he say in general terms?

RWB: The delivery was all in terms of how hurt I am. I set up the scene in the way I wanted and I believed to be the right way to do it and suddenly I came on the set it's all different and I wonder who's supposed to be doing this. It's extraordinary to me. I think we should go back to where we started.

RF: He was playing himself even then. There must have been a lot of process work on that film. How did it go?

RWB: It was sticky. Back projection in those days was very fitted [?]where it touched kind of thing.

RF: Was there a permanent BP device at Gainsborough?

RWB: I don't remember. I should guess it was brought from Shepherd's Bush. I don't think we would have had a projector with shutter sync and a translucent screen. But that's all it was. It wasn't very elaborate. All you had to do was have interlock.

RF: Did it work reasonably well or did you lose a lot of time?

RWB: I think it worked fairly well. It was pretty crude and the quality was fairly rough but it was black and white which was much easier.

RF: Did the process confine the way he directed the film?

RWB: No, that was the thing about Hitchcock. He was such a superb technician, he never had the slightest difficulty with technique. He knew what he could do and what were the limits of the technique were, and he would work to those. That's another thing to try and achieve, to be so comfortable with the run of the mill technique that you no longer think about it, you just shoot the pictures as you want to shoot them.

RF: There was a pre-title sequence/prologue which was excised from the film. Do you remember anything about that?

RWB: No

RF: I think there was a more extended scene which set up the sequence in the hotel.

RWB: I don't remember.

RF: Was Alma around?

RWB: Yes.

RF: What function did she perform?

RWB: None at all.

RF: Did she tug at his elbow or whisper in his ear?

RWB: No whatever she did she did very discreetly. But I'll tell you a charming thing Hitch did on this film. He had a daughter about nine and one day at lunch we were shooting in the restaurant and it was all set out exactly so he commanded a great picnic lunch from Fortnums and he invited her to lunch with him. They sat there on this restaurant set. That was nice. Otherwise he was not a nice chap. But he knew how to make a picture. Nothing was out of place. It all ran on rails because he knew exactly what he wanted and said what he wanted. It was like clockwork.

RF: Was there the feeling of a classic in the making?

RWB: Yes, you knew it was a good picture. It was so professional. There was a lot of amateurism with this leisurely, easy going manner which was the style of the period. A picture like that stands up. So many of your old pictures have been shown on television and you think what's it going to look like? If they stand up, and one or two of mine have stood up, that's a true test of a picture. There are one or two wonderfully flashy pictures of the moment which last four months and take a fortune at the box office and are enjoyed by millions then there's the other kind, the not fashionable picture. I prefer the long-life picture myself. I like to think of pictures being shown thirty or forty years after they've been made and still looking acceptable.

RF: It's the difference between making a film and making a piece of merchandise.

RWB: It's partly that. The next thing was *Hey! Hey! USA.* Then there was another Will Hay picture, *Old Bones of the River*. Then Carol Reed came in with *A Girl Must Live*. which was about three chorus girls. Then another Will Hay.

RF: Was this the total output of Gainsborough at the time or were there other units?

RWB: No, this was the total output. They couldn't do anything without me. Then there was another Will Hay film called *Where's That Fire.*

RF: That was Twentieth Century Fox.

RWB: Yes, they came in in December 1938.

RF: How did that affect things?

RWB: It didn't make much difference. We all carried on doing what we were doing. Then they started putting in their own pictures. The next one was one of their own pictures, a Gracie Fields picture, *Aunt Sally*. [Probably *Shipyard Sally*. DS] That was a real riot. All the men in a shipyard are being ground down by this dreadful capitalist who runs it and they're all going to go on strike. Sally is the heroine of the day. She sings a great song to them and they all go back to work. Absolutely cockeyed. It was idiotic. Monty Banks directed that and the assistant director was a very nice man, Phil Brandon who became a director later.
Then we did a picture which we had nothing to do with at all. At that period, we must have been doing two at once and it was possible because they were small pictures.
There was a radio series called Inspector Hornleigh investigates. The only ready trade[trained?] stars were the people who had made a reputation on the BBC of which this was an example. It was called *Inspector Hornleigh on Holiday*. Gordon Harker plays the inspector. He wasn't very nice somehow. I never got on with him terribly well. He was a bit star conscious. He never really was a star. He was very good in one of those Edgar Wallace pictures, *The Ringer* and he played on the stage with some distinction but he was a glorified character actor. He became a star but never the kind of star who could carry a picture on his own. He was very good.

SIDE 6 TAPE 3

He was a natural Cockney. [Omits discussion about Harker, Rome Express etc.]

Then there was another picture I had nothing to do with *They Came By Night*. It was directed by Harry Lachman who was a really big figure in the silent days. He was big in his day.

RF: He was Rex Ingram's right-hand man. Later he came to BIP with his Chinese wife which was very unusual in those days. Then he was back in Hollywood in the 30s.He was around here in the late 30s.

RWB: He was back in Britain for this one little cheap picture, a four or five-week shoot. He was very eccentric, slightly daft and international. No one knew if he was a Frenchman or Jewish or German or what the hell he was but he was an interesting man. I should have taken more notice. I never even saw him.

Then we did a radio derived number called *Band Waggon*. We started shooting in the last week of August in 1939 and on Friday night we were all called together and told the picture was going to be continued but we were going to finish it at Shepherd's Bush. Gainsborough Studios were going to be closed down and we were all to move over on Monday morning.

RF: This was 1st September and Poland has been invaded and the assumption is that it was war. Was there a role marked out for the studio?

RWB: I don't know what the reasons were. I don't know if people thought there was going to be obliteration bombing which was what we all expected at the time. Everyone thought London would be bombed flat on Monday morning. Well it could have been. We were at Shepherd's Bush on Monday morning and finished the picture.

RF: How could that be? You had standing sets.

RWB: They were moved over the weekend. Also, *Band Waggon* is based on the idea that Arthur Askey has got a little flat which is on top of Broadcasting House and he lives up there with a lot of animals. If you remember, Lime Grove in those days it had exactly that. It had offices which had been built on top of the original roof and it made the absolutely perfect setting for the story.

The Bush had been dark for over two years. Then we started *Night Train to Munich*. The Bush re—opened with the Islington people.

RF: It's surprising in a way that they closed Lime Grove at the time of the slump. It indicates Islington was quite an efficient studio to operate.

RWB: I think it was a money maker.

RF: Had Ted Black been there all that time?

RWB: Yes, Ted Black was still there and he went with us to the Bush. Micky Balcon had left a long time ago.

RF: What do you recall about the outbreak of war?

RWB: There was nothing in it for me at all except the fact that I had been called up.

RF: That quickly?

RWB: You had to register before war broke out, you registered during the summer of 1939 if you were over 21. I was 22 in December 1938 so I qualified so I knew I was in the army. I was called up on February 15th 1940.

RF: Films were not regarded as a reserved occupation?

RWB: Not to people of my age. A lot of the people who were close friends such as Billy Partington who was in the make—up department ever since I was there. He became quite a friend. …Father had a friend who was the racing manager at White City, the dog racing, and Billy was a dog owner and that made a bomb and we all went to White City quite regularly. At that time, the department was run by a German called Herman Rosenthal who was a very good make—up man from UFA, he came from Potsdam. Anyway, he went back to Germany around 1937. Off he went and Billy became head of make—up department. He was about ten years older than me, about 32. Also, he was the only man who could cut Maurice Ostrer's hair. After him Ted Black and after him Roy Baker. I always had a very smart haircut because Billy when he was a boy became the British champion barber. He could really do you a proper haircut. He was typical of the sort of staff who stayed on. He soldiered on with them for many years.

RF: Did you work on *Night Train to Munich*?

RWB: Yes, it had three days to do when I went off. I almost saw it out.

RF: What did they do to you when you were called up?

RWB: Not very much. I was very lucky. During the war, I was always in the wrong place. I was never where it was happening. I was always somewhere else. I got to Portland Bill in February. It was built as a prison during the Napoleonic wars. I'd never seen anything like it in my life. There's no doubt about it that — you were earlier asking what about your social life. Well there was nothing outside the four walls of the studio or if you were on location you might go chasing after some girl.

RF: You'd been living at home all this time?

RWB: Yes.

RF: Did you drive a car?

RWB: Yes, I had my own car.

RF: What were you on at the outbreak of war at Gainsborough?

RWB: I was on £6 a week.

RF: You were being underpaid at that time.

RWB: Yes probably. About £7-10shillings.

RF: Even a tenner.

RWB: Steady on.

RF: I would have thought someone who had been there that time. Proved their worth, dedicated.

RWB: I don't think one cared. On £6 a week you could run a car and I lived at home of course. Also, the whole of that year we were completely overshadowed by Munich. I kept saying to myself there can't be a war. In 1928, I was 12 and All Quiet on the Western Front was published in English. It was the first book - I'd read a lot of novels by that time, I was an instinctive reader, nobody told me to do it — this book came out and there was so much fuss and bother about all the dirty words in it and that launched an avalanche of books about the First World War. Robert Graves' Goodbye to All That and Journey's End. The father of a boy at school was the stage manager so I got to see that. It was very much part and parcel of that era which lasted two or three years and I must have read a couple of dozen anti—war books and I'd made up my mind that that war was completely unnecessary, a complete act of folly, really on the part of three cousins one of whom was mad, one of whom was degenerate, the Englishman hadn't the faintest idea what was going on. So, this bloody thing happened; when it happened, nobody had the faintest solution how to get out of it. They had to continue to keep slaughtering each other. There was no rhyme or reason about it at all. It was a unique war. This lead me to believe it could never happen again. Well it did. What I hadn't reckoned on was Hitler. I didn't realise you could have such a phenomenon. Again, that won't happen again but there's always the possibility something else might happen. The 1939 war I believe was absolutely necessary or we'd all be speaking German or a lot of our children would be learning German as a second language.

RF: It was the outcome of the previous war but by 1939 it was unavoidable.

RWB: You had to do it and all those people had to be killed and I was very grateful to them. They made the sacrifice. We all have to offer a little prayer every day. I feel instinctively one knew it had to happen but you hadn't the faintest idea what it would be like. I'd been in the Cadets at my school. This put me straight into the front rank of cadets as soon as I joined the army, the sergeant in charge of my section said you'll be an officer alright. That was fine

except the other people in the hut elected me to be their representative on the messing committee. The British Army is a democracy. It was invented by Cromwell. It owes its allegiance to the Crown but it belongs to the people and to Parliament. That's the theory. It's not like the Airforce or Navy. They owe their allegiance to the Crown, they're not interested in Parliament.

The Army is structurally democratic and they have these messing committees. I went and I spoke up. I'd only been in the Army for four weeks. I didn't realise you had to stand to attention, it didn't occur to me. I'd come straight from a film studio which was a closed world. The real benefit of being slung into the Army was that I suddenly realised that there were other people in the world. I said the men were complaining about this and that, there wasn't enough sugar with the porridge, people were supposed to eat it with salt and they didn't like that. The messing officer was a Scotsman. I swear to God he put back my advancement as a cadet. Anyway, Dunkirk happened and I became a translator. But nothing happened. I didn't even get a stripe, even a temporary acting lance jack, I was still a private soldier. This went on for months. My father was very agitated. He was dying for me to be an officer. It was a ridiculous ambition — you had a shorter life — but it was the thing to do. In the First World War if you became a subaltern officer your expectation of life was about three weeks. It was a bit like some parts of the air force such as Bomber Command. It wasn't till the end of the first year I was made a temporary acting lance jack. I'd seen several intakes come and go and I was still left there high and dry. Eventually the place was evacuated and we were all sent to Devizes.

RF: What outfit were you in originally?

RWB: You could call it the Welsh Regiment because they were nominally the regiment which was in charge there. But it was a primary training centre so anyone and everybody would be there. We went to Devizes. I was then sent on an officer training course - I was put up for a board. I went on this training course in North Wales, twelve weeks and I was an officer, absolutely crazy. I hadn't the faintest idea what I was doing.

RF: It sounds like the books Evelyn Waugh was writing at the time.

RWB: It felt like it. Then the Middle East started to get going but I wasn't sent there in the first wave. I reported to the depot of my regiment. I've never forgotten this because I think a terrible mistake was made. You were asked which regiment you would like to join. Give three preferences. I chose three which were near London. I went into the Bedfordshire[?] and Hertfordshire Regiment. I reported to the Bedford depot. I saw the adjutant, "here I am what, do you want to do with me?" He looked me up as if to say "what sort of officer material is this?" I was smart but wet behind the ears, 23. I said "by the way I ought to mention but there has just been a notice sent by the War Office asking for people who have experience of the film production". "Oh yes," he said. "I've just had six year's experience". He said "forget it". He made a terrible mistake because I became one of the worst regimental officers they ever had in the British Army. I was just no good at it. I wondered what the expressions on some of the men must have been when they looked at me and said "this is what is

going to lead us into battle is it?" Eventually I survived it and became an instructor but never fired a shot in anger. I was a very good instructor. I was good mechanically. That takes us well over 18 months, the beginning of 1943. We were stationed up at Cromer and never moved. I missed the second wave of the Middle East.

Then the War Office sent round another message from Thorold Dickinson and this time I went to my commanding officer and I think by that time he thought well perhaps it might be advisable.

RF: Why do you think you were blocked earlier?

RWB: They were short of subaltern officers. They wanted as many as they could get and see they sort themselves out. It was only making instruction pictures.

RF: You now were working for Thorold Dickinson?

RWB: Yes. I'd never met him but I duly reported to the War Office which turned out to be Curzon St, it was the building where MI5 and MI6 were, at the back of the Square.

RF: It had obviously been built as a pricy Mayfair apartment block which got taken over.
RWB: It was commandeered at the beginning of the War and they've had it ever since. The first person I saw was Angela Martelli, one of the grand continuity girls. I knew her already but I can't remember why.

RF: If you worked at the Bush or worked at Islington was there much intermingling or was it very much staying on your own patch?

RWB: Very little. As soon as he heard I'd done six years as an assistant he said I must have you and he did all the necessary paper work and I was transferred to his unit which was called the Army Kinematograph Service and at that time they were responsible largely for showing films in the field but they'd already become responsible for producing documentaries, training films basically for service use. We did a lot a stuff on tank techniques. We did a lot of animated pictures. George Ashworth, the famous camera mechanic, he was head of the camera mechanic department at Denham for years, a brilliant man, he got everything working. John Cox was the sound man.
It all happened at Wembley Park Studios and John Cox was the sound man for Twentieth Century Fox anyway so he put on a uniform and there he was. He knew all about the studio and virtually ran it. So, he was a kind of studio manager as well. It was another case of an absolute free for all. Everybody did what they could. Whatever they were capable of they did. I went in theoretically as a production manager and the first picture I did was directed by Jay Lewis. Other pictures started to come up and there was no one to direct then, so I volunteered. The first picture I made was an eight-reel silent picture and it was all about street fighting. What you'd now call urban guerilla tactics. I took over half of Battersea which had been bombed flat and was a terrible mess. It was a wonderful set, it was huge, acres of it. I had these soldiers running about all over, explosions, you could do what you wanted,

you were in the army and that was it. Then I did six or eight more pictures. We started making propaganda pictures for civilians and pictures about what was going to happened to you when the war was over. I did one picture which was to teach brigadiers how to sink[?], I did another three-reeler for sergeant instructors, that was done by the Army Education Corps, we did a series of army security flashes, these were two minute things which were put into the programme shown to troops, careless talk costs lives sort of thing. I did then with what I called expressionist sets and extreme tones, the glamourous spy looked like Veronica Lake. She had a cigarette holder about 18" long and Jack Warner did the commentaries. So, we had quite a range of activities.

RF: How did the business of rank work. Did you keep the rank you joined with?

RWB: Yes. Indeed, I increased mine. I got promoted.

RF: What happened if you as a captain had an assistant director who was a major?

RWB: I had one as a second lieutenant but the issue never really arose, most of the assistants were sergeants.

RF: Who were your colleagues?

RWB: Freddy Young was there. Very good at it he was. He was by far the most experienced of all of us. Angela Martelli. She was in the ATS. Bryan Langley. Ray Pitt who was a very famous editor at Ealing. He was a very strange man. He became a drunkard male prostitute and he was a very bright lad. He gave me one word of advice which has got me out of so much trouble. All you have to do is give yourself a cutaway and if you carry that in your mind you'll never get into trouble. I'm eternally grateful to him for that. And he backed me when I was directing. He was supervising the editing. There was one wonderful character there who got hold of a copy of *Citizen Kane.* We used to watch it for hours and hours. Analyse it. Pick it to pieces. I first saw that while I was in Norwich. Phyllis Crocker was there who was charming.

SIDE 7, TAPE 4

RWB: The AKS which was based at Wembley Studios which I believe became ABC Television I seem to remember after the War. The Army wanted the films which could be made. Some were very good. But, at the same time they had to get on with a glorified rabble of joke soldiers who had been film technicians. Some had been through part of the Army but most had come straight from Civvy Street. They were put straight into the unit without further ado. The command was one or two genuine soldiers. But the rest like Thorold Dickinson were not genuine soldiers, Eric Ambler wasn't, Carol Reed wasn’t. They put Peter Ustinov in the ranks with absolutely disastrous results. Just occasionally there was a major there who was a very nice man. He would thrash himself into a fury and decide something should be done, something a bit more regimental should be made of the place. He called a church parade which was duly held and that was fine. When I turned up I was one of the

very few who had joined in the ranks, had been given a commission and had served with a battalion, admittedly not in battle or overseas. The major fell on my neck and greeted me with great enthusiasm. He thought at last I 've got someone who knows the form. Yes, I did but it was no interest to me. One or two people who had been brought down from the Curzon Street head office. That was where Thorold had his office. The rest of us were all at the studios at Wembley Park. Among the people I met was Eric Ambler. He was writing scripts at the time. Eventually he became the producer of the whole shebang. We developed a very close friendship and as the war progressed and the end became a possibility then it became a question of what would happen once the War finished. Indeed, we made a film about it to show the troops what kind of facilities would be on offer to help than to make the transition to Civvy Street and get a job and settle down, what provision would be made.

The first thing I did was to be a production manager on a film about which I can remember absolutely nothing. It was a straightforward training film directed by Jay Lewis. I saw hardly anything more of him. I was then able to volunteer to direct a film meant for the Home Guard which was an 8 reel silent movie about guerrilla fighting. [see end of previous tape)

I went on from one film to the next. By the time peace came I'd made quite a few of these pictures, a great deal of film, which is the most valuable experience you can get.

Then with the prospect of peace, the idea of going back to Gainsborough as a second assistant did not really appeal because six years had gone by which is a long time in a young man's life. Looking back on it, it affected me much more than I realised at the time. Eric was making his plans. He very much wanted to go on with films. He'd written six books before the War all of which were progressively more successful and he was highly regarded as a novelist and he had reinvented the spy novel, taken it away from John Buchan. He was an author of some stature. He was about thirty-five then. He was very caught up with film and he wanted to go on with it and he decided that's what he would do. He set up with Del Giudice Two Cities which was a subcontractor of Rank. The idea was that he should write the script of a film and produce it. First of all, he chose a novel by somebody else, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* which I liked very much indeed which is a very good melodramatic story with lots of narrative which I rather care for. At the same time in a discussion what we were going to do when peace broke out, Eric said to me don't do anything at the moment, I've got some ideas. Later on, in a typically spy fashion he invited me to lunch up in London and we walked around Hyde Park so no one could overhear our conversation. He said to me would I like to direct this film he was going to make. I thought this was a wonderful opportunity and it solved all problems. But there were second thoughts at Two Cities about him doing *Uncle Silas*. They wanted an original story by him. He sat down and wrote *The October Man* and eventually we went down to Denham and made it. *Uncle Silas* was beautifully done by somebody else. It was produced by Lawrence Irving who had originally been an art director. He was the son of the great Henry Irving and wrote the standard biography of Irving. *The October Man* had Johnny Mills in it. It was a slightly strange experience for me taking off uniform and putting on a smart suit.

RF: Before you go into your career as a director can we spend a few minutes on *Uncle Silas*. It's a very much underestimated film. Its superbly art-directed, beautifully shot. I'm curious if Ambler would have approached it differently. Did he ever develop the script?

RWB: No, he never did. As a writer, he knew the book very well and thought it would make a good film which indeed it did. I'm rather sad we didn't do it. It would have suited me extremely well from all kind of points of view. I like period pictures. I like historical pictures, the idea of trying to recreate a past world, a past society for the audience. To try and bring it to the pitch where they understand why people moved like that and spoke like that and had relationships like that and make it completely acceptable and plausible to a modern-day audience. It's getting more and more difficult to do. It's got to the point where it's practically impossible to make period pictures anymore because the audience doesn't want to see them.

We embarked on the project of making *The October Man*. Eric wrote the script a man called Phil Samuels was brought in who had been the studio manager at Shepherd's Bush. He was brought in as associate producer since after all Eric was not a film producer. He just wanted to mastermind the project, oversee it and protect it. He wouldn't know about budgets or weekly cost returns. Phil Samuels did all that. We got as cameraman Erwin Hillier. He had developed a very high reputation indeed by making one or two pictures for Powell and Pressburger, one *The Canterbury Tale* he did very well and got well deserved kudos for it. One of the great pleasures was that Vetchinsky was to be the art director. I'd known him for six years before the war at Gainsborough. I knew him well and we got on very well. We had Joan Greenwood as the leading lady. She wasn't at her peak yet, she had only done one or two things but she was an instinctive actress, a delightful person, I was very fond of her. We had a little walk out which didn't come to anything but it was a very pleasant relationship. Then we had a cast of really solid performers. It was pretty much a straightforward shoot. We went wildly over schedule. I found considerable difficulty getting onto a proper level with Erwin Hillier. He was a very dominant cameraman. I'd come out of the army after six years and I'd developed rather a blithe assumption that when you issued an instruction it was carried out without question, someone saluted and said "very good sir" went off and did it, which doesn't apply when making films very much. I think, really we have to say we didn't get on. He photographed it beautifully. Those were the days when you got two set ups in the morning and perhaps three in the afternoon. That was considered to be a day's work. I wasn't used to that sort of thing at Gainsborough. It was a very easy-going sort of procedure but there was a certain amount of bustle about the place, it had a tempo of its own which it maintained. But this was all stop-go. I felt that it made life very difficult for the actors because they lost the rhythm of the day's work and the rhythm of the scene. If you take too damn long over lighting or setting up, people get bored and they're doing crossword puzzles or putting money on horses which lose or drinking, or all sorts of mischief. They completely lose concentration which is the vital aspect of the actor's profession, the ability for such total concentration that if you fired a gun behind them that if it wasn't in the script they would not react.

RF: These were the fat years still for the Rank Organisation? Money was being spent like water. Where lay the faults for this slatternly[?] inefficient, disgracefully wasteful system, the famous works committee?

RWB: I'm not avoiding anything I promise you but I always kept myself severely away from all that kind of thing.

RF: So, Phil Samuels was taking care of that kind of thing as line producer?

RWB: As I mentioned earlier, there was a certain dichotomy in attitude years before about whether I could be a producer or a director. Now I'd become a director by a series of very fortunate accidents, I'd no interest in becoming a producer and so I took no notice of that at all. If the assistant director said we've got to knock off because of x, y or z, I would sit down and do a crossword puzzle. The assistant director on *The October Plan* was a remarkable fellow called Mark Evans who'd got a ribald sense of humour. He was a bit of a wide boy, he was very sharp, very funny. He came to Hollywood about the time I was there, this was much later, and he got work somewhere or other, he finished off in charge of television production at Twentieth Century Fox. The fact there was never any serious questions about money, if you don't finish this picture by Friday you're all going to be fired or you'll never make another picture, none of those sanctions or threats were ever even thought of. Rank wanted the films and the board had sanctioned their production so those films were going to be made. This opened up the door to all kinds of perfectionist thought. We all have to be perfectionists, have to try to be, whether we achieve it or not is another question, we have to try to be. Those were the days when the lighting cameraman would wait till the scene was fully rehearsed and they knew exactly where everyone was going to be and where they were going to move until they started lighting. Then they would take about two hours to do the lighting; there were always difficulties with the boom. In those days, the equipment was nothing like as good as it is today. Then having lit it he would then run a test and the number boy [?] had to go up to the dark room and develop it and produce a ten by eight-inch glossy photograph. This was brought down to the floor still wet and examined in microscopic detail by the cameraman and operator, everyone had a conference about that and then adjustments were made, sometimes a second test was asked for and all this was tolerated in the sacred name of producing a quality product.

RF: Was Erwin unique in this?

RWB: No this was the standard procedure because I had it with other cameramen after that. But it was time consuming if not time wasting. It was black and white and in many ways black and white has its difficulties as colour has its difficulties, but in many ways colour is simpler, easier. It will tolerate flat light much better. We finished the film. It was duly shown. A premier at the Odeon Leicester Square, it got very good notices.

RF: It was presumably almost entirely studio based?

RWB: Yes, it was. I can hardly remember a location on it. We were very much studio bound.

RF: Was that something you accepted because of your own background or did you have a hankering to go outside?

RWB: I've thought about this quite a lot and I'm still a bit puzzled by it. We'd been studio all my pre—war career. There was a lot of location but pictures were basically studio bound. Then when we made the Army training films 95% was exterior although later we started building sets at Wembley, lighting them. We got back into the studio way of thinking rather than going out and shooting the stuff wherever we wanted it to happen.

RF: Was there a feeling a film was not a film unless it was shot at
Elstree or Denham or Shepherd's Bush with sets and lights and dollies?

RWB: Yes, that's the way people looked at it. From the prestige point of view, shooting a picture at Denham was top whack, it was the class studio. It still had the shadow of Korda over it and whatever they said about Korda he always wanted first class. A friend of mine once visited his splendid penthouse at the top of Claridges, there were the paintings on the wall which were signed Picasso, Monet and Manet. A friend accepted a drink and said "tell me something Alex, have you always lived like this?" and he said "always, sometimes it was a little difficult to pay the bills". That man had more charm and was a splendid fellow. We've never developed anyone like him since.

RF: We'll come back to Korda later. Would you like to have gone out on location?

RWB: I regretted I never did because it was one case where I could have been pioneer coming from a lot of the exterior shooting in the Army.

RF: But it wouldn't have been easy with a vast lighting unit a BNC[?]

RWB: The success of location shooting has been brought about entirely by television equipment, it never seriously got going till 1960.

RF: Either television or the Ariflex.

RWB: The Ariflex was a combat camera. It had been developed for the German Army.

RF: In terms of shooting it was fairly straightforward. It went slowly but surely.

RWB: It wasn't any great shakes. It wasn't one of Eric's best stories, he would agree with that. As far as I handled it. I certainly got good performances.

RF: How did you acquire that facility with actors since you'd had no acting experience of your own?

RWB: I think I decided very early on the technique of making films is really very simple. If you 're talking about fiddly things like having to stage a particular set up in which something very strange has to happen such as a man has to disappear, they're purely mechanical things which can be solved by engineers, quite properly, nothing wrong with that. To me the key to success was to get good performances because the cast were the tools of the director's trade, not the camera. You can do all sorts of dazzling things with the camera and go ahead and do them but also make sure that you get good performances while you're at it. You can only get good performances by creating the atmosphere which is proper to the scene and convincing the actors it is absolutely real and all they have to do is say the lines and behave as that character would. Then you get a completely self-conscious performance. If you can give them confidence it is very important. Not to the point they become over confident, then you fall into another trap, give them self-assurance so they know what they're doing. A lot of my attitude developed instinctively, I just had the luck to be there at the time and these things developed in me and I responded.

RF: You were sympathetic towards actors, you didn't regard them as cattle.

RWB: A number of eminent actors have hated directors because they're always a disappointment. The disappointment, if there is one, lies in the director or the story, but not necessarily in the actor.

RF: But you were enthusiastic about Basil Dean and this was a director who crucified actors. Not necessarily for the good of the piece but for his own self-satisfaction.

RWB: I think being a director at all is an open opportunity for people to chuck their weight about and to behave outrageously and become quite impossible. Some used to dress themselves up in jack boots and come on the floor with a riding crop which happened at Denham with Joseph von Sternberg. Everybody burst out laughing apparently. A lot of this reflects my pre—war experience of the actor basically being a theatre actor and the problem of his adaptation to the cinema in which he had to learn a certain amount of technique. And then forget it. That still will be the only problem to solve with any movie you're going to make. To get the absolutely perfect casting. One of the great casting directors to my mind is Fellini whose films are immaculately cast even down to the last extra.

RF: For appearance, rather than performance.

RWB: Yes, but then other questions arise. But I've always admired his pictures for that aspect which isn't the most important one but he seems to be the absolute master at finding the right faces, and dressing them perfectly, costuming them and wigs.

RF: In those days so many of the actors were West End. How did you approach style and technique? It's more than scaling down.

RWB: Yes indeed. It's not just a matter of "don't project so much dear, you don't have to make it audible at the exit doors". I think myself where one possibly can, it's done almost entirely by persuading the actor he's in an absolutely real situation the fire is burning in the

grate. I always insist all props must work properly. I think it's very important for an actor. The business of opening a box of matches, there are only two there. It confuses them hopelessly. Largely by developing the actor's concentration to the point where they forget there's a whole crowd of technicians watching. I don't give a lecture but I try and put it about when I start making anything I'm dead against any of the technicians, any of them, cameraman downwards, having anything to do with any of the actors other than good morning, can I take you out to dinner, all that sort of thing is fine but they must not give any instructions whatsoever. They must give them to me and then I convey them to the actor. But I don't say to them you didn't hit your marks. That's not the way to do it, I wrap it up in such a way that the actor doesn't know he's being corrected about something.

RF: Was Erwin a problem in that respect, did he regard actors as automata?

RWB: Yes, if someone was three inches off their mark, because Erwin's lighting was so critical, you only had to be three inches off your mark and you were black suddenly.

RF: Two Cities did not make B pictures so *The October Man* was an A picture right from the start. You're in charge of it. Were there people who remembered you from Gainsborough before the War and was there any kind of hierarchical problem of acceptance. Were you immediately accepted as the director or were they inclined to patronise you. Or were they totally a new crew and new faces and that problem did not exist?

RWB: I'm really raking around trying to remember truthfully. I had several people very much on side. Vetchinsky was the art director and he was a delightful man and we were very fond of each other. But I can't remember who was the continuity girl and she may have been somebody I knew. But on the most part they were strangers. The editor, Alan Jaggs, was certainly new. He was a good editor. It seemed to me afterwards he used the opportunity of seeing the rushes in the morning with Eric, of explaining to him how much better it could be shot but that's a common fault with editors. As far as I'm concerned, they don't do it twice but it's an obvious temptation and I won't blame them because they all want to direct, so fair enough. One thing I didn't realise was that being a director of an A feature in a top-class film studio was going to excite a fair amount of envy, jealously, all kinds of petty emotions. I didn't realise I had to tread carefully. As I said, I'd just come out of the army and I was I think infused with a slightly regimental attitude. Erwin was not the easiest man for me to get on with on my first film. It was a most unfortunate choice from that point of view, he was a brilliant cameraman sure but for Micky Powell who by that time was a great man and one of the most eminent directors whereas I was just doing my first movie,

RF: He was a bully without meaning to be.

RWB: Oh, he couldn't help it. There's no hard feelings as far as I'm concerned.

RF: Did you ever use him again?

RWB: I'll tell you about that later. I think there were faults on both sides. I certainly could have handled it better if I'd put things to the crew "how would it be if we do this?" or "what

do you think of that because I'm new here and I don't really know what's going on?" It's the sort of attitude you can only develop and get away with when you're very experienced and you know exactly wat you are going to do. I can now do it, and get away with it all the time.

RF: A very laid-back approach such as Hawkes did.

RWB: Yes and of course I was frightened to death, there's no doubt about that.

RF: So , you were autocratic to some extent?

RWB: I think I must have been.

RF: Were there retakes?

RWB: I can't really remember, there may have been on eor two, very much just for technical reasons.

RF: Shall we talk about Two Cities?

RWB: Yes, Del Giudice. Del as he always was, he was a marvellous man. I think he thought he was Diaghliev and he made a jolly good stab at it. He got around him all the best people. He was in position to offer the money so he got the best people which is usually what happens in this sordid world. He had a flat a Grosvenor House. The first time I met him I was with Eric [Ambler]. We were invited to lunch there, we were still in the Army. He was a lavish host. He decided I had the talent. He used to refer to all the people as the talent. Later on, there was a luncheon party at Chilcote[?]which was a country house somewhere near Gerard's Cross. I didn't see a great deal of him.

SIDE 8, TAPE 4

He [Del] had all the charm, that Korda had to persuade a lot of people to do a lot of things whether they wanted to or not. He could cajole or beg, borrow or steal people into movies. He never developed any capability to decide what should be made. He had no driving force, I must do this, I must do that story like Zanuck. I've been impressed since the War by people who've come to very eminent positions — one or two have become prime minister — and they knew how to get there but once they got there they hadn't the faintest idea what to do because they had no purpose or desire of their… Whatever you say about Thatcher, she had a vision right or wrong. This was the one gift which eludes so many people who get the power, the responsibility, the backing, and they don't know what to do with it.

RF: What motivated Del, was it power, was it money?

RWB: Yes, it was all that.

RF: He was a bit of a crook I believe.

RWB: He was a lawyer

RF: Meaning there's no such thing as an honest lawyer? He was a decidedly slippery character. Peter Ustinov is the one because he used to do Del Giudice stories complete with the accent, telephone bells ringing. He was very funny.

RF: Where did he do these, in the canteen?

RWB: In the canteen, or parties, whatever. Peter was at Denham at the same time, *School for Spies.* I don't know so much about slipperiness but Peter used to tell the story of being in the outer room of Del' s office where there were always about four or five half-starved Russians or Hungarians or Italians or indeed English people. Del would walk through this office scattering handshakes and then he would stop with one of them, say we will make a great picture but not this year and then he would go into his office. He was an amusing character. I thought he was quite smashing. I still adhere to feeling that you've got to have precisely that sort of character at the top of the heap. Del had a remarkably good run for five or six years and then it collapsed, went rotten. Nevertheless you can't run an enterprise of that kind with accountants.

RF: Did you go to any of the famous parties.

RWB: Only once. It was very grand and very lavish. I enjoyed that.

RF: He had no input into linking the film?

RWB: He did in a sense in the way he somehow got hold of Laurence Olivier and Olivier wanted to make Henry V it was an absolute smasher of a patriotic thing for the middle of war. So, they got it made on a shoestring under the most appallingly difficult conditions.

RF: You say a shoestring but it was half a million pounds which was a lot of loot for then.

RWB: But they never had quite enough horses. Really, I meant that. They didn’t have the whole Russian army at their disposal.

RF: But I get the impression that a Two Cities budget was a bit of a joke. It was open ended.

RWB: I think they made their intentions quite clear but [how]they carried them out was quite another.

RF: Had John Davis made an appearance yet?

RWB: No, he hadn’t yet but he was lurking at Odeon Cinemas somewhere and about to make his presence felt.

RF: This was about 1946.

RWB: Yes.

RF: It was the crash of 1948 which really gave him the opportunity to seize power. Did Del come to rushes?

RWB: No, I think he only saw the final rough cut.

RF: Was he based in the studio?

RWB: No, in town. There was an office in Hanover Square.

RF: Do you know what happened to him, I gather he died impoverished.

RWB: I never heard much about it. I met Guido who was his right-hand man and factotum. I met him not too long ago I was down at his studio. I asked him about Del and he just said it was very sad but he didn't give me any details. He has a son I think.

RF: Incidentally he exists on film. He plays an Italian general in *First of the Few.* Denham was an exciting studio. What else do you remember was shooting there when you were working on *The October Man*? What would Denham handle at any one time, two or three pictures?

RWB: At least. I think if you worked at it you could even get four.
They were vast stages, of course. It's curious to me that early in 1936 Denham was being built. Amalgamated Studios were being built and Pinewood was being built. It was strange considering we didn’t need them.

RF: Amalgamated was never used till after the War.

RWB: Pinewood stayed open throughout the war because I remember the RE Film Unit was there. I’m trying to think of other pictures which were shooting at Denham. There was Peter Ustinov's picture *School for Spies* .

RF: Was the shooting day a regular one, 8.30 to 5.30 or was there a lot of overtime?

RWB: It was five and a half days. But the five-day week came in very early. It was 8.30 on the floor and I think we were supposed to finish at six and we did. There wasn't much over-time. People didn't want to do it. I ought to mention a man who came into my life quite a bit around this time, this was from during the War, and it’s William Alwyn, the composer, one of the nicest men I’ve ever met in my life and absolutely first class. He did the music for *The October Man* but I'd met him before because he came in to do one of our training films and he did some very good music for the film which was conducted as usual by Muir Mathieson. Mathieson did all the fixing. Muir was a very forceful Scotsman who felt his mission in life

was to come in to save this picture from a fate worse than death by putting marvellous music on it.

Every single head of department should fight his hardest for his particular corner and then if they're all brought together by the director you'll have a very good result indeed. Everybody is putting forward his absolute utmost ruthlessly from his own corner, that's fine. As far as cutting was concerned there wasn't that much to do. I had for some time been working on the general principal you shot on a preconceived idea of how it should be cut. In an extended dialogue scene, you would cover it with a series of mid shots or close ups and then you box around between them in the cutting room. But generally speaking I always shoot to a plan. As someone once said he cuts in the camera. I think its economical. It gives the enterprise a general sense of purpose which I think is very valuable to the attitudes not just of the cameraman but of the actors as well.

RF: It also keeps greater control over what finally is cut.

RWB: There you've put your finger on the real purpose which is to stop producers becoming what is called in Hollywood the creative producer and he is the fellow who recuts the picture after you've finished it just for the sake of redoing it.

We got to the era of *The October Man* and this was the first minor crisis of my subsequent career. At the same time at Pinewood, David Lean and Tony Havelock—Allen had been making their films with tremendous success. They were turning out some remarkable movies which have stood up and they were also working for Rank. We were all meeting constantly. David and Tony very much wanted Eric Ambler to go with them as a writer-producer, which left me out in the cold. There was never any formal partnership. I never felt he was in any way obliged to me or me him. We had made a film and that was that.

RF: Had you [thought]about other films?

RWB: Vaguely but not seriously. I think Eric was a little disenchanted with films by the time he finished the first one. But certainly, he was very intrigued by the idea of writing for David and off he went. I was quite happy in the sense that I had got a first picture on the screen. I had solo screen credit. I lacked of course the most unfortunate thing which was that I had no clear idea of what I wanted to do. I did not have two or three scripts burning a hole under me which I could plonk on somebody's desk. This was being a problem for a long time. When I began to develop any number of ideas I usually found difficulties in finding anyone who wanted to do them, I could occasionally but not enough. So, I was rather in limbo in a sense. But I kept in contact with Two Cities and the people there and I think by this time Earl St. John had appeared. No I don't think he could.

RF: *The October Man* had appeared by this time and got good notices and audiences.

RWB: Yes.

RF: Did you have an agent?

RWB: Bryan Linnit and Dunfie. Jack Dunfie took me on. He was an extraordinary personality. I didn't really [like] him at the beginning. He was very much a character. Later on we got on and then we fell out. Then he did an evil turn but that's way into the future.

I can't remember how the next picture came up. It was Paul Soskin producing a film called *The Weaker Sex*. It was based on a play called *No Medals* a play by Esther McCragan who wrote quite a number of successful West End plays at the time. *No Medals* was the women on the home front during the War, what they had to put up [with], the shortages of food and clothes and worrying about the children and the bad news. Soskin himself was a well-known producer. He produced a number of pictures before the war. He was very tall and handsome, considerable dandy, He was a Russian. He was very much the Cossack cavalry officer. I don't know to this day why he decided to have me. I suppose at this time there was a shortage of directors. I don't think he ever liked me. I handled the picture perfectly satisfactorily and no complaints. It was a domestic comedy drama with Ursula Jeans and Cecil Parker. It was a very conventional play with middle class characters. Paul Soskin said to me proudly in the middle of the proceedings. We've been very lucky we have got your favourite cameraman. I said who's that? He said Erwin Hillier. Erwin was not suited to this kind of film at all. It was a bore for him. We soldiered through it. Vetchinsky was the art director so that was alright. It went 'round the Rank circuit and I suppose it should have got their money back. It was a good little picture but it was never going to make anybody's name. In some ways I think my position had weakened again. But I think I was still blithely unaware that I might fall by the wayside and might have to go back to being an assistant director. Then my agent rang and he'd found a picture and there was only one condition attached to it. The pay was good and everything was fine but it had to be shot in seven weeks. It must not under any circumstances go over schedule. I undertook to do it. It was called *Paper Orchid* and it turned out to be quite a good story. It was written by Arthur la Bern who was a very famous journalist, an extraordinary eccentric but he'd written a good book. The screenplay had been done by Val Guest. So, there was nothing wrong with any of that. It was a straight forward melodrama. It was photographed by Basil Emmott. Basil was an old-time cameraman. He'd soldiered through the silents. He was a very nice man who spent most of his tine when he could in the South of France and he was very proud of his motorcar which was a black Citroen which are now worth a mint. He adored this thing which was rebuilt every two years. The music was by Robert Farnum and quite good. The producer was Buster Collier, William Collier who had been a big star in Hollywood. I think we made it at Walton or one of the smaller studios. It was a glorified B picture. We did very efficiently and it was never shown. It was trade shown once which was a legal obligation. There was never any explanation at all and then they all disappeared. Columbia British was wound up and Buster Collier went back to Hollywood There wasn't even anyone to ask what happened. I'd now taken a long drop down and I was beginning to get worried. I was thrashing around trying to find stories which I thought could be made into films. I ran up against the biggest problem which is if you find a story and ring up a publisher and find out who the agent is they say we're

talking 10,000 dollars to Columbia or whoever, you get nowhere. I shouldn't have taken any notice. I should just have gone ahead and spoken to the author say I've written this script of your book, do you like it and can I do it. I know that now but I didn't know it then. I was decidedly green. But I'd only made two and a half pictures.

RF: That was the sort of guidance you should have had from a reputable agent.

RWB: They'd been very energetic on my part and got me this job, but after that they couldn't sell me.

RF: Were you known to be difficult. Why do you think there were problems? There was a lot of work around at this time.

RWB: Yes, everybody else was busy. I really can't say. All it needed was someone to take a sharp intake of breath. I don't think people were actively going around and saying don't have Roy Baker. It was never like that. I was just quietly being dropped. Hitchcock was making a picture at Elstree called *Under Capricorn* and Kay Walsh was in it. Kay had remained a great chum from being in *The October Man* She was just going through the agony of a divorce from David Lean who was her husband for a long time. She said "you need cheering up. You come and have lunch with me at Elstree on Thursday" so I went and there was a big table with Mr Hitchcock sitting at the head of it he was very nice and greeted me and said "well done". He didn't know who I was from Adam. He remembered me from working on his film. There was Marlene Dietrich there. The best thing that can happen under those circumstances was for a waiter to come along and say Mr. Baker someone wants you on the telephone. So I went to the telephone and I always look back on this as my lucky day for at the other end of the telephone was Jay Lewis who I'd met fleetingly in the army. He was now in partnership with a man called Leslie Parkin. Leslie Parkin had been a senior official at the Ministry of Food during the war, a high flying civil servant. He got interested in films. Leslie was very much the quietly spoken, very discreet gent from Whitehall and he belonged there. He was alright in films too. Jay was the flamboyant one and the picture maker. He had two scripts. One about a submarine which crashed but another one which he wanted to do which was the life of Salvatore Giuliano, the Sicilian that is a sterling story. It turned out to be far too difficult to go to Sicily so it was decided we'd better do the submarine one which turned out to be *Morning Departure*.

We had an excellent cast but for those days not a particularly grand cast, Johnny Mills, Nigel Patrick, Richard Attenborough, George Cole. They were all very good actors. The screenplay was by William Fairchild based on play. He became a director later himself. He was a practised screenwriter by that time. He had one big advantage with this in that he was a regular Royal Navy officer. I had Vetchinsky for the art direction and a new cameraman for me, Desmond Dickinson. Desmond turned out an absolute trump and he was so good to me I've never been able to repay him because I ran into the most shattering difficulties right from the beginning. There's no doubt about it Jay Lewis had taken me on because he had to take me on. For some reason, the powers that be wouldn't let him direct. It was vaguely Rank but it was a shoestring job cobbled together largely by Leslie Parkin. It was

ultimately released by Rank. It's coming back. I'll tell you who the people who were most responsible for getting it made and that was the National Film Finance Corporation. Jay Lewis wanted to direct this picture they wouldn't let him. We went on location to Weymouth where we had a mothership. We went to sea, did a dive, marvellous very interesting. We shot quite a lot of location stuff of the submarine and on the deck of the mothership the rest of the picture was to be filmed at Denham. We had a marvellous bit of luck. Vetchinsky found a mock-up submarine which had been built during the war for instructional purposes. We arrived on Monday morning and the first thing Jay Lewis did was to take me for a walk round the grounds of Denham studios and lecture me about how badly I'd made the exteriors and how everybody was desperately worried he was going to have to be on the floor the whole time. There was nothing I could do about it and he nearly drove me insane but I decided — this was where the penny dropped, I knew if I was sacked or fell down on this one I really would be finished that made me fight all the harder and I had friends at the NFFC. One of the chaps who had been in the army with me knew David very well and I was able to filter back what was happening and why I was shooting it the way I was. One of the most effective contributions I made was with the actors. Kenneth More had a reasonably nice small part. He'd served in the navy during the war. Johnny was an extremely competent actor and knew what he was doing. But with the others Nigel Patrick had come straight from the theatre. He had a certain amount of experience of films. In the theatre, he's made a great reputation playing a lot of wide boys, spivs. I was absolutely instrumental in pulling him together, teaching him he was playing a first lieutenant not Joe Bloggs from Hackney.

SIDE 9, TAPE 5

Jimmy Hayter played a series of taxi drivers in B pictures and he rose to the occasion nobly and it made his career. It made a career for a whole lot of people. It was an extraordinary film in many senses. Over the continual arguments with Jay Lewis, somebody thought of a brilliant idea that there was a certain amount of exterior night shooting needed to be done for the salvage operation which is mounted from the service which is trying to raise this submarine which is sunk. This was to be done at Dover. The navy had all the equipment to do this. There was the question who should go down to Dover and take on this chore. Whether he volunteered or not, I don't think he did, but Jay was given the task. That got him off my back for about ten days or two weeks.

Desmond Dickinson was a tower of strength because he lit it in the most exemplary documentary style and he was a great character. He started in the Stoll labs around 1905, well very early on. He practically lived on Tio Pepe, which was the strongest sherry. It's like varnish. He always carried a pocketful of nails which he picked up off the studio floor which he said brought him luck. He was another one who had one motorcar all his life. It was DOG 05. It was an old drop head VB, a very fast car, pre-war vintage. By this time, it was on its seventh engine but he really loved it and he wouldn't part with it. He said to me when we're in the submarine we must never put the camera outside the fourth wall and we stuck to that rigidly. So, half the picture is in close-ups but it works because you get the claustrophobia.

RF: Was this at Denham?

RWB: Yes. The submarine had been put on a lorry and brought to Denham. It provided just the basis. It had to be modernised, it had to have all kinds of new equipment put in. Eventually after all these trials and tribulations I thought we'd made a really marvellous picture. I thought it should be a tremendous success. It had one thing for me which I found very stimulating, very exciting.

You finish up with seven or eight men facing death. They're entombed in a sunken submarine and nothing is going to get them out. Very moving. I thought what makes good movies.

And the performances were superb, honest and true and right. It was a dreadful struggle. We then waited in fear and trepidation what is going to happen when the picture is actually shown. It is due release on Thursday and that Monday night there was a Royal Navy submarine came up the Thames and there were three or four men on the conning tower which was open. But coming down the other way was a heavily loaded tanker. It bumped into the tanker. Three of the men went overboard and I think they were saved but the hatch was open, it wasn't possible to save it and everybody aboard was lost, about 47 people. It was headlines all over the place and a shocking tragedy. We immediately thought that cancelled our picture. But Jay eventually said "that's all right, they want us to show it because it portrays the difficulties, the problems mariners face". It was the most wonderful publicity out of a tragic accident. It's a horrible thing to say but it's a fact. The picture was packed out. You couldn't get a seat for love or money and the notices were fabulous. I never forget reading the Evening Standard, not so much for the notices, but because there was an election that day and I think I was driving a car, taking old ladies to the poll. The remarkable thing about the notices was that they were nice about the actors, wonderful about the film as a whole but above all the direction by Roy Baker is outstanding. I didn't know what had hit me. But of course, the consequences were yet to come and were not at all funny. Went to the first night and there was the usual crush of people in the entrance of the cinema and everybody's fighting to get through. My agent Jack Dunfie, who's about six feet tall, towered above everybody else, I can see him up on a staircase, and he spotted me. Being a great showman, he shouted across all this mob "I say Roy telephone me in the morning it's Hollywood". It was, it was Twentieth Century Fox. As soon as that they'd got onto him. They'd read the notices which had only been published some of them that day and they're on the phone. What I didn't realise, I didn't understand the envy and backbiting which can ensue over who was responsible for what. I learnt it much later when someone else had a success of that kind. Suddenly you find that the man who directed it didn't direct it and the man who produced it did something else.

In Hollywood they start suing each other. In those days, it never struck me this might be the case. The first person I met, I think it was at Pinewood studios, was Paul Soskin. He took one look at me and said "you're a very lucky boy, you remember that". I didn't know what he was talking about. I suppose he was disappointed that a film I made for him was no great success. Then one or two things began to pile up. I phoned Jack Dunfie the next day and he explained Twentieth Century Fox were interested in the idea of me going to Hollywood and there was a contract. The Rank Organisation were fairly alacritous also, largely at the

instigation of Eric Ambler. He'd written a script from one of his early books called *Highly Dangerous* which was going to have Margaret Lockwood and it was a good spy thriller. Eric had invented a language for the people the other side of the curtain which wasn't Russian or anything else and the poor actors had to learn this stuff. He was playing a game with that. Reg Wyer was the cameraman and Tony Darnborough the producer, a man of immense experience.

The first thing we had to do was to do some location work for this picture and it was decided to go to Trieste and the future of Trieste hadn't been finally settled, politically it was very sensitive.
Anyway, we didn't take any notice we just got on with shooting. I found it very difficult to make anything of that location. I was a bit disappointed and to tell the truth I didn't do it very well. The reason I say that is that many years later, either Henry Hathaway or someone like that, one of the Fox directors had to shoot a location in Trieste and he made it look absolutely marvellous and I realised because I'd been trying to piece it together in a logical way, sticking to the topography of Trieste I'd done myself an injury because the audience doesn't give a damn. I do think it's going a bit far when you put Big Ben outside the door of Buckingham Palace which has happened in some American movies. All I can remember is constant telephone calls about this Twentieth Century Fox contract. There was going to be premiere of *Morning Departure* in Paris and would I go to it? I had to get on the train and go to Paris for that then come back again. Eventually we got back and finished the picture by which time the Fox contract had been agreed and signed. I was to pack my bags and off I was to go.

Earl St. John was the executive producer. I'd not worked with him before. The film was made at Pinewood. Denham was closed by that time. Pinewood took over the mantle. I always believed the great difference between Pinewood and all the other studios is that at Pinewood they know how to live. They do it properly. I admire that. Earl St. John had originally been the manager of the Plaza in Lower Regent St. He was a Paramount man originally. Then he worked for Odeon Cinemas. Then John Davis put him in to supervise all productions at Pinewood where all production was to be concentrated. JD had to take over by this time.

RF: Did you have much dealings with him or was it always through his minions?

RWB: No, I didn't have much to do with him till much later, It would be five or six years before he began to make his presence felt in person. He got interested in it.

This was the aftermath of the '48 crash, cutting back and the bank debt and all the problems. I deeply regret the Rank Organisation went out of production. I believe it was a deep blow from which we've never really recovered. Margaret Lockwood was the star of this picture and she was a very big star at this time. She has star quality. I had first met her on *Dr.Syn*. We have a common birthday, are exact contemporaries. We have a common sense

of humour She likes funny jokes. She became quite a friend although I haven't seen her recently. She was wonderfully efficient as a movie star. In the costume pictures she'd have the most elaborate gowns and hairdos as soon as someone said cut, print, she'd disappear in what seemed about thirty seconds flat she would reappear and she would be in a neat white shirt and pair of slacks looking immaculate. I got on with her extremely well. She's a very reserved character. Whether she would have been a great actress if she'd spent more time in the theatre I don't know. She was certainly the sort of person ready to take on any challenge in a somewhat foolhardy way, she reminds me very much of Bette Davis. She got extremely irritated about one particular aspect of her life and I can sympathise, I know exactly how she felt. She was such a big star in this country, a film didn't need any titles. As far as the audience is concerned if the film is not a big success or they think the story was poor, they'd blame Maggie for it. Margaret Lockwood makes another dud was the way the critics used to go about it. It was most unfair because she had no control over the scripts. No control over who was going to direct or photograph it. She obviously expressed her wishes and to a certain extent they were listened to and everybody wanted to keep Maggie happy. But she only got what she wanted to a limited extent. At one time, she was thinking of forming her own production company doing it all. If she was going to get the blame, she might as well be responsible for it. It doesn't happen so much nowadays because the star system isn't so preponderant as it used to be.

RF: She was more than just a pretty face?

RWB: She was a very intelligent woman. Crosswords; Scrabble. We'd play Scrabble for hours and hours. Not in the studio. She loved puns and word jokes.

RF: What sort of influence did Earl St. John have on individual pictures going through?

RWB: His influence was largely in the scripting stage. He was the one who decided this film should be made and this one shouldn't.

RF: So, he was bringing his distributor's nose to it.

RWB: Yes, I know what the public will like. Then he would have to go to the next board meeting and get it agreed by them. I think in most instances they just rubber stamped it. Then his influence more or less stopped. He didn't see all rushes but he saw quite a lot of rushes. He probably had two or three pictures on the floor at once. He was only a vague presence. But I remember vividly at the Rank offices in South St, Earl had his office there and it was one of the bedrooms and the bed had been built up on a dais and he had his desk up there and he sat up there feeling I think rather silly. There was nowhere else to put the desk. He was a nice man and he tried his best for all of us. I remember some discussion about *Highly Dangerous*, "don't worry about this Hollywood thing, you're going to be a great director and we've all got great faith in you. But you're not the kind of fellow they want in Hollywood Forget it, it's not going to happen". He was being nice I think. I absolutely knew for stone certain from that moment that I was going to get that Hollywood contract. I don't why it was some kind of perverse thing. I thought he's wrong. I know he's absolutely wrong and it did happen.

RF: Had they offered you a long-term contract?

RWB: I don't think so.

RF: Did Earl St. John get involved in the cut?

RWB: I can't tell you because by then I'd gone. I just handed over a sort of fine cut to Tony Darnborough and when I did see the film by accident, I was very disappointed in what I saw.

RF: What were your memories of Pinewood at this stage (1950)

RWB: Memories are very vague because I only made that one picture which took six or seven weeks to shoot.

RF: Your comments about their knowing how to live was based on that experience or much later?

RWB: Much later because much later I was there for seven years. One of the big problems with *Highly Dangerous* was that it had to have an American co—star. We were into that again. The American co—star turned out to be a lion called Dane Clark. He was just delivering a stock leading man movie performance which was virtually nothing. He wasn't very

efficient. I think he fell in love with London. He also fell deeply in love with Jean Simmonds which was unrequited. He was a pillock I'm afraid. Marius Goring played the Belgravian heavy he was very heavy I'm afraid. I couldn't control him at all. It was a satisfactory run of the mill picture.

[They break for lunch]

RF: Hollywood calls.

RWB: I suppose looking back from this distance I was totally at sea.

RF: How did you get there?

RWB: By sea and then train. By that time, I had a wife and child of six weeks and this was very difficult for her. One didn't realise in those days the traumatic effect of childbirth on women. To take a new mother, first child, on this incredible joint was really quite an undertaking. I suppose it's just as well we didn't know what it would be like. I suppose one fell back on one's instincts and did what one could in a naive way. We sailed on the Queen Elizabeth and came back on the Queen Mary. It was a luxurious trip.

RF:A Cunarder, I did. Was this a culture shock at that time and coming out of austerity Britain onto a Cunarder bit was a culture shock.

RWB: A tremendous culture shock. I had a little experience of the culture shock before, because after I made *The October Man,* I got a curious letter from a man in Switzerland who was an expert on avalanches. He wanted to make a film, he'd seen *The October Man* and admired it. I went to Switzerland and I'd never forgotten — this was late 1946 — we'd got into the sleeper in day time, woke up the following morning in Basle with an enormous breakfast. White bread and black cherry jam. I'd never seen anything like it but even that did not prepare me for what was going to happen when I got to America. I have to tell you there were some aspects - and I realise this with hindsight - I had a very good friend who I met in the Army, Stephen Watts. Before the War and for some time after he was the Sunday Express theatre and cinema critic. He was a Scotsman, he came from Glasgow and I met him through a fellow who was in the AKS with me, Jack House, who became very famous later on with the Round Britain quiz programme. He was a Glaswegian of the absolute essence. Once the war was over he went back there and has been there ever since. He'll go 'round Scotland but won't go anywhere else. He was in the unit making training films. He had the acquaintance of Stephen who was a fellow Glaswegian. Stephen was in MI6 which was the counter-espionage. We never talked about that ever. He turned out to be an extremely genial and knowledgeable chap. We were very close and he did me one enormous favour. We were both bachelors and when the war was over he got back into civilian suits and was given two tickets for every first night which he had to attend so he took me along with him. So, for two years I had a crash course in every play and musical. I was at the first night of *Oklahoma* which was a sizzling occasion At the end the audience stood up and cheered. Stephen was a good friend. When I was sailing for America he was doing a column for the New York Times on the London theatre or cinema or whatever he liked to write about. He did a piece entirely about me and the fact I was going to be inflicted on Hollywood. This was a wonderful build up for my entrance. In it there were some remarks I didn't understand at the time about leaving austerity Britain.

It was only a few months before that that bread had been put on the ration. It hadn't been on the ration all through the war, now it was on the ration. The meat ration was cut. I was sailing away in my own particular world.. There was a certain feeling this was the rat leaving the sinking ship and I should have stayed in England. I should have devoted my talents to the good of the British cinema. Well the British cinema didn't have much to offer. As usual when people are offered a Hollywood contract they accept it and I went. It was a difficult voyage. We landed in New York where we met a lot of friends we'd made during the war and one was one of the big publicity people in the New York office. We were put in an enormous Cadillac, you've never seen such a car. We stopped at some traffic lights at an intersection. There were a couple of fellows leaning against a lamp post at the other side of the road and they looked at this car and one of than shouted out how does it feel to be rich and my friend pressed the button and the electric window went down and he leaned out and shouted great and he pressed the button and the window went up. I thought that's America. We were installed in the hotel. A great chum of his man, David Golding was Gary Merrill. He'd just made his first film in Hollywood. He'd made *All About Eve*. They were in New York for the opening night nothing would do but we'd have to appear for the opening night which was a sensational film. The upshot was Gary was going onto the coast by aeroplane but

Bette and her entourage was going by the one through coach which went the whole way. Normally you had to change trains in Chicago.

SIDE 10, TAPE 5

To that very day the Santa Fe Railroad and the New York Railroad were very reluctant to make any connection between themselves. You had to get out at one side of Chicago and go to the other end of Chicago to get into another train. But there was one coach which was put onto the Superchief [train] from New York where they shunted you around various sidings and eventually you ended up tacked onto the back end of the other train which was going to take you to the West.

RF: There was a famous ad attacking the American railroads which showed pigs and it said a hog could travel across the United States without changing trains but a person could not.

RWB: It was true. They clung to their traditions just as much as anyone else did even when they were outmoded. The first thing about the superchief out of New York was the dining car which was the Harvey service, absolutely impeccable, linen and cutlery and the whole thing and the food was absolutely marvellous and any portion would have fed three persons. We'd got very small stomachs us. We arrived in Los Angeles. I was dressed in a full suit a tweed overcoat and a hat and all I needed was a shirt and trousers. We were met by Sam Goldwyn Junior and his wife Jennifer and Alan Campbell and his wife Dorothy Parker.

RF: Were these friends from London?

RWB: Yes, but not Dorothy Parker. I'd never met her but Alan Campbell was here during the war. We saw a lot of him. He was a rascal and did a lot of naughty things but he was instrumental to introducing me to a vast number of acquaintances. He was an effective catalyst. I met him with Eric Ambler. Everything in my life really stems from Eric. An agent met me, George Chasen, a very grand fellow from MCA. He took care of all the baggage. Alan had found us a rented house to stay built on the side of the cliff you went downstairs to the bedroom. It was an upside-down house. It was on the fringe of old Hollywood.

I reported for work at Twentieth Century Fox. The first thing my agent did was to walk me round the lot which was exhausting. There was miles of it and we saw all these sheds full of the equipment they'd used for *Cavalcade*. They had [London][?]bus and taxi, and they'd built Trafalgar Square, they had it all still. It was stunning. I went on one or two of the stages but of course I didn't know, silly me, what I should have done is storm in there and say "I've got a wonderful idea fellows, let's make this film about whatever it is". I didn't have it so I was put in a position of waiting to tell me what to do.

RF: Had they signed you for a certain number of years or a certain number of pictures?

RWB: Three years. It was an optional contract.

RF: Were they paying you well?

RWB: Yes, I think so. Certainly, by British standards, they were paying me extremely well. But it was away from one's natural base and it takes a long time to settle down, get things organised on a proper economic basis. It was no more than enough. I wasn't being over-paid in that I was able to stack away a great sock of gold.

RF: Also, what went a long way in London didn't in a high living society in California.

RWB: Yes, you kept up a bigger front or had to try to do so. I always lived North of Sunset which I couldn't really afford to do. I should have lived South of the tracks and in a flat too. I always had a house. I enjoyed it and was glad I did it but it wasn't always wise or prudent. I don't know if I've ever been that.

RF: I'm curious if you ever had any kind of indoctrination talk from Lew Wasserman or any of the lads at LMCA?

RWB: No.

RF: That seems extraordinary. They just took their 10% and that was it.

RWB: Perhaps I was unbiddable. I was just unreceptive if they were feeding in any information.

RF: There was no a sizeable post-war British colony by this time? Simmons is out there.

RWB: No, they all followed me.

RF:  Compton Bennett.

RWB: Yes, he had gone there.

RF: Were you aware of a British colony?

RWB: Yes. I went there with letters of introduction but they were all to the old guard, the raj. This introduced me to Willie Bruce for instance.

RF: Were they prepared to let you in?

RWB: Yes. They received me and were very affable.

RF: You weren't regarded as an upstart newcomer?

RWB: No. Nigel Bruce was an affable duffer he played an affable duffer. There was a typical example of what we were talking about the American conception of the Englishman and what they expect. It would be much nicer if you supplied that expectation rather than be yourself. They had all read P.G Wodehouse and would say "toodle pip" and things like that. As far as the English colony was concerned, the only ones I had much contact with was Willie Bruce and his two daughters. As far as the general reception was concerned, like

when you came into any new town, you're a new face and so you're a curiosity and everyone wants to see you, find out about you and you're something to talk about so you get a pretty good run for your money when you first arrive. They couldn't have been nicer. Alan and Dottie Parker gave the most enormous party for me at which practically everybody appeared so we were launched. They all took pity on these poor starving Polish refugees from this horrible England. The English colony thought it was fashionable to be left wing. They were very keen on the Labour Government and socialism.

RF: Put names to that.

RWB: Certainly Willie. That was a bit of a surprise.

RF: I'd never heard that and it's certainly unexpected given that the House of Unamerican Activities was active at that time.

RWB: It was only just beginning.

RF: The House Committee had been operating for some time. McCarthy was just coming in.

RWB: I heard a lot more about him in 1952 and 53.

RF: Henry Hull, the actor, the old man, I was at his house in Connecticut around this time and his wife was Julia Fremont Hull. Her ancestor was General John Fremont who had opened up the West. She was very much aware of her ancestry and she was a staunch McCarthyite and made a vague protest in favour of freedom of speech and freedom of politics and Julia said "you wouldn't understand Mr Fowler, you're a foreigner". But there was Willie Bruce flying the red flag which does take me back a bit.

RWB: It was really quite funny in a dotty sort of way.

RF: Was he really as dotty as he played?

RWB: That's very difficult to say. He was an actor first of all which was a special category. Jokey and amusing and all he wanted to do was entertain. He certainly didn't want to get into any serious discussion about Mr Attlee or Mr.Who.

RF: There you were settling into Hollywood…

RWB: Yes, it was curious that anyone working for any of the studios seemed to run a club together and never spoke to the people at Metro or the people at Columbia or the people at Paramount or Disney. They all kept their separate enclaves. Robert Stevenson was at Disney so one ran with the studio you were at so I ran with the Fox people. There was Jean Negulesco and Henry Hathaway, all those guys.

RF: Let's start at the top Darryl Zanuck ran the studio.

RWB: He wasn't ready to see me. He was too busy. I stuck around for a week or two. It turned out I was having a few people in for drinks one evening and the phone went and it was Jay Lewis. I didn't know he was in Hollywood. I said come and have a drink. So, we came to this funny place which had a balcony which overlooked the garden which was a bit like the cliffs of Dover, it was straight down. I gave him a drink. At any rate, he said “I think I should tell you I’ve had a word at Twentieth Century Fox, I’ve put them right about a [few]things”. It didn't strike what he meant. I apologise for my naivety but there it is. I said “really”. Off he went back to England. I then found myself being quizzed about people, about the picture I’d made. Eventually there was a man called Alfred Hakim and he it was who stopped me on the lot one day and [the] curious thing about that picture, one of the things that struck Zanuck about it — they'd already got a copy even before it opened — he loved it, he said it was a great picture. In discussing the picture, he brought out the fact that the contrast between the location stuff and the studio stuff was beautifully handled. It was wonderful for a director to be able to show that contrast so beautifully. Then Jay Lewis had appeared and told them that he shot all the exteriors. The ground was cut from under my feet before I'd even started. From then on, I had to work as hard as I possibly could to prove myself and start all over again. There were all those doubts.

RF: Was Lewis that good a self-promoter that people believed him?

RWB: He was a good salesman and he was not incompetent, there were several things he could do extremely well. He turned up some wonderful stories. He did *Live Now Pay Later* a very much underrated film, a darn good picture with a splendid performance from Ian Hendry. Jay was unbelievably conceited. He was perfectly acceptable in his appearance and was well dressed. He was a little fat man and he wanted to be a tremendous womaniser. Later on, I was able to say on the lot openly that the famous Jay Lewis is the producer of a film which is being directed by Compton Bennett in England on which things got to such a pitch that the producer was fired off his picture and that has almost never happened. But after that he recovered himself and came up with another good script. I think he directed *The Baby and the Battleship*. Then Jay made one or two other pictures and gradually ran out of steam.

It's very difficult to prove a negative. I had quite a problem on my hands but the real problem was that I didn't understand what had happened so people would ask me strange questions and lead me into discussions but never say “son do you realise the realities of the situation and what can we do about it?” It was finally agreed that the subject to which I was most suited being an Englishman was to do a picture back in England which they were planning which Tyrone Power was going to be in and it was going to be a remake of *Berkeley Square*. Now if anyone says remake to me I go scatty because I’ve hardly ever seen a successful one. You're flogging a dead horse to start with.

Gregory Peck’s agent had discovered a little while before this the American government was very anxious to develop all their interests in the oil industry in the Middle East and they simply couldn't get enough American engineers to go there and start pumping this stuff out

of the earth. The Arabs weren't going to do this. They didn't even know what the stuff was about in those days. So, they said go over there, stay five years, all your money is paid in America and you don't pay any tax on it at all. It left a law in the statute book if an American worked abroad under certain circumstances which were very loose then everything he earned was tax free. You suddenly find Gregory Peck is interested in making a film in England. That's how it all started. Tyrone had got onto this one. There was one more picture he had to do and this was it. So, basically, nobody gave a goddam about the picture it was just an exercise which had to be gone through for legal reasons.

The subject itself was a fifth-rate carbon copy. It was all started with a short story called 'A Sense of the past' written by Henry James no less. That had been taken up by John L. Balderston and J.C. Squire had got together and made a play and then a film was made with Leslie Howard and Heather Angel. The screenplay had been written by Randle McDougall who was a very difficult character. I think he wanted to direct it and had been told he couldn't. I think it was intended as an intelligent device to get me back to England then I would be quietly dropped.

RF: They felt it had been a mistake.

RWB: Yes, I think so. Well I wasn't falling for that. I saw myself as being in Hollywood for three years. I didn't give it more than that. I never intended to stay. I did a lot of silly things like taking personal artefacts over there like furniture, complete folly but that might have given some people [the idea] I wanted to stay for ever but I didn't. It just wasn't me. I was too old. I was over thirty and when you're eighteen you go to America and it's wonderful and you stay there but later on I was too set in my ways and I didn't want to become a professional Englishman in Hollywood. There were a number of opportunities which were open to me and I refused all of them resolutely. Anyway, I landed back in England with this turkey which is what it was. I met Tyrone who was absolutely wonderful, a smashing person, a highly competent actor. Much better actor than anyone believed just because he was so good looking. He really was a wonderful looking fellow. So, we set about doing that at Denham. I only met Zanuck once or twice, talking about the script of this.

RF: Do you have distinct memories of Zanuck?

RWB: Very distinct. He was a very forceful personality, a very striking man. I think that many years later I did a picture in which Vincent Price appeared and we were talking about these days — [how]it all was and why we had never met before — and we got onto the subject of Zanuck. It quite surprised me but I thought about it after, and it was a very prescient remark, Vincent Price said he was a very common little man. Well I’m afraid that’s true but he was brilliant and the one thing you have to give-him as executive producer is that he really knew how to make a film and almost none of them do. He really could do it and he was a brilliant editor of films. I suppose that's how the dreary business of the creative producer came up, because all the other producers on the lot, his $4,000 a week lackeys were all trying to model themselves on him and recut the picture.

RF: I think the system had been established long before this.

RWB: Probably. He used to walk around with a polo mallet vaguely making strokes.

RF: How did he talk to you about the script?

RWB: There was hardly anything to say. Sol Siegel was the producer. He was a charming man and straight as a gun barrel and a first-class producer. He finished running MGM at one point. He said one day I'm going to take you to lunch so we got into the Cadillac and we rode out of back gate and about 500 feet up the road was Hillcrest Country Club which was created as a riposte to the Los Angeles Country Club which had a great claim to fame that it refused to have Douglas Fairbanks as a member because he was Jewish.

RF: It was two—fold, Jewish and show-business, but largely Jewish.

RWB: Hillcrest was founded by the Jews. We arrived there and in the entrance, was a huge round table which was for people who wanted to dine on their own or were not with a guest. We were seated at this table. There was Danny Kaye, George Burns, Jack Benny, one of the [?], there were about eight brilliant comedians I've never had such a brilliant lunch in my life. Groucho looked at me and then looked at Sol Siegel and said how long have you been here. I said ten days. He said it didn't take you long to get mixed up with the sharpest guy in town, meaning Sol. They loved me because they were going to reinvent me as the typical Englishman. I was Bertie Wooster. I played up to that, what else was I going to do? So, he was known on the lot as the elder statesman because he was very grand, very dignified, always impeccably dressed, beautifully dressed, everything was immaculate and he ran his office very quietly.

I remember Nunnally Johnson too. He was a great fellow. Sol was very kind to me and he said to me after the picture was made you're OK son, you've just got to learn to protect yourself in the clinches". Even now I didn't know what he meant.

We landed in England. We had a backup team in England known as the Fox office which was in the old Korda office at the corner of Piccadilly. It was run by a fellow called Freddy Fox who was not related to William Fox who founded 20th Century Fox but he was the brother of Mrs. Darryl Zanuck, Virginia. He's married a wonderful girl called Myrtle and they were wonderful fun and didn't take life too seriously. But the people in the office, the *eminence grise* was Bob Dearing. It was awkward.

I take you back to my story when I visited Shepherd's Bush and Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat took me down to the pub to have a drink in the evening. This was before the middle of the war and bombs were dropping and things were going downhill rapidly. It was a very difficult, sad time. They were very nice. Bob Dearing was in the pub and I said hello and he turned his back on me. So, I'd forgotten all that really, it was six years previously. But he was a difficult character to say the least of it. Anyway, I was in the saddle and he had to be wary of me. The boot was now on the other foot but I was very busy with other matters. One

of the other matters was the most unfortunate girl I've ever come across called Connie Smith. She came to a bad [end].if anyone ever did.

Sometime during the peace someone made a film with Hedy Lamarr called *Ecstasy* in which she ran about naked and everyone thought this was scandalous and dreadful and everybody wanted to see it. To promote that or another picture in Ireland they set up a competition to find the girl who most resembled Hedy Lamarr, the black hair, huge violet eyes, the peaches and cream skin. Constance Smith won the price which was that she would be given at a dinner in Dublin by an eminent British film producer and she would go to England to have a film test. She was a country girl who knew nothing. The producer turned out to be John Boulting. She was met when she came to London Airport, she was given this test and got a small part in a film Jean Negulesco made all about Queen Victoria with Irene Dunne playing the part. She was a little Irish tweeny who scuttles about Buckingham Palace. She had about two lines and that was it. Suddenly Zanuck and everybody else are pressing me to have this girl to play the lead. It was impossible. There was no question whether she could do it or not. She couldn't. She had no training. She had a complete false impression given to her, the kind of idea you get from reading too many fan magazines. There are far too many girls and men around whose idea of what we do is formed entirely on what they read in the newspapers which turns out to be disastrously wrong. So, there was tremendous difficulty. Zanuck by this time was in Paris and we had endless conversations about this I remember. We went over to Paris, Sol and I. It was a junket as far as Sol was concerned. We stayed at the Ritz. There was one curious incident when the phone rang. It was Billy Wilder. They knew each other well. What are you doing, etc. Sol explained he had this English director with him, what's his name, ginger haired fellow, I know him, I'd him at Eric's house during the War. He'd been over, he was in the army and doing something for the American army. He remembered meeting me. I'd never been so flattered in all my life. He must have a photographic memory.

The upshot was that Tyrone Power was never going to play with that girl and finally we said sorry it's not on, the poor girl was heart- broken and she turned very ugly and said wait till I see Zanuck I'll tell him. I said you do that darling but it's a mistake, it's not going to do you any good or anybody else. We did tests and we did costume fittings and everything with her but it was hopeless. The alarm bells rang and Hollywood came to the rescue and supplied Ann Blyth. She was marvellous and just slotted into it and did it beautifully for what it was worth. It was really a pretty weak story which was outdated, didn't work, so no real good was going to come of that. We made it and took it back to Hollywood with the cut.

SIDE 11 TAPE 6

RWB: Zanuck looked at the work print. He didn't have much to say about it.
He accepted it for what it was. It was then to be brought back to England to have the music done by William Alwyn who did some lovely music.

RF: Fox were quite serious about production here for two reasons. I suppose blocked funds and the quota which they had to satisfy. But it was frozen funds more than anything.

RWB: Yes I think so.

RF: The budgets were quite generous.

RWB: Yes. It was made at Denham. I had a very famous cameraman, Georges P*é*rinal. He was one of the most disagreeable men I ever came across in my life. He was a boor. He contributed absolutely nothing. He just sat back, pointed a few lamps and that was that.

RF: You weren't happy with his work?

RWB: His work was fine.

RF: He had been one of the greats.

RWB: When I had him, he was bored and he was boring everybody. He'd done everything he was ever going to do. We just didn't get on. He contributed nothing and he accused me of contributing nothing. I was struggling as hard as I could. It was the first film I'd made in colour. It was Technicolor, it was three-strip with the camera about the size of a minibus. It looked beautiful.

RF: The operators deserved medals.

RWB: How they did it I don't know, it's amazing they did crane shots with the bloody thing. Then it was back to Hollywood and what do I do next if anything. I think I had begun to develop some friends at court. I think Sol firmly believed I had a rough deal the work I'd done was at the very least satisfactory. Ty was a friend. I'm sure he spoke his piece.

RF: You seemed to have a lot of ups and downs at this stage. Do you think it was a personality thing? I don't think you went out of your way to offend people. Was it part of your manner the executives took exception.

RWB: I'm the last person to know that. I didn't know if I did. I'm perfectly willing to accept if I did.

RF: Could it have been that your focus was on the picture you were unaware of studio politics?

RWB: Totally unaware.

RF: So, you stepped on toes in the course of making pictures. Did you have a row with Zanuck?

RWB: I never got to know him well enough to have a row.

RF: You showed him the cut and he like it.

RWB: Yes

RF: He didn’t recut it?

RWB: No. There was nothing to recut. It was perfectly straightforward. It had been given a modern framework but it was still the story of the fellow standing on the doorstep of Berkeley Square and there's a flash of lightning and he's back in the seventeenth century.

RF: I don't remember the film at all. Just about that same time I did it on television with Dicky Greene and Grace Kelly no less. And it must have been exactly at that point. I remember the series very clearly, we were doing one hour shows every other week and they were all plays for which the film rights had been sold but not the television rights and we fed live stations only, they were not even kinescoped and we did some extraordinary things.

RWB: Zanuck finally said “OK we’ll go ahead with you. This is Julian Blaustein who is going to be the producer” and he had an assistant called William Blume who had come from the story department of Columbia. I think they both had, they were both very old mates. Julian was one of those very well read, slightly professorial Americans and we were going to make a picture based on a book called 'Mischief' by a well-known American thriller writer called Charlotte Armstrong. This was the story of a suburban American couple who came up to big city for the annual company banquet. The hotel liftman recommends his niece as a babysitter for their daughter. It turns out the girl is slightly mentally unstable. She’s an unattractive orphan who dotes on a pilot who's killed in an air crash and she refuses to accept the situation. A man in a room opposite sees her through a window, sees her and asks if he can come over. She agrees and then becomes hysterical when the child gets in the way of the date. We're told Marilyn Monroe is going to play the part. Anyone farther removed from it you can't imagine. Who got the idea, to this day I don't know. There were a number of casting reasons apart from her appearance — we tried to make her look dowdy. It was impossible and the more dowdy we made, her the sexier she got — but she was unstable.

RF: This was her first Fox contract

RWB: It was her first starring role. It was billed as Richard Widmark and Marilyn Monroe in. She had been around about 10 years and she had been in about a dozen pictures. She'd been moved on from pillar to post all round Hollywood. She wasn't insane but she wasn't sane either. She was unique because she was a sport, an oddity, because of this imbalance between one or the other. She never behaved irrationally, she never behaved rationally. I think in her way she was brilliant. I adored her from the very word go. I was eating out of her hand. I thought she was wonderful. She kept on saying to me “will I be a star?” I said “there will be no question you‘ll be a star, an international star at that”. I think that in a funny way she was the most determined person I've ever come across. She was determined she was going to crack it. She was driven and obsessed by this ambition. She’d do damn near anything to get it. But she wasn't ruthless, she wasn’t cruel, she wasn’t unkind. Of course

she picked up all kinds of most unfortunate ideas for achieving this objective. For instance, the obsession with Stanislavski who had as much to do about acting as that coffee pot.

RF: Already?

RWB: Oh yes. She had the books under her arm, An Actor Prepares and My Life in Art. She was obsessed with this stuff because she was trying to protect herself against her incapacity because she was not capable of being an actress. Once she got into the category of movie which really suited her like *Bus Stop* and *How to Marry a Millionaire* then she was away and there was no stopping her.

RF: Was she as troublesome to direct as she later became?

RWB: The short answer is yes but the long answer is much more helpful. First problem was as far as I'm concerned was that there was on the lot a charm school like the Rank Charm School for young actors and they would be brought in and given 50/60 dollars a week living expenses and they were in stock [company]; they were allowed to play one-line bits otherwise. They had this school of acting run by somebody called Natasha Leitesz who was from the [Max]Reinhardt School in Berlin, the Berliner Ensemble and all that. I had to stop Marilyn at one point from reading a line of dialogue with a German accent. She'd learnt it parrot fashion from Natasha. I said "you're not playing a German, come on". One very peculiar thing was during the course of this she was associated with a large number of different kinds of people. I never saw one of them exchange words with her without touching her, rather like the Rolls Royces at motor shows which have finger marks all over them and they have to repaint it. She had that animal magnetism.

RF: Was she available?

RWB: I don't know. There was talk of Joe Schenk.

RF: There was also Johnny Hyde, her agent.

RWB: I didn't know of his existence till many years later. I suppose she regarded that as part of the Hollywood system which it was.

RF: She didn't come on to you?

RWB: Oh no. Perhaps I was too innocent.

RF: I don't think there's any doubt people in the stock company were there for Zanuck.

RWB: He used to get his secretary to order them up every afternoon. I don't know what her life was. To the extent I could get to her I got on very well with her. I didn't get on with Miss Leitesz because she was always on the set interfering. She would takes all the time. If she felt she hadn't got it right she would blow the tape deliberately. She wasn't trusting not to print that one but to go on with another one which was an old trick. You never hear of it these days. She was a lot craftier and a lot greedier than people thought, than I thought.

Dick Richards was the 'Daily Mirror' film correspondent and he was on a Hollywood visit. I introduced him to her and I said the next great international star he didn't believe me. Hedined out on that ever since. He was given the scoop and refused to believe it. Nonsense he said. After the dreadful experience of the interference on *Morning Departure* by Jay Lewis. I've told you I went from picture to picture gradually going downhill at the beginning but it doesn't mean to say there wasn't talk about other pictures and my name was obviously discussed and dropped and somebody else did it but I remember once or twice it was fashionable to have someone called the dialogue director because it was thought directors were technicians and didn't know about actors and dialogue.

RF: That was a hangover from the introduction of sound.

RWB: Exactly. So: I got a bee in my bonnet about interference, coaches, dialogue directors and all that. I was not going to take kindly to Miss Leitesz. She looked upon herself as the sole owner and proprietor of all the copyright in Miss Monroe. That was going to be her career and it was for quite some time.

RF: Then later came Stella Adler doing exactly the same thing.

RWB: Yes and doing immense harm.

RF: Interestingly Monroe didn't trust her director who was working for the picture rather than for her. She seems to want someone standing there representing her interests.

RWB: We talked about this earlier with Katharine Hepburn saying she loved working with George Cukor because he could be relied upon to represent her interests. You find nowadays an actor who has got the whole thing exactly worked out and the whole thing's set in concrete. You can't change a thing and he's probably right so just let him get on with it. A lot of these young people don't expect any help from the director. The directors, especially in television are so poor they don't get anything from them anyway. They've give up hoping. With the *Irish R.M*. the cast rumbled straightaway I'm an actor's director and so the trust was complete and immediate, instant delivery. If I said I want you to stand on your head for this one, OK, anything. But directors vary. Actors go from director to director all over the shop. Some wizard comes in whose done three commercials, is flavour of the month. They're not going to put themselves in that man's hands, by instinct. So they have to fend for themselves and they become director proof. In an ideal world, the director is so bloody good that the actors all sit and wait and say what do you want me to do sir.

RF: Or the actors are so good, the director has nothing to do.

RWB: No that couldn't happen. Because the director is the one who is making the picture.

RF: But there is a school of directing, again I come back to John Huston whose theory was do it, and Billy Wyler too, they'd only tell people if they were doing wrong, they never interposed themselves into the actor's consciousness.

RWB: But in a subtle way they knew what they were doing.

RF: Anne Bancroft was also in *Don't Bother to Knock*. The first thing she ever did. I've developed quite a collection over the years of people who've made a debut with me. She's one. Patrick McGoohan's another. All sorts of people who just did three or four lines. She had quite a big part actually and was very good.

RWB. You gave her her first start in movies, I did in television at the same time. I'm working in New York. Her name was Anne Bhrmer [?]. [Anne Bancroft, real name Anne Maria Louisa Italiano]. And we fired her because she was so bad. I didn't, the producer did. I didn't have the heart to, I said let's try make it work. He said no, properly so because our resources were so slender. Rod Steiger was in it.

RF: She was under contract because Gregory Peck was going to make but never did a film in Italy based on the Girl in the Via Flaminia, a very famous novel of its day, a Madame Butterfly type thing, American soldier and an Italian girl. They tested dozens of girls for this part and there was her test and the casting director said I want you to look at the test of this girl. She might be right for what you want. She wasn't really right for it. It was a much too sophisticated role for her at the time. The script was by Dan Taradash who almost immediately did the script for a picture from a famous novel, *From Here to Eternity*, so he was a writer of considerable stature and ability. He was brilliant and one of the things he did with this — it was a rare picture in that it observed the unities - in the time and space allotted to it. It all takes place inside a hotel and all you needed was the ground floor which is the entrance, the reception desk and the cafe bar/restaurant bit. And somewhere up on the sixth floor you have the bedrooms which are built, like a lot of American hotels, [around] a quadrangle. We only needed part of one bedroom on the far side and on the nearside we needed the bedroom and the sitting room and bathroom, it was a small suite. It was a very ordinary hotel. It wasn't meant to be very grand or pretentious. It could have been any local city hotel anywhere in America. So it was obviously possible to build all those sets as complexes all on the one stage which was done and it was done at Western Avenue Studios which was the old Fox Studios in Hollywood which was still maintained and still going strong. Indeed the man on the next stage to mine was John Ford. We had both the sets ready built and dressed before we started and we had a week's rehearsal. We were able to walk the sets with the cameraman. Of course, in those days it was a studio picture so you had almost a complete crew.

RF: Was it still a case of the script was delivered and the director assigned or did you have any input into the casting, the script?

RWB: A bit of both really. If you had a lot to say about it there was always someone to listen, firstly your producer, to what extent it was pursued at that level and to what extent you could push it up to Zanuck's level was something in this case didn't occur because Taradash had produced an almost fireproof script. Every line of dialogue was in place and there was very little you would want to argue with. Either you liked the subject or you didn't. I liked

the subject, I thought it was alright, it was a kind of suspense thriller but it had a lot of character to it and I was quite happy with it. The only thing none of us were happy with was the casting of Marilyn Monroe and we begged on our knees — Julian Blaustein went to Zanuck — and he was absolutely adamant she must play this. When you look at her history you can see that his casting was right because it's the casting of a girl who's not absolutely barmy but is unstable psychologically, is desperately unhappy particularly about her childhood and her lost lover, all of which lined up with Marilyn's own history. You can see those reasons. It was wrong casting because she didn't have the appropriate personality to go with it on the screen. She was far too good-looking for the part, you didn't believe a thing. No girl who looked like Marilyn would have the disasters the character in the film had.

I'm going on because it's very important for me to establish none of us wanted Marilyn. It was against the grain to have her. Once we did have her, and the ship had sailed we all rallied round and we all did our best. There's no question about that. We had to work all the harder. I was helped quite considerably by a remarkable man who photographed the film, Lucien Ballard and indeed I did two more pictures in Hollywood and both of them were photographed by him. He was the only cameraman I worked with out there. He was extraordinarily handsome. Tall, dark and handsome. A devil with the girls apparently. He was known as a bit of a maverick, a lot of people didn't want to have him but I got on famously with him, he got on famously with me. We used to pull each other's leg and he was no doubt a first-rate cameraman. Later on, he did some distinguished pictures. He became quite sought after. He was sought after by people who knew him. He wasn't blacklisted but he wasn't the flavour of the month. He used to jolly Marilyn along. He was very, very helpful. If your cameraman is on your side the crew follows that. They take their attitude from the cameraman. I had a charming assistant director called Ely Dunn who had first came to Hollywood from New York as William Fox's secretary. The whole unit was very good indeed. The art director was Richard Irvine. It was my first introduction to Alfred in the music department. He was wonderful. He was very funny indeed. He played a tune. Then he'd say to himself, here's what we'll do, we'll extend it, this gives it class.

Fox was run, like they all were in those days, by department. There was the production department which was huge which supervised everybody else's department. Then the art department had a whole building to itself.
Lyle Wheeler was the boss man, and his name went on everything regardless.

Then on each film he would allocate an art director. In my case it was Richard Irvine who did a lovely job. He brought the whole mood of the film. It was a rather boring hotel slightly shabby. Not dirty but a depressing commercial hotel. He had to submit everything to Lyle and once it was passed we got on with it. The same thing with Alfred Nevanan. He had a much younger brother called Lionel and there was a marvellous man who was the chorus master. Alfred Nevanan did the music for all Fox pictures. On each one there was somebody else to carry it through. But Alfred was instrumental in plotting out the title music and general ideas for it and one of the characters in it — did all her work in about four or five days and she was terrific — Ann Bancroft was a part—time cabaret singer who did a number in it. I'm pretty sure we had a doubled voice, we didn't use her voice. But there we got a

wonderful break because we got a very lovely tune called Manhattan, and Alfred says “we own the copyright, it will cost you twenty-five dollars, this great big hit”. That was fun. It had been in some earlier musical movie they made and so they owned it.

We were able to shoot in continuity because we had everything built. This only happened to me once more. Really you have to be lucky with the shape of the thing, normally we shoot totally out of continuity, these days more than ever. I think that was a help to Marilyn. She was always later. She couldn't get on the set before 11.15 in the morning and everybody else had been there since eight.

RF: Was this the middle of her career?

RWB: No, it was still quite early. She had been in about ten pictures including *All About Eve* So she wasn't unused to studio work. But I thought at the time it was a species of stage fright. She was so desperate about being a star. I’ve seen the same desperation in some of the tennis players such as Connors and McEnroe where if they don’t win it's the end of the world, an obsession which I don't envy. It’s very nice to be top dog for a few years but I don't envy them a bit. In a way it's a mixed blessing, if not a curse. Marilyn herself was very charming and I adored her, we all did. The only people she seriously annoyed were the production manager, who was a toughie of the old school called Charlie Hall who couldn't stand her because of her being late and untidy. Lucien liked her and did his best for her. He made her look wonderful. The actors had the worst of it because she could hardly ever get through a take and no two takes were alike. They hardly ever knew if the cue was coming, if it was coming at all and they had to wait there with a bland expression of some kind of interest on their faces while they waited for her to get on with it which resulted in a lot of close ups and multiple copies of takes, picking bits out of here and bits out of there which is alright but it is nice to play a scene, even if in rehearsal, a longshot master scene just to get them all used to it and to polish the timing, decide the moves, lock it all down and then go in and do the detailed work. I thought at the time a lot of it was stage-fright.

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We were lucky to have Richard Widmark because he was and still is an extremely good actor. He came from New York and Chicago originally. He had been a radio actor to begin with. He had by this time a reputation for being a dreadful villain who pushed old ladies downstairs accompanied by an hysterical laugh. He'd got quite bored with doing this and he was angry with the studio and when the chance came to do this picture he was so eager to be in it that he agreed much against his will to be in a short story picture which was going to be made almost immediately after or even in parallel. It was one of those magazine pictures with three or four short stories he was going to be in one of them again, he was going to have to play a villain with a [?] laugh he agreed to do it just once more once on condition that he could be in this picture that I was doing. The reason he wanted to be in was that he was going to play a sympathetic character for the first time. It was heavily characterised, it wasn't a straightforward leading man role. But he was the hero and he did try and save the girl. Having done all that and then when Marilyn turns up two and a half hours late he naturally got a bit tense about it. On Christmas Eve I went to Marilyn in her little caravan and she gave a magnum of Champagne. I said can I sit down because I've got news for you. I had dismissed the coach. This was a ludicrous protest on my part. I don't suppose I would bother if I was stuck in a similar situation now but I really did get upset about the continual interference. It just drove me mad. I said to Charlie, the production manager what can I do about this. He said you can fire her. I said I can? He said sure you can. He said you leave it to me I'll tell her. He was thoroughly enjoying this. It didn't mean a thing because three weeks later when we finished shooting Miss Leitesz was back inside Marilyn's handbag and was for a long, long time afterwards. Incidentally, there was one thing also which crossed my mind at the time, you may think it's a bit of vanity but it has happened that a director when he makes a picture who from that picture gets star rating, quite often that director carries on with that performer and becomes that star's director, for instance there was Clarence Brown at Metro made about seven films was Garbo. The thought did cross my mind if I got on great with Marilyn it might have led to several pictures with her. But I dismissed the idea because I thought why should I do that because I want to do films with a number of actors, not just restrict myself to one only.

RF: Was the studio pleased with the picture?

RWB: Yes, very. Marilyn was fine in it except at the end where she's hysterical and she has to cut her wrist with a razor blade rushes down to the lobby. She didn't match up to that. At the time it was beyond her, would probably always have been.

RF: How did you cope with her insecurities during the course of the production?

RWB: Well, by being as comforting as I could and offering as much encouragement as I could and saying well done Marilyn even when it was only three quarters good hoping you could get something better in the next take or the next close up.

RF: There wasn't much you could do about the situation?

RWB: No, I was locked into it and it was a case of making the best of what you have. Another aspect of her whole career is that she had the misfortune of never meeting anyone during the whole course of her career she thought she could trust. That was something to do with her that she couldn't give trust because she had given trust earlier on and had been abused and pushed around and I think there was a lot of that and she closed up and wouldn't trust anyone. I feel to this day I could have done more with her if only she had trusted me.

RF: Among directors you weren't unique?

RWB: Not everybody suffered. Some of them wouldn't waste their time. Perhaps it was handy I was round there and Zanuck said what I going to do with him and discovered everyone else had turned down the idea of making this picture. She had a terrible reputation for being a nuisance and being a boor and being thick, none of which was quite true. They didn't understand her. What happened to her in the end — she was almost the last one Hollywood managed to destroy and they did destroy her in my opinion. It was the Hollywood system which was absolutely implacable and if you arrived five minutes late you got a note from the front office. There were several people who got around this like Elizabeth Taylor who would have none of it — from the age of sixteen she was telling them what she was going to do and she was right. Any number of people went under through the system.

RF: Did the front office perceive her to be a star of great magnitude?

RWB: No.

RF: Why were they so patient with her?

RWB: They weren't patient. We made the film on schedule and so they had nothing to grumble about and it was a cheap film to make with only two sets to build and an inexpensive cast. So, there was nothing the front office would get their fingers on to pillory her with but I often wonder how many people turned it down before I was assigned to it. It turned out to be a roaring success. Her agent rang up three weeks after it had been released and it had already made a million dollars profit. They were all over the moon over it. But something else had happened to me in the meantime which rather took the shine off that.

Having finished that one Julian Blaustein came to me and said Roy we have this picture we want to make in Africa. It was based on a book White Witch Doctor and it was an autobiographical novel by a rather amateur writer about her adventures. She was a medical missionary in West Africa, the Belgian Congo, about 1908 and she had some curious adventures with the natives. Very, very primitive in those days because there were almost no white people at all. In fact, it had only just been taken over by Prince Leopold of Belgium. The point about the character was that if ever you saw a star part for Margaret Lockwood this was it. It was perfect. It was a charming piece and in those days, there hadn't been many pictures with wild animals. The producer of this picture was going to be Otto Lang.

Originally, he won a gold medal at the Olympics for skiing. He met Zanuck at Sun Valley and was brought onto the payroll as a producer. So, we were to go to Africa to start doing all the backgrounds. Again, I think it was a case nobody else wanted to go and they were right. I was there for four months. I had a three-strip Technicolor camera from England. Shooting in the jungle with an instrument of that kind was just impossible. The natives, as they were still called in those days, when they were made up in their war paint, you looked through the viewfinder and they just weren't there because of the camouflage and it was so dark. The weather was incredibly depressing. It was nothing like what you'd expect when you see South Africa for instance which has a climate as clear as a bell. The sun shines twelve hours a day. Up in the Congo it's not the same. It's dull, overcast almost all the time, that's when it's not raining buckets.

RF: Nobody had bothered finding that out in advance?

RWB: No Otto had sold the idea on the basis of a wonderful place which existed and a tribe called the Buganda which was North Congo by Stanleyville and this village was remarkable because the king lived in the middle and the village was designed as a series of concentric circles. The idea was to have chases and battles inside a maze. When we got there, the village didn't exist. It hadn't existed since living memory so what little research had been done turned out to be useless in any case and I got angrier and angrier and I just went on trying to shoot backgrounds and trying to stage scenes and native dances and all this kind of stuff and eventually called a halt and brought the whole thing back to Hollywood.

RF: Did you have a British crew?

RWB: Mainly. The production manager was a lady who became very famous, Eva Monley, came originally from Rhodesia. [IMDB has her birthplace as Berlin, as Eva Sachs. DS.] I had a few Americans, an American cameraman, Harry Jackson, who was the most boring slob I've ever come across in my life. He came from Metro. He wasn't a Fox cameraman at all. I think he'd only taken the job because he was broke. There was a camera operator known as Lou Conkle. He was known as Uncle Conkle. He was charming and a delightful man, a hard worker and did everything he could possibly do. I also had an art director who was a great tower of strength. He had to build what the research said was there and wasn't. In those days, very few of the natives spoke French and even fewer spoke English. There were one or two Belgian administrators. The place was unbelievably primitive. We had no principals there, just doubles and they didn't know who they were doubling. One day it would be Tyrone Power, the next Gary Cooper who was a foot taller. It was a shambles. I was the patsy and it was during this I got the letter from Hollywood telling me about the success of *Don't Bother to Knock* but I wasn't there to enjoy it or even exploit it. The absent are always blamed, as the Romans [?] said.
I was a damned fool ever to go. By the time I came back I was not well. You dare not drink anything, you even cleaned your teeth in bottled water. Everything was flown in from Brussels. I had a terrible mishap on the way. I decided I wanted to go by train to New York because I had a lot of flying later and didn't want to do any more. I stayed there a couple of

days while they got me on a train to London. Then I had to connect with a plane which left Brussels on Thursday morning once a fortnight. I arrived on the Tuesday. I settled into a hotel and I was wakened about three o'clock in the morning by the police. I was marched to the police station. Then I had to wait so the inspector of police could deal with me - he was asleep and wasn't going to get up until six! It was a case of mistaken identity. There was another Baker born on the same date as I was and they'd seen it in my passport and they thought I was him. His name was Robert and he was born in Brighton. It was very upsetting indeed. I didn't know how to handle it and I couldn't telephone anybody at three in the morning. I hadn't even got the name of the Fox representative who met me off the train never mind his telephone number. Eventually they were satisfied they got the wrong fellow so I was allowed to go back to the hotel. I told the hotel manager he said it was an old trick which they learnt from the Germans, arrest someone in the middle of the night and then say there's only a sixty dollar fine to pay. They had said it to me and I'd changed some money at the desk but it stuck in my gullet to give them the sixty dollars. I wasn't in a good mood about any of it.
When I got back to Hollywood I was thoroughly exhausted and very bitter about the whole thing. I said who are we going to have in the lead. It turned out to be Susan Hayward. She wasn't going to have any of this documentary stuff and making it real. Robert Mitchum was going to be the white hunter. There's no white hunter in the book at all. I just got more ill and eventually I said I don't think I can do this. I'm sure Miss Hayward didn't want me so I was allowed to be ill, stay at home, kept on the payroll and Henry Hathaway inherited it. When I got better I had lunch one day in the commissary and I was coming down the steps as Henry Hathaway was going up. He was in the middle of shooting this thing. He took one look at me and said "next time I'm going to get ill". It was a turkey. It was a run of the mill "Jungle Jim" picture. It had a lot of things going for it but it was a disaster as far as I was concerned.

Then there was the question of what to do next and a picture came up with Gary Merrill. My family and his family had chummed up by then and we were quite friendly. Bette was very shocked. She was pro—British. Did I tell you she lent me a house? By the time we met again after the premiere of All About Eve, I'd been back in England to make *I'll Never Forget You* then I made the Marilyn Monroe picture and then I went to Africa. When I came back to Hollywood I'd been renting the house and I continued renting the house but the landlord had put somebody else in and was taking double rent and refused to get rid of them when I came back so I'd been cheated of a lot of money. There was nothing I could do about it. I tried lawyers but it was a waste of time. Bette was very shocked about this and thought it was an insult and thought anyway that anyone coming from England should be treated properly. She was very indignant and at the time she was going to New York for at least six months to be in a review and Gary was going with her so she gave me her house. She said just pay the pool man which was Twenty-five dollars a month. Renting a house of that sort even in those days was well over a thousand dollars a month. It was a wonderful gesture. She was a funny lady but she was so New England and was shocked that this could happen to anyone never mind anyone she knew. It was her way to help me over in style. Gary left his car so I had two cars. It was very generous indeed. Then all that was

over and the next picture was a picture about a drunk which probably appealed to Zanuck's sense of humour casting Gary in it. He was a heavy drinker. I wouldn't say he was a drunk. I don't think he got to the stage where he had to take a cure. Not that sort of alcoholic but he was a heavy drinker and when he was drinking heavily he was inclined to get a little obstreperous and I think that led to the breakup of the marriage with Bette because some of the rows were pretty awful and it was very embarrassing to be there with them. It wasn't by any means all her fault. Gary was a genuine New York stage actor. He spent a lot of time in radio. He had a wonderful voice, indeed after he left Hollywood he made a fortune doing voice—overs. He was a nice fellow, very funny, great fun, firmly left of centre in his views and very upset around this time over the House of Unamerican Activities Committee. I remember Gary had a book by Howard Fast called Spartacus and Gary got a whole load of copies and got Fast to sign them. You had to pay a premium for a signed copy and the premium went to the defence to help people who had got stuck in this evil nonsense.

RF: Sane people suffered terribly from this "nonsense".

RWB: Some people came out of it very badly. This was Gary, happy-go— lucky and a good egg. Very old bean. We made this picture. It had Linda Darnell who was delightful. She had very little to do. It also had in it as a comparative newcomer to Hollywood, Hildegarde Knef who was smashing. She was a sort of latter day Dietrich. The film was called *Night without Sleep*. It was a book by Elick Moll and a man called Frank Partos who was a stock writer on the lot and was allocated to Elick Moll and the two of them worked together on producing a script. The producer was Robert Bassler. It was a nice little picture. It was never going to make anybody's reputation. It was just the run of the mill picture. You began to realise studios made the pictures and once you got the job it was the easiest and laziest existence. No wonder everyone got atrophied and lapsed into a semi coma. All you had to do was push a few buttons and everything happened.

RF: This was the time the studio system was on its way to collapsing.

RWB: Yes. That was one of the last of that sort of movie because [Spiros]Skouras had been to Paris and some ingenious person there showed him this wonderful lens called CinemaScope which made the pictures look as if you were looking through the rear window of a Buick. Somebody once worked out the ideal scene, the girl who's ill in bed so she's flat, the door opens and Toulouse Lautrec walks in leading a poodle on a long lead. It was terrible but they were so worried about television which was making its first impact. They were looking for a way of beating it and the solution was to make the screen bigger. So, CinemaScope made the screen bigger. They were going to make this wonderful picture called *The Robe*. Everybody was going to be in it. Enormous and grand.

I'd quietly got on with business. I'd maintained my relationship with Julian Blaustein, William Bloom. I discovered that Bloom had got a very good short story. It had been printed in a magazine and it was by a writer called Francis Cockrell. I got this out of William and read it and thought this could be a very good small picture. It would never be a big picture but I

could really do something with this. It was the first time in my Hollywood experience I looked forward to doing a film. Eventually it was called *Inferno*. The title of the short story was Waterhole which nobody was going to put on a marquee. It was *Inferno* because it was all about heat and the desert and Zanuck had the inspiration, he suddenly lit up like a firecracker because nobody could come up with a really good title. He said I know, *Inferno*, that's it and we own the title. *Inferno* was a picture which William Fox had made in the silent days about Dante's Inferno. One of the reasons he made it besides the class, the prestige, was that in one circle of hell a lot of ladies were floating around diaphanously dressed indeed. This caused a furore.

It was decided because there was a certain amount of scope in this story that we'd shoot it in 3D. A special rig was made, a big base plate about as big as a desk and you'd put two cameras on it, one pointing straight at the scene, the other at right angles to camera A, camera B was shooting into a faintly silvered piece of glass which was placed at 45 degrees in front of camera A. Therefore, if you moved camera B closer or further away you could vary the distance between the eyes. It was very cumbersome to carry about. You couldn't snatch things with it. You had to stage things fairly carefully. The other attractive thing about it for me was that we were to go in the desert to shoot the whole picture, nothing in the studio. Not that I wanted to get away from the studio but I'd never been in the desert before. I found it a remarkable, stimulating experience. We finished up in Apple Valley in the Mojave Desert which was a housing estate which had been created after the war for veterans to grow apples.
[Anecdote about a local rancher.] [Not transcribed, apparently]

We shot the picture. Rhonda Fleming was absolutely delightful. She took the whole thing with a sense of humour. It was agreed between us that I would look after the acting if she looked after the face.

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One of the most attractive thing about the story apart from encompassing the desert which is very much a factor in the story, the point of the story is that he is Howard Hughes, say, a rich eccentric and thoroughly spoiled from the age of three months and now he's about forty-five and he's a wife who's very pretty, slightly tarty but he likes her. He's used to having a number of buttons to push or a number of people to run around doing whatever he wants them to do. He goes off onto an expedition into the desert led by a mining engineer. On the way there, the wife who is bored by the husband casts an eye on the engineer and they begin an affair. In the desert the millionaire's horse shys, and he hurts his ankle. The wife and the lover go back and are supposed to order a helicopter to fetch him. On the way, back it occurs to them that if they go back slowly the husband will be dead by the time help arrives. I had one character alone on the screen with no dialogue. It was a fascinating situation for me to deal with. I think the idea was used in an Italian picture *Umberto D*. I had long sequences with this man entirely on his own. Eventually the man is able to get out of the desert and the great thing is that he has been able to prove himself to himself. He is a better man for the experience. The film ends with a fight and a fire. The ending was more or less cobbled together by Zanuck. It wasn't the original ending of the story which ended in a much more logical fashion with the man pushing the wife out into the snow. I had the great Dick Talmadge helping me with the fight scene. I'd never done one before. There was nothing he didn't know about staging fights. Marvellous. Ever since then I've never had the slightest problems in staging fights. Thanks to him. One learns and if one's lucky one learns from the best. And he was one of the best, this is acknowledged by everybody.

RF: In that instance how did it work? Did you turn the camera over to him?

RWB: We did it together. I presented him with a situation. Then he worked the thing like a dance routine, how they got from here to there and then as one of them falls backwards he knocks the stove, the chimney pipe falls down and hits somebody on the head.

RF: So, he would choreograph it and you would shoot it?

RWB: Yes. I did, immediately when he told me where to put the camera. No problem. He was awfully clever in the use of stuntmen and the real people and enabling the real people to do much more than you could ever have expected with stuntmen opposite them. He was great with tricks where you have your stuntman facing the camera and he gets a tremendous punch and staggers back and crashes into the back-wall of the hut and disappears in a furnace and you have your real man there already and he gets up and comes into the fight and as he comes back into close up, that's your man. Someone very good at that was Roger Moore.

RF: You were satisfied with the shoot?

RWB: Yes, and it surprised Zanuck. As William Booth said," making this huge picture called *The Robe* and we're out in the desert making a thing called The Jacket". Very little was expected and by the time we started everyone was losing interest in 3D anyway. You had to have a pair of polarised spectacles, then you had to have two projectors which were exactly matched and balanced as to luminosity and of course they had to run in sync and you had to have two prints, one polarised for the left eye and one polarised for the right and you projected the two of them onto one screen so they overlap. You're superimposing one on top of the other. You had to wear these spectacles which were quite expensive. You couldn't make them properly cheaply. In those days, they cost about ten dollars a pair. But to see a film in the studio cinema which was beautifully up for it [?] was an eyeopener, it was unbelievable. It was just like sitting in a darkened room and looking through a huge window at the film. There was no screen. There was nothing between you and it. I had a lot of fun not just with the obvious things rushing towards an audience but a few things going away. It was very difficult but at one point in the story our man has got himself to a blind end, he's got himself to an edge of a cliff and he's got to find a way down. This was shot at Red Rock Canyon which is all red rock. And looking down it's very difficult to show the depth which is ninety or one hundred feet or more. It wasn't a great deal but it was enough. I couldn't put anything there. I thought of animals but they wouldn't show up so I had him loosen a shower of white stones and the white stones fall to the bottom and you can see them for some time so you realise that it's a long way down. That was effective. It was a stimulating picture and certainly the best thing I did in Hollywood.

RF: Was there a name for this 3D process, did the studio give it a name?

RWB: The picture was shown in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. It got very good notices because it wasn't an exploitation picture in 3D like *The House of Wax*. But it never got over the problem with the spectacles. You could buy two tickets at the box office and they would hire you a pair of spectacles for a dollar each and you had to leave a deposit and return them when you left. It was unworkable. Nobody's going to go through all that.

RF: Did you ever see it on a commercial screen?

RWB: No, never.

RF: I just wondered if they were able to get all that refinement onto the screen because the adjustments must have been quite incredible.

RWB: Yes, they were, but it was only shown in three major cities in America. It was never shown again. Except in a flat version you could show either the left or the right eye whichever you preferred.

RF: Eastmancolor?

RWB: Yes. Processed in Fox's own laboratories, Deluxe. There's no future for 3D because it's not possible to realise it under any other circumstances than going that way. You've got to do it with two cameras and you have to have two different eyepoints kept separate till the

very last moment when you see them together. If man was born with one eye it would be fine but he isn't.

[Discussion of the difference with 3D achieved with holographs with photography. Apparently not transcribed]

RF: Was 3D very time consuming to shoot?

RWB: Not that I can recall. We were out in the desert for about six weeks. We all motored up on the Sunday to get bedded in. We'd been up several times to prospect everything. All the locations were chosen. We arrived in time for lunch on the Sunday and it snowed. They'd never seen it before. It only stayed for a few hours and then it was gone. It was a very successful picture and it's been played on television.

It's a good story, it's a narrative, it's about a devilish plot to murder someone. It's about a man who's a rich slob who pulls himself together, all sorts of interesting angles to the thing. Then there's all the scenery.

RF: Did it raise your stock at the studio?

RWB: I think so but there again there wasn't the luck. If it had been *The House of Wax* I'd have been the hero, gone on to make many more pictures. But, in any case I'd been there on and off for three years and really, I wanted to come back to England. I didn't want to stay. When I first went I never considered the idea of staying for good. I don't know why in terms of specific reasons, [but] for me [it]was family. I had a small boy and I just never thought of sending him to an American school. I think the picture was admired. Zanuck was unquestionably surprised and he said so. He was a funny sort of coot, I never got to know him really. I'm quite sure I wasn't his type in any way. I had been useful. I behaved myself. I turned in some perfectly good work and indeed this picture was rather better than expected. And if the 3D thing had been workable in audience terms it would have been a different story. I didn't go rattling what am I going to do next. I just thought it's time for me to go back and try and pick up the threads in England which I did.

RF: Did you have a contract?

RWB: Yes, it was one of these yearly option ones.

RF: So, there was no problem getting a release from that?

RWB: No.

RF: This is the end of your Hollywood sojourn. Do you have any memories of it, the system and especially at that particular point because the golden era was over and they were running scared politically and economically. Did that manifest itself in the way the studio behaved?

RWB: There was quite a lot of thrashing about. I remember when I first arrived in New York on the first trip that there was a packet of mail sent to my hotel from the Fox office in New York, included in it was this great long letter of about 10 pages from Skouras who was President of Twentieth Century Fox explaining the times were so hard that everyone earning so much was expected to take a voluntary cut of about 10% in their wages. I'd only just signed the contract. They didn't ask me to do that but that's what was happening on American soil. Yes, there was quite a lot of sacking: a few of the cleaners, minor secretaries. But when I arrived on the lot, it was huge and you could easily have fired five hundred people, never have missed them. It was a very grand studio, posh. Everyone I met there said you're lucky, you're in the right one to be.

RF: So, they were firing the cleaners, not the nephews or the ski instructors.

RWB: They don't get fired, they're just fired to go away forget it for a few months, when things cool off they come out of the woodwork again. I can't remember any drastic things. I think making a picture like I did with Gary Merrill, that was an example of something which-was being deliberately made to get something out of the people they were employing anyway rather than having them stand around doing nothing or lay them off. They tried to keep everyone on as far as they could. So, they started using up old scripts and that sort of thing. It was a kind of writing down period.

RF: And hoping they could fight television rather than working with it.

RWB: Fighting with sheer volume and technical gimmickry. It never occurred to them "supposing we make better stories?"

RF: Also, they read the situation wrongly. It wasn't only television. The post war change that the period went through.

RWB: The movies, as they openly said to me, the Americans didn't come into the war until the end of 1941,long after we did, the outbreak of war saved the movies. In 1939 and 1940 it was going downhill rapidly. They had sound which saved the silent movies. Everyone was getting very bored with the silent movies until sound was brought in and that perked it up and then they had a wonderful period with great stars which is the only way you can guarantee a box office or make any sense of the film industry. You have to have stars. That's the only thing the audience can recognise, understand and follow. For good or ill that's it. It carried everything along till about 1938 or '39 and then it started to go very sour indeed. By 1940 they were really worried. Along came the war and it boosted the whole thing.

RF: I'm not sure I'd agree with that thesis. Hopefully we can debate it. My reading would be that 1939 was probably the greatest year in Hollywood's history in terms of pictures they made, in the sound era.
Business was very good, the depression was more or less over because America was gearing up for war and they were supplying this country with so much material. Was Zanuck a legendary character?

RWB: Yes, he was. Another thing which happened the week I arrived. He had his picture on the front page of Time which was the highest accolade an American could achieve. He was a wonderful picture maker, there's no doubt about that.

RF: Was he regarded with fear by his employees?

RWB: His word was absolute law. I met a couple of writers coming out of his office. They'd obviously been at a story conference. I said "how did it go?" They said "great a downhill fight all the way". Everybody did what Zanuck said. There was no appeal, no argument, if he wanted it that way that's the way it was. He was an absolute dictator. I don't think he was deliberately evil with anybody, on the other hand he did, like many of those men, he would indulge himself by humiliating people preferably in front of other people. He would insist on two or three of his producers would go off on a hunting trip with him for two or three days. He was a man of action. He could shoot and he could ski and fish and play polo and he made all the others do this.

RF: All the Hollywood moguls were all so tiny. There was a Napoleon complex at work here.

RWB: Probably, but I'm only five feet seven myself so I speak on behalf of the little men.

RF: You said at one point you were shooting adjacent to John Ford.

RWB: Yes, I got very excited about that but I'd always taken the attitude I didn't like strangers coming onto my set so therefore I didn't like walking on anyone else's set. So, I carefully said to an assistant director do you think Ford would mind if I go on there and see him and introduce myself. I would very much like to meet the great man. He said "what for?" He said "what for?" I said "what do you mean what for?" He said "what I mean is why do you want to meet that sonofabitch?" That shocked me and shook me to the core. He said I worked with Jack Ford, lots of people have and he's one of the few people you'd pay money to get off one of his pictures. He's a bastard. He went on like this for two or three minutes and the upshot was that I never did introduce myself to Ford. Being an Englishman it would probably not have gone down very well in any case because he was rabidly anti-English.

RF: What about some of the quite civilised people at Fox at that time. Nunally Johnson for instance.

RWB: He was marvellous. I wished I'd managed to work on a picture with him. He's been a lot to England of course. He was very genial and very much an Easterner. If you went into his office in the morning. Usually the door was open. You'd say "am I interrupting?" and he'd say "yes you are and I'm delighted. Come in and sit down". Another man there who was also very much the same sort of category was Charles Brackett who was Billy Wilder's partner for all those years. He was very nice, amiable and gossipy and fun. Mankiewicz, I met him at a remarkable notice[?] I had nothing to do with him because he'd just made *All about Eve* and it was a little later, perhaps a year later, that … Zanuck should be fired and Mankiewicz should take over. He probably wouldn't be bad at the job.

This didn't go down well with Zanuck and there was a terrible row and Mankiewicz left. But he had a contract to finish, one more picture had to be made. They scuttled around for something which was suitable and he would want to do and they lit upon something called *Five Fingers.* I was already on the short list for this picture. I would have done it extremely well because it was the story of the British ambassador in Ankara who had a valet; the valet was a German spy. There was a book published around that time and it was an exciting story. Joe Mankiewicz read it and decided that would be the last one he'd do for Zanuck and grabbed it and I didn't get it. It was a good picture. The first time I met Mankiewicz I was invited to somebody's party at the beach and he came and there was a tremendous animated conversation because he'd just come from a meeting. He and Fred Zinnemann were leading lights in the Screen Directors Guild of America. At that time Cecil B. De Mille and Adolph Menjou — how Menjou got into the act I couldn't understand because he was never a director as far as I know — but those two between them were going to rewrite the book of rules for the Screen Directors! Guild.

RF: There was an outfit called the Association for the Preservation of American Ideals, or something like that. De Mille was active in it. Menjou was active in it. Sam Wood was very active in it. He was way to the right, a maniac.

RWB: There was this big fuss going on at the time and there's no doubt about it Zinnemann, Mankiewicz saved the Directors Guild from a fate worse than death. It would have become a puppet union.

RF: Did you go to SDG [Screen Directors Guild] meetings?

RWB: I did occasionally.

RF: But you didn't go to the famous one at which Jack Ford stood up and said my name's Jack Ford and I make pictures, again a right winger, but he put De Mille down totally by saying the most important thing was freedom of speech and who the hell was he to tell people what to think.

RWB: I think that had happened just before I got there. I wasn't conscious of it. I'd only just been made a member of the Guild and all that and I'm not particularly active as far as trade unions are concerned. I suppose one of my principal friends there was Tyrone Power apart from Bette Davis. Tyrone was a most attractive man and more charm than you could believe in one human being. But he was funny. I saw quite a lot of Elizabeth Taylor. She'd just got married to Michael Wilding and I knew him quite well in England.

RF: Did you pick up again with Hitchcock?

RWB: Yes, I went to see him. I made the contact through Joan Harrison.
I met her when we were making *The Lady Vanishes* because she was Hitchcock's secretary. She was his right-hand girl Friday and very efficient too. I had some dealings with her during the making of this picture when I was second assistant and I was able to take up this tenuous acquaintance somehow and she was very nice and invited me to dinner. I said how

much I'd like to see Mr Hitchcock again. She arranged for me to come to Universal. I went out there and he took me on his set and gave me tea and then he described with great enthusiasm the next one he was going to work on — he was bored with the present one — it was going to be what became *Psycho*.

SIDE 14, TAPE 7

RWB: Herman and Joe Mankiewicz shared adjacent offices. The next office was occupied by Sam Fuller, an amazing character, full of incredible energy, what we now call macho. He'd seen active service and he was keen to make pictures. He would have made a marvellous job of *Platoon*, he was good at that kind of picture, the brutal and licentious soldier in action. He wrote his own scripts and as the characters developed he used to do caricature sketches of all these characters and stick than on the walls of the office. Then he would act out the scenes. Next to him was Herman Mankiewicz who was Joseph's brother who was a writer and in many ways a much deeper wider ranging writer than Joseph L. was. Joseph L. used to write all his own scripts. He was an auteur. The rest of us are not auteurs. Some people think just because you've got your name on a thing as director, you've invented the whole thing. Sadly. It's not altogether true. I remember Mankiewicz he was very friendly and very genial. Interesting man to be with. Charles Brackett was also there. They were the quality, the class that lot. They were all there scribbling away for Zanuck.

RF: How did Zanuck treat them?

RWB: He was happiest when he was working with his writers. He also liked working with his directors. He never saw all the rushes. The one thing you have to say about the Zanuck operation is the sheer organisational skill which had gone into constructing this way of life which was the way he wanted it to be personally and secondly how he wanted to run his business. The editors would every day assemble the rushes, show them to the producers in the morning and an edited version of the rushes was prepared which was left in Zanuck theatres ready for about 11 0'clock at night or 12 0' clock.

RF: The director selected takes?

RWB: The director selected takes basically cutting down odds and sods to make it a reasonable package because at any one time he would have six pictures on the floor, sometimes more. So, when you see the rushes of six pictures it takes quite a time. He used to gallop through it a bit but he would see all that stuff and dictate notes if he had anything to say which were almost always sent directly to the director. He liked working with directors. He felt that they were chums. They were picture makers. They were chums because they were picture makers, they originated the stuff. When it came to the producers, in the first place his attitude was that he had become top dog and he was going to remain top dog, there was no nonsense about that. One step out of line — the basic rate was 4,000 dollars

a week for 40 weeks plus an option for the further 12 — even in those days that was a lot of money, they were well paid but they had to keep in line. He felt he was producing all the pictures himself in any case and the producer was a factotum just as I described. The art department was one man, Lyle Wheeler, with a number of art directors, each one looking after a number of productions.

RF: Would Lyle Wheeler look at the drawings?

RWB: He would look at them and contribute to them. The top lion always has a pack of wolves snapping at his heels. Once you became a top man they want your job, so you have to keep on your toes and these guys did. It was very much the same sort of thing with Zanuck except that he was almost untouchable until Mankiewicz got quite close to persuading Skouras to let him take over but it didn't happen.

RF: But the dynastic fights came not that long after and Zanuck went to live in Paris. What was the social life on the lot? Was the commissary a focal point?

RWB: Yes, lunch was a meeting point. I remember the first time I met Hildegard Knef. She was supposed to be in this film. We agreed to meet and I said “let's go to lunch”. She said “what are you going to eat”. I said “steak”. She said “good. All these producers live on rabbit food”. We were friends from that moment on.

RF: Was there a writer’s table and a director’s table?

RWB: Not particularly. There was an inner room off the main room. Directors and producers and writers went in there. Some actors went in but very rarely. I used to lunch a lot with Richard Sale who was a writer and then became a director. He was funny. He’d written several novels which was how he made his way to Hollywood and then he directed a few films but his heart wasn't in it.

RF: Looking back on the early 50s what are your impressions of it as a place to work in. Was it a lotus life?

RWB: Certainly, it could have been a lotus life. They say Los Angeles is 36 villages trying to make a city. To a certain extent it's true in that if you go there as a European you can link up with almost any kind of society you can imagine. There is a whole bunch of theatre people, there's a whole bunch of musicians such as Stravinsky, painters, writers, a number of homosexual cliques. There was almost any kind of group you could choose to run with. There was a lot of choice and a lot of very stimulating people around. It was the best of the old Hollywood. I'm glad I was around to see it. It turned me into a professional, it shook me rigid and I had to work. I came to realise that with sheer determination and will-power you can get much more out of a script than you think at a superficial glance. Nobody was putting pressure on me, they didn't have to. Either I put the pressure on myself and I succeeded or I failed. No one bothered one way or another. It was up to you Jack. A number of people were extremely kind, were very helpful and did their best to guide me but my heart wasn't in it really.

Looking back, I realise my heart wasn't in it. I never had any intention of staying there. If I really wanted to stay I would have tried much harder to establish myself and then stayed.

RF: Was it a matter of roots?

RWB: I suppose it must have been but my roots in England weren't all that strong. I had a father and mother but no brothers or sisters. A few cousins who I hardly ever saw. I wasn't really family bound. I felt by instinct that I had a son and I wanted him to go to school in England. That was one practical pull, but for the rest of it, I think I just missed London. All the time I was in Hollywood, three years off and on, there were only two items of news that got through. One was that George Bernard Shaw had died and the other was George V died, Elizabeth succeeded to the throne. We had a big Coronation Ball which was a great shindig.

RF: So, it was time to shake off all that golden sunshine.

RWB: Sunshine isn't all that golden when you live in California. It's like living in a number of these tropical paradises. The first thing you discover is that your blood thins out. So whereas when you first arrive you dash into the ocean which is stone cold and you think it's wonderful, once you've been there about six months you won't go near it. You turn up the heating in the pool till steam comes off it. I've had English people arrive to stay for a few weeks and one Englishman dived off the diving board and came up and said it was like pea soup. It was too hot for him. You find that California has only got two climates. One is rather dull and overcast and occasionally rainy, but not very often, or it's hot and boring. I missed the seasons. You do encounter mosquitoes which have been around for 14 or 15 years, quite old experienced mosquitoes. Whereas in this country you have mosquitoes but they only live one year and that's it so you get a new lot which have to learn all over again.

RF: How did you find your return?

RWB: Tricky, very tricky. I didn't know what to do. Once again I 'd left myself exposed. I was in the ridiculous position that I had not got a humdinger of a script under my arm which everyone would give his eye teeth to produce and I'd left myself in the exposed position of waiting for someone to offer me something. We got back here in November 1953/4, it was still common in those days to have a London fog and there was one in Piccadilly. I was walking along Piccadilly down the Duke of York's St there was no traffic around and there was a busker around and he was playing the theme from Chaplin's *Limelight.*

I linked up with old friends and William Fairchild who had written the script of *Morning Departure*. He said what are you doing? I said I'm looking for a picture. He said I've got one. I've just written a script. It's a sea story again. I'll introduce you to the producer. That led to Julian Wintle, a film called *Passage Home*. I thought the title was significant anyway if nothing else. The picture was to be made at Pinewood and Julian Wintle turned out to be a really interesting producer. He was quite different. He was never very well. He was a haemophiliac and he had to have treatments for many years I never once heard him complain about his health or that he walked with considerable difficulty. He'd been in documentary.

He was a great leg puller. He once launched into a long cock and bull story about how he'd driven headlong into the gates of Hyde Park when they'd been closed. He was very subtle. One thing he had a great knack of: I've only every come across once in another fellow, who was Milton Subotsky, was the extraordinary capability of getting marvellous casts. Very good actors indeed, always. Good scripts. Sometimes not very good scripts but some good scripts. I went down to Pinewood and it was agreed that I was going to make this film. The cast was Peter Finch and Diane Cilento. The trouble with the film was that it was old fashioned before it started. It was a novel and Bill had adapted it and done his best with it. It was a sailing ship story about a tramp steamer that you got in the 1930s. If it had been written about a windjammer it would have been much more valid. It was the story of how this devastating blonde gets picked up by this merchant steamer and what happens on the voyage back to England.

RF: Was this an independent production?

RWB: No Rank produced it, well it might technically have been through Julian's company but it was in fact fully backed by Rank and made at Pinewood. There were two things about it. The first was the staging of the storm scenes which were done in the studio with a rocking foredeck bridge, half of the tramp steamer on rockers with enormous great skips of water which came down and bounced up over the deck. So once again I was at sea and I developed quite a reputation for sea pictures and I used to quite enjoy them. But there was this fatal flaw, it was an old-fashioned story in an almost contemporary setting and it didn't really work.

RF: A boring script.

RWB: No, I wouldn't say that. If just one of us had the sense to say why don't we put her in a long skirt and put beards on all the fellows then all this late Victorian stuff might have worked.

RF: What were you feeling coming back from the West Coast to the industry here. What differences did you perceive?

RWB: I was delighted to be back among old chums and crews I'd got to know. As far as making pictures was concerned, and to some extent even with the heightened efficiency of today, but in those days, it was rather leisurely, if it didn't work this time tomorrow is another day and we'll have a go at it and sort it out.

RF: Where did that attitude originate?

RWB: Well when in doubt I always blame the management. I don't believe it's all the fault of the unions or all the fault of the crews or all the fault of both. If you're running a car factory or a toy factory or a studio it always takes its tone from whoever is at the top.

RF: Who was at the top?

RWB: It was Earl [St. John]. That is not to say I'm laying the whole thing — it wasn't that delinquent but there wasn't the positive drive, the determination to make something slightly better out of what we've got — I wouldn't lay all that at Earl's door.

RF: Do you know the genesis of this particular film?

RWB: I don't think it was William's idea. I think Julian had had the book pushed under his nose by somebody and thought we can make this into quite a good picture and went to the Rank Organisation and they'd agreed. In due course he'd thought sea story, ah William Fairchild he knows about the sea. Then it went on from that.

I don't want to lay all of it at Earl's door but Earl was not Zanuck. He was not a positive leader and ruthless driver if need be like Zanuck at Fox. He had no organisation to support him to speak of. He had a story department, dreamy, quite charming but dreamy. If asked to look into something, find out who owns the right they'd look into it and in a few week's time you'd get an answer. Earl wasn't a producer in the first place. He found himself in charge of the studio and did his best to be in charge of the studio, he liked being in charge of the studio but he wasn't really a super positive contributor like Zanuck was. He had no facilities for seeing the rushes. If you asked if my rushes are going to be on at 11 0'clock he might come over and look but as for sitting down at midnight and looking at the whole of yesterday's work, it wouldn't have occurred to him.

Here I'd like to interpose a little now about the chief technical problem about producers in general and top brass in general in this country. It takes a very experienced and clever man to be able to read somebody's rushes. If you're the executive producer on the lot

you've got four pictures on the floor. You say I want to see all the rushes at four o'clock. They put them up and you see them all. It's not an easy task by any means to see that raw stuff with the clapperboards on it, one take, it's difficult to see, even knowing the script and even knowing the people involved exactly how good those rushes are and what's wrong with them. Very few producers can sit there and say you've got to have a close up of that line, the man's crazy, tell him he's got to have a close up of that line tomorrow. This is what Zanuck would do. He would write a polite note saying don't you think we should have a close up but meaning we need a close—up and get it for Christ's sake. And usually he was right. He was a genius at reading other people's rushes. It really is difficult to do. I've tried it once or twice and it's not easy with a lot of experience. So, I'm not blaming them for this delinquency. I do think if anyone wants to be a producer they should spend a little time training themselves and finding out how they do this. Most of them sit there and say it's all come out, isn't it lovely. That's not what seeing the rushes is all about. Zanuck would realise if the director was making it more of a fantasy than he'd imagined or the realism was much more ruthless than he thought.

To come back to Earl St. John. He had not developed any mechanism for running the job. It was the first thing which struck me and I used to speak about it injudiciously in the bar, did

me no good. The film went out and they probably made a bit of money on it. It was certainly well made. It was a splendid production, storm sequences and all that stuff..

RF: Was it expensive?

RWB: No it was a run of the mill cost of its day. It wasn't an expensive picture. I'd say around 250,000 pounds. Not more. Casts were very cheap in those days. Finch was contract. He might have been expensive. But these were the days when Alec Guinness's agent said Guinness wanted £10,000 for a picture and they said go boil your head, we don't pay £10,000 for any actor. Finch was probably only getting £3,000 for doing the picture and all the rest were unknown. They were all extremely good actors. I've always been puzzled by Michael Bryant because he played a very perky junior officer, glorified midshipman and he played it with such a sense of humour I thought this fellow has a wonderful future as a comedian, every time I see him at the National, he's absolutely immersed in gloomy tragedy which he does brilliantly because the first thing he did for me he couldn't have been lighter or funnier or more delightful.

RF: Was Pinewood efficient to work in compared with Pico Boulevard

RWB: Yes, given you couldn't work so fast as you'd get it in America. In America, I had some scenes in one of the films which involved back projection so I said we'd better shoot the plates for this ahead of time if we can organise a small camera unit, preferably with the cameraman, Lucien Ballard, shooting it, which was the English way of shooting it and they looked at me with utter amazement. Oh no Joe Hurley will shoot the plates for you and they'll be great and they were great. He read the script and came to talk with me for twenty minutes and we went through the scenes and he said great and he disappeared and I didn't see him again but the plates were on the floor on the day. That's true to the basic principles of America, they can do this kind of thing. It was an efficient assembly line process and it works perfectly well. There's no artistic or imaginative loss. There again you can just sit back and press a button which says Jim Fatzenburger and Jim Fatzenburger appears with this, this, that, and he's gone and it can make you lazy.

In England you had to shoot your own plates. There was this marvellous documentary cameraman called Peter Henessey and we put him on a merchant ship with a camera and we told him to sail round the Mediterranean shooting this and that. He disappeared for three or four weeks and came back with cans of stuff, all exactly what we'd asked for. A nice man with a great big golden beard. It was the first time I'd worked with Geoffrey Unsworth who was a great chum and a great colleague. In those days he was already a super cameraman, really good, sympathetic, imaginative, understanding cameraman who's always your right hand. If you don't have a cameraman you don't start. You can do without a lot of people but you can't do without him. He was marvellous. Vetchinsky was the art director, he was still there, still scribbling away. As a production, it was quite remarkable. The performances were all there. Peter used to tell the story about me that this actor was a little inclined to the bottle. One day he was on a standby call and never believing he was going to be called at two o' clock in the afternoon, he had a very good lunch. I was up on the bridge

of this set and I saw him coming in through the studio door. Peter was beside me and according to Peter's version I took one look of this fellow walking in and it was obvious he was half seized over before he even got on the boat so, apparently, I said to [an]assistant, "he's pissed let's do something else". We set up a couple of other scenes and sent him home. Peter was a great card. He was a naughty man. He used to do the bottle a bit as well.

RF: During the shoot?

RWB: Not when I had him. He may later I don't know. This was quite early days. He'd only just come over from Australia.

The next picture came up. Being at Pinewood one mobbed around with all the people there and one was George Brown the producer who was the producer of the picture Peter Ustinov was making at Denham when I was making my first picture ten years earlier.

SIDE 15, TAPE 8

RWB: Well this one was called *Jacqueline*. It was a book by Catherine Cookson no less who is now one of the great best-selling novelists of all time. It was a story set in a Belfast shipyard about a rigger who has to go up these enormous heights and catwalks, rather like a steeplejack, rather dangerous work and his nerve starts to go and he takes to the bottle. It was a fairy tale, charming delightful. The script was by Patrick Kirwan and Liam O'Flaherty, Geoff Unsworth was the cameraman. The picture was partly made because of the introduction at that time of the blue backing process which made back projection very much easier than the old-fashioned process but it had its teething problems and difficulties. So, I boldly

was the first one to use it and it worked extremely well. Again, we had an extremely good cast. We had John Gregson who was excellent for the part except he kept saying I wish I was Victor McLaglan because it needed a great big hunk of a man and John wasn't. We had Kathleen Ryan who was lovely. We then had the Irish gang Cyril Cusack, Liam Redmond, etc., and a wonderful woman known as Delaney [Maureen Delaney], she was only ever called Delaney and at that time she was the queen of the Abbey [Theatre, Dublin]. She was about 80 and she played the grandma. What I didn't know — and I have to confess my stupidity in not doing the research — I had got hold of the story which told about Protestants because the shipyard is the one place they don't have the Catholics if they can help it in those days which was a long time before we got into this dreadful unending situation which we're in now, so I knew nothing about it. I went over to Belfast, visited the shipyards, got into a bucket on the end of a crane and went up in it and did all that. I was astonished that the shipyards seemed to be run by a lot of irascible men in bowler hats who went around shouting at people. I said why do they wear the bowler hats and was told because they would have hot rivets thrown at them if they didn't. It was run on an atmosphere of open warfare between the management and the workers. I was quickly taken away into the back streets by a priest and was introduced to some family in the most abject poverty. The priest had got hold of one Englishman and was determined to show it. I didn't know. There were all those children and the husband who looked just about capable of breeding the children, capable of nothing else at all, really pathetic. The dialogue was based on "do you realise these people have not had any breakfast this morning or two or three previous mornings either". I fished out a few pound notes and someone was sent off for some tea and presumably they sat down to a decent breakfast after that. I kept asking myself what is all that about? We did shoot some location in Northern Ireland. there was one marvellous country house built entirely out of granite, exactly like the people, and there were housemaids and parlour maids and brass stair rods which were polished every morning and the brass knocker. It was a time warp. You went back 50, 70 years. We did very little shooting over there and then we went back to the studio and started shooting with the cast. They of course are all Catholics all playing with a Northern Ireland accent. We had a street party scene in it and the rain had to stop the party and they had to sing. They came to me with a brilliant idea. They said we have this wonderful song that we all know and we could sing it for you. It would go down great in Ireland. They all know it and they all love it, it's absolutely right. So, I said fine and it's in the picture to this day. But what everybody made of this I don't know because it was the Sean Bhean Bocht [Poor Old Woman] which is a revolutionary Irish folksong. I didn't know. They were having me on rotten. Every film has its problems and with this one it was that the central character was the little girl who since she was nine had never been in front of a camera before. She'd been tested and looked at and seemed all right. But she was frightened to death. I think she thought the Duke of Wellington was going to come and put her in the Tower and leave her there. Anyway, she got through it and in the end she wasn't bad. Also, I'd never directed a child before. I think I could do it better now. But there you are. The film was quite successful. It was a harmless fairy tale. They were all good in it and they were picturesque and quite funny. Noel Purcell was very funny with the little girl. We didn't know whether to make him protestant or catholic. In the end we left it equivocal. It was so stupid, dishonest. I didn't realise the only sane thing to do

was to make it Protestant or Catholic. One or the other. In the context of that particular movie, which is about a man who loses his nerve and takes to the bottle, religion has got nothing to do with it so no one could have been offended. That decision was never taken and the whole thing was papered over. It was foolish, lacking in courage and stupid. And I feel in some ways I was party to it because I was so pathetically ignorant.

The important thing about Noel Purcell was that he was about six feet six inches tall, with a huge white beard, he looked like Noah or Moses. He was a great hero in Dublin because he used to be on the halls and his act was very much as an East ender in Dublin in the docks, working man kind of comic. When I went back many years later to do *The Irish RM* I managed to persuade him to do a part for me because he'd been so helpful with the little girl. He took her on one side and would talk to her and carry her along with him and rehearse the scene with her. He was a helpful sweet man, so kind and a really good chap. He died recently. The next thing that happened was that Leslie Parkin came back into my life. He was the co—producer with Jay Lewis of *Morning Departure* so he knew me very well. He was going to make a film and it turned out it was based on one of my favourite authors Marjorie Allingham, *Tiger in the Smoke* it was called. Änthony Pelissier was doing the script but he was also very busy doing a television spectacular which meant he was very busy with other things when he should have been driving his quill on our behalf. The upshot was we hadn't got the end of the script. Leslie said you've got the book, you know what to do, you do it. So, for the first time I took a seriously active hand in writing a script. Up to then I'd done all kinds of alterations, particularly in dialogue. Marjorie Allingham was one of my favourite authors. She was a wonderful character. She was rather large and very pretty lady. Very feminine and with tremendous intellect. She was a genuine writer and she had a smashing husband who was an artist called Philip Drummond Carter. They had a huge house in Essex near Tiptree. She only ever gave one party a year and it was during the late summer and she used to have a circus in the grounds with all the swings and roundabouts — an entire amusement park and about 300 guests. It was quite a shindig. The film was a disappointment. A lot of her stuff has been put on television recently and I felt that it went wrong. They did their best. It was just too quirky. She was a very bizarre writer. Her books appear to be very realistic and straightforward detective stories, thrillers and suspense. But she's not like Dorothy Sayers, she's right off on her own and there's a sort of bizarreness which is very difficult to catch. I didn't get it. I think I got some of it occasionally where a number of the character were just plain daft. The one I really wanted to make was *More Work for the Undertaker* which is even more weird. All the people have impossible names. They didn't catch her - it was Campion. The trouble with Campion is that he's as whimsical as Peter Wimsey.

RF: They certainly changed the character in the television series.

RWB: Completely. He was nothing like Campion in the books. But her stuff is difficult and my film was the first time anyone had had a go at it and I didn't bring it off. The picture was a failure. To take example. The climax of the picture takes place in a large house at the top of a cliff in Brittany and there are some people coming ashore in a small boat, who are the villains. The geography of the description in the book was so precise I said I think I said to

her she must have had somewhere in mind and she said, gaily “no I invented the whole thing”. So, I had to find somewhere suitable and of course I never did. I should have had the wit and been bolder and said I must change the script. I must confess I’ve always been rather script-bound. I’ve always had too much respect for the writers, some of whom didn't justify the regard I had for them and the scrupulousness with which I treated the material. It may have stemmed from starting out with Eric Ambler. He is a writer's writer. Nowadays I’m much more cavalier. I look at the script and it’s not necessarily the one we’re going to shoot. But I think you have to because we’re making pictures that move and not words written on paper.

Geoffrey Unsworth was the cameraman on that one. The art director was Jack Maxted and the music was done by Malcolm Arnold which was rather good as you might expect. Alec Clunes played a part which was meant to be Campion but it didn't have Campion in it which was probably a mistake.

RF: Was it a Campion novel?

RWB: Yes. One of the problems with the picture is that the central character doesn't appear until at least a third of the way through. It should be a man with an overwhelming personality, not macho but real strength, real evil and he is a determined villain and it should have been Jack Hawkins. This was when John Davis started to take note of what was going on down at Pinewood and started to poke his nose in here and there and this was one of the occasions he did it and he insisted we had a new young man called Tony Wright who was a charming young man. He’d made a few pictures in Paris but he was just miscast. It didn't do him any good, it probably set him back for years. It was a great shame. There was nothing one could do to bolster it.

RF: He wasn’t much of an actor.

RWB: It was an unsuccessful picture but it really was quite an important picture in my own development. A lot more responsibility had been thrown onto me. I was very much encouraged by Leslie Parkin. It did me a lot of good in the studio. It was a difficult picture to make because the whole thing takes place in a thick London fog. It was sort of 1930s period. The interior sets had to be built with boxes outside doors or windows which had to be full of smoke. When someone came in through a front door the fog had to be behind them and came in with them and when they shut the door there was no smoke inside the sets which was a little local difficulty, it was tricky. The smoke which poured out day after day got everybody down a bit. We had Liverpool Street Station and we filled that full of fog. Again, it was operationally a special effects picture. The previous one had been blue backing and the previous one had been a lot of back projection of sea backgrounds. I again had Geoff Unsworth which delighted me. He was a great enthusiast. I suggested that in order to get some special feeling about the picture we should shoot the whole thing not on a conventional tripod or dolly but on a baby crane so that the camera could always be on the move, however slightly, even on close—ups, it would sink or it would rise or drift away diagonally.

We would keep the camera moving all the time. I think this was one of the first clear in-

stances of a man not having the courage of his own convictions so I didn't do it broadly enough. So, nobody noticed it and I don't think anyone till this day has noticed all the terrible trouble we went to. It was the camera operator's, Jack Atcheler, first picture, who became a very famous operator, so it must have been tricky for him. At any rate, even during the making it did attract quite a lot of attention and publicity so it was more important than you would think given it was not a successful film. But there were a lot of things in it which were well done and well brought off.

RF: Can I just ask you about Pelissier. He is a relatively unknown figure. What are your recollections of him?

RWB: Tony Pelissier was first and foremost a man of the theatre. He was born in the theatre. Fay Compton was his mother. The Pelissier family has a long tradition in the theatre. He was one of those people who were a master [Jack?] of all trades and a master of none. There was absolutely nothing he couldn't do. He could sing, he could dance, he could compose music and all well but none with sufficient punch or whatever. He was everybody's favourite, he had immense charm, he was good looking. The girls used to fall over themselves over Tony. I have many happy memories of socialising with him. One of his early things was that he appeared in one of Noel Coward's play long before the war. He was prominent … in the theatre set. But he was inclined to pick up a thing and never quite finish it and that's what happened with this script. He went off to do this show set around Eartha Kitt and we never saw him after that. He was a great friend with Johnny Mills and they collaborated on a number of things such as *The History of Mr. Polly* and *The Rocking Horse Winner*. They'd known each other for a long time — all the way through the '30s in the theatre. Anthony was finally married to Ursula Howells who was an extremely good actress, rock solid.

RWB: It was a period of stock taking for me. I was invited to go to Durham University to give a lecture and like a fool I didn't know what to say. I had only done it once before and it had been a disaster. Anyway, this one was also a disaster as well. I was still at Pinewood. I think by that time I was under some sort of contract because I was looking for subjects to do. I had got myself quite pally with a chap called Frank, I never knew his other name, who ran the Piccadilly Arcade bookshop. Frank only dealt in new books and he was a walking expert on every book which was published. I was in there one Saturday morning. He said I've got two books for you. You're going to make them both into films. Marvellous, right up your alley. And he stuck these two books in my hand. So, I took them home and read than and agreed. I thought they were both marvellous and wanted to do them like mad. I went into Pinewood on the Monday and discovered in both cases Rank had already bought the rights. Julian Wintle, whom I knew, was going to produce one of them. Bill McQuitty who I didn't really know, the other one.

Sometime previously he'd offered me a film which I was a fool to turn down, it was called *Above us the Waves.* I missed an opportunity there. I jigged a bit because I thought I don't

want to do another submarine picture having had a glorious success with one. I should have done it because it was a good story. In those days John Davis had begun to take a serious interest in production and his interest grew and we reached a point where we had a Thursday meeting in the famous flat at the back of the house. Lunch was served. I was down for the meeting and it usually consisted of JD himself, Earl St John and the then casting director. None of these turned up and I found myself sitting for lunch with JD on his own. There's nothing JD appreciated more than someone who'd made up his mind, was forthright and stated I want to do this, that's it, that appealed to him. He said to me what do you want to do and I began to spout about these two books,

One was *The One That Got Away* and the second on was *A Night to Remember*. He listened and was delighted. He said right you can do them. About *The One That Got Away*, I won't play a German, I think Dirk Bogarde should do it. Then he said as far As *A Night to Remember* is concerned, who are you going to put in it. There was only one part of any length so I said Kenny More. He said good idea, go and talk with him about it. He said where is he and I said Bermuda. He said OK you'd better go and talk with him. So, I had a week in Bermuda. I think JD knew it was a leg pull but he didn't care. As far as *The One That Got Away* was concerned I started work with Julian who had absolutely the right approach which he always did. I said Dirk Bogarde is a much under-rated actor and I yield to none in respect for him. I think he is a first-class actor but it doesn't mean that he can do everything and I don't believe he can do a German wartime air ace. Somehow or other we've got to persuade JD that we want somebody else and to my mind the only way to do it is to find a proper German. This began to bring up a lot of just passing remarks around the studio, "why are we going to make this German propaganda picture, what's it about, a fish?", and funny remarks like that. I admit I made almost a profession of being non—political so I was not acutely aware of any distaste anyone might have in respect to this particular project. But I felt it was well worth doing for several reasons. One, it was naturally a chase picture. You have a man on the run right from the word go and that can't be bad from the point of view of making a motion picture. I think that perhaps it's a blindness to think first in terms of a movie and secondly what the political or undertones might be later. But I had an overriding feeling that I had become very, very disappointed that there had been so many war pictures that had featured the German, and the British and French and everybody else, but the Germans either came out of it as beer swilling Bavarians or homosexual Prussians. I didn't believe this was entirely true of the German nation. Having served six years in the army at the behest of Adolf Hitler, I got no — and at this moment I'm very disturbed by the prospect of the Germanies being joined up again, it's a matter of history we should prevent it. I consider the Germans to be a very formidable nation in all kinds of compartments and war is one of them. when you consider what they achieved during the war it's frightening.
They achieved more than any of us. We had the weight of numbers once the Americans came in but saving that, they'd have been all over us and everybody in school today would have been learning German as a second language or by today a first language.

SIDE 16, TAPE 8

I thought this picture was worth making because it gave an opportunity to show a German at his most formidable, The man. It was based on facts to start with and was a matter of history. That involved the usual research. The book had been well researched and was thoroughly sound and provided an excellent basis to go on. A script came in fairly soon after we had our talks and it was no good. In all general terms, the story had been altered and I felt you can't alter history. Far too many people know about this, his widow was still alive, not out of respect to him but if you're trying to tell a story which would mean something it would have to be accurate. Julian — there were only three or four weeks to go before we were going to shoot, we'd been put into a slot by the studio — it was all go, go, go. Up to the lake district to see the POW camp. It was a big house called Grimsdyke [Probably Grizedale Hall] and it was grim too, Gothic granite, and it was going to be knocked down. We went to the estate agent and fortunately they delayed for a couple of months. They knocked it down after we used it. Julian came up with the idea of a writer I didn't know called Howard Clewes. Within something like two to two and a half weeks he produced a full, complete dialogue script which was absolutely right. It was a miracle. I never cease to be grateful to him for that. It was one of the few scripts I ever had — the others being from Eric Ambler — which didn't need an immense amount of work and straightening out. At that time, the Rank Organisation were running sales conventions for their distributors and among them overseas people. Part of the junket was that they would come down to Pinewood, be shown round the studios and have lunch in the Green Room. I found a man who was our man in Hamburg so naturally I battened on to him. I said there are only two names of German actors who are known at all, one is Uwe Fischer [?] who must be all of 50 by now if not more and the other is a sort of ex matinee idol and notorious bore. This chap said I know the fellow. I said I'll come over and see you. I promoted a trip to see Uwe Fischer [?] in Munich. We'd just edged JD gently round to the idea of having a Kraut to play it. I said if for nothing else for the sake of the accent. I came up against this horribly later. The only way you can play foreigners is to have a foreigner of the right nationality play it and then it comes out sounding absolutely fine. David Deutsch had just recently joined the studio and he was appointed associate producer and the two of us were booted off to Munich to see Uwe Fischer. We duly went to see Mr. Fischer but he was totally wrong. Then we saw the other chap whose name I forget. I said wait till we get back to Hamburg and see this fellow Kruger. Our man in Hamburg arranged lunch at a club overlooking Hamburg Harbour and Hardy Kruger walked in and I only said about four words to him and I knew he was it. I'd never before and since had such a totally close, intimate, relationship with an actor on a picture. It was absolutely miraculous. We began to talk alike, think alike. We had a similar sense of humour. One of the things which attracted me to him was that he'd only ever played in comedies. To me an actor who can play comedy can play anything. It's the people who play straight parts come unstuck when they come outside their field, or they sometimes do, not everybody, I'm generalising obviously. Everything went merrily as a marriage bell. He came over and did a test and on the basis of this test JD realised he had no argument. He looked like him, he was him. From then on everybody was worried sick we were going to get terrible stick when the picture came out for being pro German. They didn't show it in the

West End. They showed it in the notorious Odeon in Paddington which was originally the Regal, Marble Arch. We had the widow over and she brought her lawyer over. Germans, just keep your guard up when you deal with these buggers. It was a roaring success, the critics loved it. When it was shown in Germany, the Germans thought we were a lot of idiots for making the picture in the first place. They couldn't see this man had been presented as having charm and a sense of humour, a daredevil sexy airman collecting all those Iron Crosses but underneath it all he was ruthless, he was cunning, and a formidable opponent in war.

RF: They are a gifted race but they have a dark side.

RWB: I was always amused they have a word schadenfreude and they're the people who invented it. It means taking joy in somebody else s misfortune. The crowning glory came two or three years later when I was making a picture at Shepperton and Stanley Kubrick was making *Dr. Strangelove*. He was having lunch one day in the canteen and I walked past him and he stopped me and he very politely said “are you Roy Baker?” I said “yes”. He said “I do want to tell you that I saw your picture *The One Who Got Away* and … I have to tell you that is the best and probably only true representation of the German character that I’ve ever seen. Coming from him I fell down on the spot. I suppose there was a lot of back-stairs criticism about the making of the picture and me for making it. Then later, but not much later, when Eric Ambler was going off to America to work he’d bought a new car and said you must have it. It was written down for a small amount of money and it was a Porsche. There I was: a German car so that put another nail in the reputation. This was 1957.

RF: So, we’re twelve years after the war and there's this extraordinary distrust and dislike of the Germans.

RWB: Nobody offered to punch me in the face and I don't want to overplay it and a great deal of this is hindsight.

RF: I remember crossing on a German ship in the late fifties or early sixties and it was essentially a German passenger list and a handful of British -Canadians and we huddled together in the first class lounge nervous whether we’d make it. We felt we were training for the next one from the way the crew behaved. Yet you had this marvellous working relationship, personal relationship with Hardy Kruger. So, there is a danger of tarring them all with the same brush.

RWB: It turned out that Hardy was a very young man during the war. He was only 16 when the war was over. He was young when I had him. He was no more than 26 or 27. He was in the Hitler Youth which was like the Boy Scout’s movement with military overtones but he's never lived in Germany since. As soon as he could get away he got away. This film made him a star and he's been a star ever since.

RF: Was he fluent in English?

RWB: Yes, very good English. I think he made it his business as soon as the War was over and the British occupation, he was in the British sector and he worked in the British canteens. He really understood what you were saying and occasionally you would have the odd word of German to explain something but otherwise it was easy and it just rolled on skates the whole thing. We went to Sweden on location and we went to Canada to the spot where he crossed the St Lawrence when it was frozen. The most insulting thing which happened was that I was accused on one occasion by Basil Dearden of making all the British cripples or halfwits. What he didn't understand that all the people in charge of prisoners of war were soldiers but they were not fit for fighting and they had to be given something.

RF: What sort of business did the film do in Germany?

RWB: Absolutely fabulously. The film made a fortune. My stock went up like a rocket over this. This was when I really established myself after all these trials and tribulations, through all these extraordinary ups and downs and a lot of them downs, I had finally arrived. I don't consider I had arrived when I went to Hollywood.

RF: Another question about the reception of *The One Who Got Away* in the States given the Jewish presence in the film industry there was even stronger anti—German, it wasn't even just anti-nazi it was anti German.

RWB: I can't tell you. I think not, because none of our pictures did good business over there. I think the only other thing I should mention about *The One Who Got Away* was another tremendous piece of luck. Geoff Unsworth wasn't available. I got great luck with a new cameraman who I've never worked with before never worked with since and that was Eric Cross. There was a man with an enormous record of documentary and particularly exteriors. I suppose that was why Julian chose him. Julian had way back some experience of documentaries and might have known him then. He turned out to be an absolute triumph. He was an ace. He really saved me from my worst instincts to shoot, shoot, shoot. If the conditions weren't right and they didn't tell the story properly he would just sit on his camera box and smoke his pipe. You couldn't move him, nobody could move him. Of course, it was wonderful. We had a series of locations in the Lake District, we did a lot of work up there and we thought we had it made. We had a lot of locations which needed fair weather and a lot of locations which needed foul weather. In the morning, it was raining and we'd go to a foul weather location and the sun would come out immediately. In the Lake District they change the weather every twenty minutes. We'd rush over to the foul weather location get the camera out and down would come the rain. We went backwards and forwards like shuttlecocks. It got funny in the end. All we could do was sit there and wait which was where Eric was such a tower of strength.

The next film was *A Night to Remember*. That needed an intensely long preparation period which fortunately it got. There was a Congressional inquiry, a Board of Trade inquiry, we went through that with a fine-tooth comb. We got hold of as many survivors as we could find and talked to them. Geoff Unsworth came back and Vetchinsky was the art director. It was necessary to do the most intense planning because one had to decide what angle of tilt the

ship was at once it started to sink. The preliminaries only took about one reel. She strikes I think at the end of reel one or two and from then on one had to plan very carefully. For the short scenes before she strikes we had huge sets built on hydraulic rockers. That hadn't been done much before. It had been done for my earlier picture *Passage Home* so we had that to go on. It was a depressing picture to make. It's a depressing picture to see. It's highly regarded thank heaven. It was a tremendous effort on everybody's part. They were all rightly proud of the work they did as they should be because it was superb, everything to the first-class menu was served as it was. The knife and fork was correct.

RF: Was it an expensive picture?

RWB: Yes, it cost £454,000 which in those days was a lot. It was all Rank money too. They were making several big pictures at that time. I think there was one which cost £600,000.

It was a depressing picture to make because everybody you were talking to all day was going to die of drowning. I had wonderful performances from everybody. All the actors responded to the thing. I had in *The One Which Got Away* became quite demanding and ruthless that everything should be as right as it possibly could be because we were dealing with history and real people. They're not joke figures, particularly if they're dead you should show proper respect to them and try to portray them as they were when they were alive.

RF: I think the key to the success of the film, the believability both in terms of the mounting, the physical mounting. It's one of my favourite films.

RWB: I regard it as something of an achievement not only for me only, for it was very much a team effort, Sidney Hayers was the editor, he was a very good one, very right for it. We deliberately did it in black and white. We could have done it in colour because at that time colour was coming in and most of the other pictures on the lot was being made in colour. But we elected for black and white because we thought 1912 it should be so.

RF: Did you shoot it more or less in sequence?

RWB Yes nearly, one had to because the sets had to be tilted and progressively changed. Again, all that had to be got right. I remember the first script which was Eric and it was meticulous and beautifully finished, everything you could wish for. But he'd left out one element, it was well authenticated that the policy of the captain was, the one thing he was terrified of, was that if panic broke out everybody would start killing each other and he knew right from the start there weren't enough life boats to take all the people. The regulations didn't demand it. You can blame the Board of Trade if you like, you can blame Parliament but that was the rule at that time. So, who issued an order even if an order was issued but there were a lot of people down in the steerage who were Irish or Polish immigrants. When they tried to make their way on the upper decks once they knew something was wrong - because a big ship like that one could be struck by an iceberg it could be three or four hours and the ship was sinking before you realised what was going on. They did eventually realise

something was up: they tried to make their way up onto the deck. On a big ship, it's not easy to find your way around.

RF: Also, those big ships were designed to keep the paying classes separate.

RWB: And, generally, the steerage classes must have subsidised the first-class passengers when you think all the space and facilities were provided for first class the way people were packed into steerage. I think the economics of the ships gave a better deal to the first class.

These people were trying to find their way up; they found their way barred and a series of locked gates. They started to get fire axes and smash their way through and eventually they did make it to the upper deck. Eric had left it all out. He said it's getting very long. The picture can't go on forever. I think he was worried we'd get a bit of political criticism. Cunard White Star wouldn't like it. I said I can't see the argument, it's history, we know it happened, we know how it happened, we can't identify any particular individual but there's tons of evidence to show that this was the case. If it's history, too bad. What we're trying to do is give a complete picture.

RF: Why was he so sensitive about corporate feeling?

RWB: I don't know that he was. I don't want to criticise a dear friend.

RF: Was it you that brought him in to this?

RWB: I'm not sure, it may have been Bill McQuitty.

RF: Was it a subject he particularly responded to, the story of the Titanic?

RWB. He was fascinated with it and being a statement about society which can persuade itself into an attitude of mind which excludes common sense or reason.

[Discussion of purpose of Government intervention].

RF: Walter Lord in the original book makes the point it was the end of an era.

RWB: That was what the film was about and it couldn't have been more precisely timed. It was 1912, a couple of years before the outbreak of War.

RF: To what extent did you use material from the film Goebbels made before the War.

RWB: There was a tiny bit, only a tiny bit from it which was the view of the quarter deck in daylight which we couldn't do because we couldn't find a ship which resembled it closely enough. The earlier stuff where you see a ship leaving Liverpool that was library stuff of the original article. We had some very good breaks. The scenes in the engine room, there weren't many of them and they didn't involve any flooding, you had to see the engines. The ships engine is an enormous affair with a turnover of about ninety rpm. Very slowly they

thud along. The identical engine exists in a water pumping station. We found one near Uxbridge. They'd kept it. It worked because we made it work but I don't think it was seriously used for pumping London's water any longer. I dispatched Sidney Hayers but to the Gairloch because we were going to build the deck and we had the lifeboats on Ruislip Lido overnight but we had no means of getting people from the decks into the lifeboat. You had to see that. We found a ship of reasonable size which was going to be broken up and we were able to rig lifeboats up there and lower them full of people and people jump overboard and panic and that was all done by Sid Hayers in Gairloch. We plotted it all out. He was going to do this, I was going to do that to match into it and it worked very well.

RF: Were you pleased with the miniatures?

RWB: They were marvellous. They were photographed first of all by Skeets Kelly. He did a marvellous job on the photography and the models were all built and set up by Bill Warrington. We got hold of a launch which we then fitted out to look like the Titanic from a distance. It would move, all the lights would work and there was plenty of space inside so we took the proportions of the launch to the original Titanic and then referred back to that to get the life boats and then we had little lifeboats made with people made of clockwork. I always [wished]I'd stolen one. I don't know what happened to them. Marvellous little models so long as you didn't hold onto them too long. It wasn't the sort of set up you could hang up for minutes on end.

RF: Where was all that done?

RWB: In a tank. The tank was specially built for it at Pinewood.

[Anecdote about attending Rank Christmas party during the shooting of the film.]

RF: Two or three years before yours there was a Fox film, wasn't there?

RWB: Yes, it was directed by Jean Negulesco and made about the time I was on the Fox lot but I had nothing to do with it. It had Clifton Webb being terribly brave saying "women and children first" and Barbara Stanwyck, and the Titanic scene was only part of the story. It was the background rather like the famous incident in *Cavalcade*. That was brilliant. I remember that very well. There was the German one which I thought was grotesque. It had Jewish billionaires forcing millions of dollars on the captain on the bridge.

It was very interesting who survived and who didn't. [We tried?] to find one of the radio operators who made a mistake over the cables [who] didn't survive. The architect who built the ship didn't survive. The captain didn't survive and the officer on the bridge didn't survive which left Eisner as the most senior officer who had nothing to do with it because he 'd gone off watch. [Discussion of what happened to Eisner subsequently].

RF: One of the great things about the picture is the sheer professionalism of its making, its construction, the special effects, they all work so well.

RWB: That was the wonderful thing about it. The wonderful response one had from every-one concerned. I remember the woman who did all the costumes, she worked on a whole lot of pictures for Sidney Box, she was over the moon about it and getting every detail of the costumes right. I found I required one or two short scenes which had to be played on the port side of the promenade deck.

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We built about 250 feet of the starboard side but I had no port side and I wanted it for just a couple of short scenes. I looked at all the costumes and I realised all the men were wearing overcoats for reefer jackets and you buttoned them up in the normal male fashion of left over right. The buttons were all there and if you just did them up the other way right over left where a man was wearing a trilby hat you just put it on with a bow on the other side of his head and then you shot into a mirror. This came out as if they were on the port side. People of course had to shake hands left handed and we had quite a few amusing games doing this and the only snag was the officers caps had a badge on the front which was the Cunard white star which was a sort of white pennant flying from left to white so we had some badges specially made with the pennant flying the other way.

RF: You said earlier you had ten weeks of night shooting. What was the overall schedule?

RWB: Twenty-One weeks. That was a change. We just about did it. I don't think we went over very much.

RF: And on budget too.

RWB: Yes, I think so. You see Bill McQuitty was a tower of strength. He was a remarkable man in many ways. He was born in Belfast and comes from a distinguished Belfast family. It owned the newspapers and his brother was a QC. Bill didn’t like it much and got a job in Shanghai Bank and then he went to India and joined Skinner's Light Horse as a corporal. He was a rolling stone and an adventurer, full of the most wonderful stories. He's still alive and would be around 85 or 84. He's very spry. He's got one of these beautiful flats looking over the Thames in Fulham.

RF: Was he assigned to the film or was it one of his own projects?

RWB: I think it was one of his projects because it was Belfast. The thing was built there. He remembers being held up in his father’s arms at the launch and seeing it sail away for the first time. The finish on that ship was unbelievable. It must have been a floating palace.

RF: It's a heart-rending story. It's impossible not to be affected by the tragedy.

RWB: It was an achievement on everybody's part. There wasn't a single idle passenger, they all worked their hearts out and loved it. Alec McCowen had a small part in *The One that got Away*. I hadn't worked with him before and he was wonderful. He was also in *A Night to Remember*. He plays the wireless officer in Carpathia.

[Discussion of the historical background to the sinking of the Titanic.]

RF: Given the fact that in audience terms it's a very downbeat subject, what sort of business did it do?

RWB: I think it did very well but never spectacularly. I'm not sure that it ever made a profit seriously. On that kind of budget which in round figures was half a million you have to take an enormous amount of money at the box office before you start showing a profit. You have to get about two and a half times back.

RF: In those days, they didn't spend so much on promotion.

RWB: So, you have to get two a half million back before you start showing a profit. So, I doubt it earned that much. We're now 1958 and everything was going my way absolutely and JD himself was saying "what would you like?"

RF: Were they paying you well. This is to get an idea what top directors were earning at the time. You were on a picture by picture deal, were you?

RWB: I can't remember and sadly in those days one agent kept all the contracts and I only sat down and signed them and I've never seen them since. He's lost them all.

RF: Were the reward commensurate with the risks in the work?

RWB: No, I don't think so. What happened to me was, during this middle period, somewhere around *Jacqueline* or *Tiger in the Smoke*, Earl [St John] had been installed as executive producer at Pinewood on all Rank products and he was happily running the business. Then John Davis started to take a more active interest which would be around 1955—56, he brought in a man called James Archibald. He was young, tall, rather dashing, every clever and bright man and he was brought in and somehow or other his position in the whole thing was never clearly defined. I think it was a great pity from his point of view let alone anyone else's but he was listened to by John Davis and Earl went along with whatever he said no matter how reluctant occasionally. These two worked more or less together. I think Archibald was only ever known as personal assistant to John Davis sort of thing. It should have been one thing or the other. One of the first things he did was investigate the condition of everybody's contract. You got taken out to dinner and it was explained to you by James that you were now getting say £3,500 to direct a picture on the basis it would probably take one year. You would never expect to do more than one picture a year but if I did I would have been paid for both of them. He said this is not enough. He said in future we will pay you say £6000. It was certainly a hefty raise. Bound to make you popular. But he

was right, we were all underpaid. I can remember in 1955 when Geoff Unsworth was lighting a picture which was ten week's work, but responsible for putting the thing on the screen and he was being paid about £70 a week which was ridiculous. this went all the way through. I think I must have had some sort of short-term contract which was probably for three pictures.

RF: What were the outside temptations?

RWB: Not many.

RF: Not ABPC [Associated British Picture Corporation], for example?

RWB: No.

RF: How did senior directors in the business regard the opposition?

RWB: I certainly never thought about it. I very happy at Pinewood. It was a marvellous studio to work in. You had everything you could wish for within the limits of British production of those days.

RF: The relationship of talent which management was a pleasant one?

RWB: I think it was reasonably happy. Everyone got his gripes. Dirk was certainly fed up of being in *Doctor* pictures. He knew he could do better. Everybody had got a sob story about this wonderful script which had been turned down. That goes on all the time, doesn't it? I can sort of remember my contract had not run out when I finished shooting *A Night to Remember*. It's beginning to creep back into consciousness I may have had a contract for three pictures of which I'd done two. I've got a feeling I owed them a picture but the contract was due to run out in four months. So, there was a quibble between me and the studio whether they were going to hold me to that other film or whether they wanted to extend the contract. I know I got £6000 for *A Night to Remember*. There is one other thing I should say about Julian Wintle, a man for whom I have the highest possible regard. When we did *The One that got Away* the studio, I suppose it was James Archibald, he introduced a system by which the producer of the picture was to be paid 15% of the profits up to £l00,000. When the profits went over £100,000 that was the finish and the Rank Organisation kept everything. *The Man that got Away* was successful and there was a kind of unwritten law that the producer would receive the 15% and then he would pay half of what he got to the director. And believe it or not Julian paid every single penny on the nose as it came in. I got £7,500 on top of what I was being paid.

RF: That would have put you in a very high tax bracket.

RWB: So, having finished *A Night to Remember* John Davis was very keen I should stay there. That I should do what I wanted and everything was going to be absolutely great. I am sure that was his intention. So, we negotiated a new contract. I can't remember the details.

It would have been a three-year contract because it finished in 1961. Presumably I had to do three pictures. I can't remember what the fee was. It might have been £10,000. It involved a raise on the original. But, of course I said I wanted to produce. A fatal mistake and I doubt if I've recovered from it even now. But I wanted to do it for a number of reasons. One was to make myself more my [own]master. The other was to have access to all the information producers had and directors didn't. I was sick and tired of people saying what do you want to do and me saying I read a marvellous book last week and being told it had already been bought or you couldn't read every book which came out.

Rank had a huge story department but there was no liaison with the directors or at least there wasn't with me. You were in a position of waiting for a producer to come to you and say I've decided to offer this to you, would you like to do it?

RF: How were the producers operating. Were they independent producers under the Rank umbrella or were they staff producers?

RWB: I think most of them had an independent company of their own and on paper were subcontractors. I'm sure Julian was. He was a good businessman. He knew what he was about. He did it well. There was in his life a dreadful dispute where he was sued for wrongful dismissal. The one extraordinary characteristic was that as soon as the picture started shooting he got an attack of nerves or some kind of cold feet. Rather dramatically I suddenly thought I must change the director, I've made a mistake, I must have somebody else. I know there was trouble with this with *The One Who got Away* I remember Earl called me when I was in the Lake District to have a talk about how it was all going. He was very worried about the political aspect. We talked about the thing and it was all right. The schedule was a bit sick because we were having such terrible trouble with the weather. Nevertheless, there was nothing seriously wrong and nothing seriously wrong with what I was doing. It was an odd thing with Julian, it was purely a nervous spasm which got him and then he got over it and he treated me like a king. He paid all that money to me. He didn't have to. There was nothing on paper. So, it did happen later and there was a terrible row and it got very acrimonious.

There was I with a new contract and I was a producer and I formed a new company. I was all set to start looking for subjects. The first thing JD said to me was what we really need is a vehicle for Kenny Moore and Dirk Bogarde. Dirk is going to Hollywood shortly and we're frightened to death we're going to lose him. He's a big asset and we must try to keep him. If we can find a good story for him he'll be happy. If you could do that it would be great. Also, we need something for Kenny. The one trap with having stars under contract is that you have to pay them and then you have to find subjects for them. It's murder. That's why people don't do it much anymore. One of the other producers on the lot was Hugh Stewart who subsequently made a lot of [Norman] Wisdom pictures. We were sent by Earl — he would never go to the theatre himself, he would never go and see a movie, he would say I read in the paper about this thing they're doing at the Royal Court, just pop along, give me your feelings, reactions. I went, Hugh Stewart went and we agreed we'd get together on this. The play was called *The Long and the Short and the Tall*. It was a good play. It also had a great

deal of bad language. Nevertheless, he and I were attracted to this and wanted to do it with some of the people in it, particularly Peter O'Toole who was sensational. Then there was another play by “Tam” Williams. Hugh Williams, and his wife had developed over the preceding few years a facility for writing charming light West End plays. He played in them. He was always losing so much money on the horses he needed the income. I knew him from *Paper Orchid* all those years before and he had a play on called *The Grass Is Greener*. I went to see it. I was captivated by it. I thought it was such a clever idea. It's the one about the married couple living in a large country house. They have a charming American visitor who makes a play for the wife. It was a slender plot but I thought a fresh idea and an idea that I liked. I never liked the idea that if your wife discovered you had a ding dong you should immediately ring up lawyers and instigate divorce proceedings, particularly if children are involved. There was a third property I liked but I can’t remember what it was.

I did a lot of work on a subject called *The Man from the Sea* for Kenny Moore but it came to nothing. It had a slender premise: an unbelievable idea that a British yachtsman sailing in the Mediterranean has to swim ashore and he’s stark naked. The local village think he’s a Greek god because he's flaxen haired and a marvellous looking fellow.

RF: Who paid for the development costs?

RWB: Rank.

RF: Did they give you a budget?

RWB: No, you'd go to Earl and say I think we ought to try to develop this for Kenny because we need a subject for Kenny.

RF: How much would a screenplay cost?

RWB: A few hundred pounds. Incredibly cheap.

RF: Was there a contract?

RWB: Oh yes. It was all done according to the rules and regulations at the time, whatever they were. One thing about operation under the aegis of the Rank Organisation is that once you got the OK you went ahead. There was no meeting people in the lobby of the Dorchester and trying to chisel them down for £50. The price was set and if the price was too high you didn't make the deal unless the other party decided to take less. There was no proper bargaining. It wasn't like that. I spent a lot of time on that project which was aborted. I wanted to do *Take a Girl Like You*. I got onto him and we became great friends. We chummed up. He's another man in my life for whom I have the highest regard. It was decided he was going to do a treatment. It wasn't satisfactory so I took it to John Mortimer who was a bright new star. He took it on but couldn't make it work so it was in the doldrums. The next thing that happened was the regular Thursday meeting and everybody was there. I was to speak for my three propositions, *The Long and the Short and the Tall* and Hugh Stewart came in on that and supported me. That was thrown out because if you took the bad language out of it there would be nothing left.

RF: Was that a sensible comment?

RWB: Well it was made at Elstree by Les Norman very well with a very good cast and I think they made a bomb with it. So, that fell by the wayside. I had the whole lot against me. Then we went on to discuss the next one *The Grass is Greener* and that was thrown out on grounds of immorality. It so happens I was living in a village in Bucks at the time and I'd got to know the vicar quite well. A very nice man and bright. I had mentioned this story to me and he said strictly speaking members of the Church of England should not do this, persuade the wife to come back. He should chuck her out and instigate divorce proceedings. He was a little bit shocked at the attitude. Another thing with *The Grass is Greener* which presented a snag was that Columbia were already interested in it. Hugh told me he was open to offers. I was after Deborah Kerr and I went to see her. The upshot was that she was perfectly happy to do it but what about an American release. She was an international star. She'd worked a lot in Hollywood and she couldn't afford to be in a picture which was not going to get an American release.

RF: Her price would have required that.

RWB: JD was prepared to pay that. He wasn't daunted by any of that. He was jolly bold. It came to nothing in any case because it was chucked out on moral grounds.

RF: These moral strictures were they basically interpreting how Arthur Rank felt about things. There was a high moral tone attached to the Rank Organisation.

RWB: To the point of being prim. And to the point of being rather provincial. There was a strong feeling — it didn't really come from anyone — they die and that influence of all the trends set by that man continue forever. No one seems to actively do it. They continue even when there's no particular advantage.

RF: There is also a dimension which is particularly British in that-things are done in a particular way because they've always been done in a particular way. Very seldom people say let’s go back to original principles and try and work it out.

RWB: At ABPC that is a case in point where the influence of Farrell[?] and Robert Clark are still here to this day. But no, it wasn't John Davis or any individual saying J Arthur wouldn't like that. He was never mentioned. I only met him once on the staircase.

RF: What happened to a picture if he disapproved of it, presumably he saw the pictures?

RWB: I don' t think so. I rather doubt it. They were probably taken down to his country house and he may have run them there when they were finished but there was never any question of any cut stuff going out of the studio and John Davis never saw any cut stuff. He hoped everyone knew what they were doing and left it to them. If things were going all right he wouldn't interfere at all. But if he smelt anything was going wrong, he was onto it like a ferret and woe-betide anyone who got in the way.

Pinewood had its 21st Birthday Party and this was the one occasion I did meet Mr. Rank. It was just before I was going to make *A Night to Remember* because I remember meeting John Davis and Arthur Rank on the staircase at Pinewood. John Davis said how's the film coming along. I said fine. He said if you cut the budget we can get you a knighthood. He introduced me to Sir Rank and that was the end of the conversation.

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This Pinewood birthday party was an hilarious affair. A huge marquee was built at the back of the studio and tables were set for ten people, there must have been about four hundred people. And right along one end of the tent was this long table for all the top brass, honoured guests, etc. It turned out that every single one of them was going to make a speech. It went on and it went on. Lunch, we were longing for some tea. Then our dearest friend, a man who has stood by the Rank Organisation through thick and thin, our man from Canada. Canadian Odeon was a big proposition. It was sold off later. He was a very important fellow. He was by profession a lawyer, not a particularly young man, he produced a speech about fifty pages long and he started to plough through it. Two tables away from me was the very famous actor A.E. Matthews. He was very restless and kept shifting around and in the middle of this man's speech shouted out "doesn't this man know I haven't got long to live?". Nothing happened and eventually the man finished his speech. All three projects were made by other people very successfully. I grant you that when Columbia made *The Grass is Greener* then I reckon I'd probably lost it in any case. They were offering £l00,000 for the rights. We couldn't have touched that. The one I couldn't remember was *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Joe Janni was already after it and he was a very bright fellow, very astute producer who had a good eye for a script. He had a notion but hadn't done anything about it. That one was turned down because it was sordid and nasty and about these dreadful people apart from being hilariously funny. Again, the argument was that Dirk must play it. You can't imagine anyone further removed from Albert Finney than Dirk.

RF: How long had you spent on these three?

RWB: It was getting on for 15 months and I'd done absolutely nothing.

RF: Had you not floated the ideas earlier?

RWB: Yes, and they'd gone along with a bit of research. They'd paid for my trip to Klosters and they'd paid Kingsley a bit of money and John Mortimer a bit of money. I had two or three other things going and they'd taken options. You could pay a writer three or four hundred pounds to do a month's work and they were quite happy. They were all doing other things in any case.

RF: A lot of money hadn't been blown but you'd spent 15 months of your time?

RWB: That was more expensive than all of it. During the course of it, quite early on Earl had approached me with a book. I read it and said I can't do it. It's not me at all. I don't have any sympathy or understanding for what goes on. It was a book called The Singer not the Song and it was about a priest in Mexico who gets involved with a local bandit and also with the daughter of a rich American. I ought not to speak about this at the moment because the whole question of the position of the book turned out to be highly controversial and I want to reread the book and be absolutely certain of the facts before I start to pull it to bits. It is of course a Catholic book. One of the things I can say now which I only found out to later is that in the days when it was set in Mexico in the 1920s, Mexico had had a revolution and there was officially no such thing as a Roman Catholic priest but of course it was all there. Your local priest would be the village plumber or carpenter or baker. He was a genuine Roman Catholic priest but didn't wear his robes in public. That's highly interesting but it's not in the book and I didn't tumble it till it was too late. Anyway, I turned it down. I'm not a Catholic but the book seems to me to read in a very critical way of that church and I've got no wish to be involved in criticism, or indeed praise of the Roman Catholic church. I said "the man you want is Luis Bunuel", he said "who?" I was only half serious but it would have been a good subject for him. So, I turned it down and it was forgotten. Then my various projects were turned down. Then I put my hand to other things.

There was a small detective story by Julian Solomons. He turned out to be a good egg. Very, very, competent and highly intellectual. He'd written a book which had one very attractive aspect. It's the story of a teenager who gets involved in a murder case but the story is told entirely through the eyes of a reporter on the local paper, not national. Now local newspapers in this country are far more important than national newspapers. The national newspapers think they influence the nation and tell the government what to do. Actually, nobody takes a blind bit of notice. The real influence is in the local rag. That's what everybody reads. It's got what they want to know about. To me it was a good idea to show the local paper. We never got an entirely satisfactory script.
George Brown wanted to do *More work for the Undertaker* which was another Margery Allingham and he had four or five scripts done on it and it never came right. I'm trying to think of the almost endless list of things which didn't work. Eventually John Davis invited me for lunch.

Bill McQuitty wanted me to join him, he said we could do great things. But I was reluctant, I wanted to go on my own, clever dick. If I'd gone with him I would probably have ended up

running Ulster Television. That's what he did almost immediately. He made one more picture. And then Sidney Box got together a consortium and they made a bid for Ulster TV and got it. Bill McQuitty became the chairman and his wife is still on the board. Bill had to retire because there is an age limit. He still retains an interest.

One thing which gave me great satisfaction with *A Night to Remember* was that during the first night which was turned into a great gala by JD at the Odeon Leicester Sq., Bette Davis was in and so I rang up JD and told him and said I'd very much like her to come. He said we'd be honoured. So, she was there to share my joy.

But back to this lunch. At this lunch, we picked over these various subjects and JD then said I don't see why you don't do this thing which Earl wants to do, *The Singer not the Song* So I rehearsed all my objections. I'd half-forgotten the book. At least a year had gone by since the original reading of it and the upshot was that I gave in. I thought what am I arguing about, I can make a picture of it. So, I did it. The doing of it was largely predicated by JD because it would be a subject for Dirk Bogarde. I'd never worked with Dirk. I thought I'd better go and talk with him about it. He was in Hollywood so I went to Hollywood and saw him practising the piano for the Liszt film which he did very well. He put his heart and soul into it and by the time he finished he practically could play the damn thing. He's a man of great integrity. He's ruthlessly honest with everyone else as well as with himself. We talked about it and he said he was going to make it. Earl had been on the telephone and he said while you were away I've come across Nigel Balchin and I think he would be very good man to write this. I only knew him from a couple of his novels but it sounded alright to me.
Also, he had some track record as a script writer. That sounded alright to Dirk. He asked who was going to play the priest. I said I didn't know that yet and I certainly don't know who's going to be this little girl but it's early days yet and I'll keep you posted. I came back to England and then it was a question of working with Nigel Balchin. He couldn't come to England because he was a tax exile in Italy so I had to keep going backwards and forwards to Florence. That was no hardship I can tell you. He'd got himself a small castle which he was renting and I think he did a pretty good script. I can't tell because from my point of view the picture was a total disaster. I was pilloried, the most dreadful notices. The 'Times' critic said "what would you expect from a man who would cast Marilyn as a psychopathic babysitter". So, I shot a letter into the Times pointing out that the only person who wanted Marilyn in the film was Darryl Zanuck. In those days, they were unsigned and I've no idea who the critic was. But I resented it at the time and I still do. A lot of those things stick.

RF: Critics have a very strange idea of how films get made. It's always the director.

RWB: That's alright if you've achieved as a director the position where you really do have full control but that is extremely difficult to achieve. Very few people get to that stage. To my mind the only director who's achieved *carte blanche* is Charles Chaplin because he owned the studio and he would make the picture and finish it and realise it and retake it and retake it and he was an owner of the company who distributed it. Lesser mortals do not achieve such a position. Listen a lot of the people who say they do are not their own masters. Since that time, we have developed a few people who exercise slightly more power than I was

able but since most of them are financed with American money I don't believe there's no influence following up that money.

RF: There are so many practical considerations too. So often there's a start date and contracts have been signed and someone has dropped out at the last minute.

RWB: I suppose the critics would say then you have to walk out. Then you can't pay the mortgage and your child can't go to school.

RF: It's the sort of things journalists do every day.

RWB: There I was embarked on that terrible jamboree and I knew it was going to be a disaster. I bolstered myself and thought if the worst comes to the worst, I've established a good record for myself and maybe that's the way it has got to go. Largely at Earl's insistence it was decided to play Johnny Mills as the priest. My choice was Paul Schofield. You can't have him, he's too many wrinkles on his face in spite of the fact that he would have been marvellous and might have saved the day. We were burdening Johnny with a part for which he wasn't suited at all. He has to be sexually attractive not just to the little girl who has to fall in love with him but also the bandit although this was never mentioned.

RF: That was the subtext of the book?

RWB: trying to make the picture without doing it was ludicrous. Johnny was not right. We burdened him with a phoney Irish accent. If there's one actor in the world Dirk can't get on with, it's Johnny. and when I told him Johnny was going to play the part he very nearly hit me. He was very hurt and very angry and really felt that I'd betrayed him because he had said if it had come to his eyes that this was being mooted, he wouldn't have any of it. But he was under contract like I was and we all had to accept it. It was a mistake and it didn't do Johnny any good either. I'm not condemning him in any way. He gave as good a performance as he possibly could in those circumstances. You were making a film which was about something you couldn't say. These days you could probably do it. Another one of these sex and religion sagas, that's what it came down to. I don't blame the critics for hating it but I do blame them for condemning me personally. But I had announced myself as producer as well as director and they probably thought "sod him, we'll throw the book at him".

RF: The string quartet had not detected those undertones.

RWB: The author had a good reputation and she would flatly deny this was in the book and this is why I want to reread it to make sure I've got my facts right, or at least my own feelings.

RF: Who did she write for?

RWB: She was a middling lady novelist [Audrey Erskine Lindop.DS]. She wasn't Mills and Boon but she didn't aspire to great heights. She was a good middleclass novelist, I mean middle class in novel writing class. She would hotly deny there was a relationship between

the priest and the bandit but if there wasn't there's no story. I got for the girl [Mylene Demongeot] who was very good but she was very heavily under the influence of her husband who was a stills photographer and it was during that wave that every girl in France was being groomed by a still photographer to be the next Brigitte Bardot. If you went to France in those days every girl in the street looked like Brigitte Bardot. She'd been conned into this. She started in Nice as a concert pianist. I saw her in Paris a few years ago, she's now married to Georges Simenon's son who is a film producer. She was as good as she could be under the circumstances. She had this stills man who used to jump around like a jack-in-a-box and was a terrible nuisance. I'm certain that didn't help. He got her so brain washed she didn't know what she was doing.

RF: Where was the picture shot?

RWB: Pinewood and Spain. We went to Malaga. I had a production manager on *A Night to Remember* a production manager called Jack Hanbury, a brother of Victor Hanbury. He turned out to be an absolute charmer. He was wonderful running the thing. I took him on as associate producer and as far as I'm concerned, he was the producer of *The Singer not the Song*, because I threw all the work at him and just got on with directing. He did it all extremely well. Nobly trying to keep everybody sweet and stop the fights. I sent him and Vetchinsky off to find a village. They started in Barcelona, inspected every village on the South coast, got to Malaga, got beyond Malaga, found a little place called Alhaurin de la Torre.
The village itself was absolutely perfect for the story. It worked perfectly. Really almost all the picture was shot there. We had about six weeks there and then three weeks at Pinewood doing the interiors of the church and things like that.

RF: Were there tensions between your two male principals?

RWB: Oh yes. They couldn't get on.

RF: What was the basis for it?

RWB: I don't know. They were two totally different people. They were opposed in every opinion, belief, style, manner, character, deportment, they were two divergent characters that couldn't work together. I don't know if Earl was playing that evil game that they play a lot in Hollywood of putting people together like that to see if it will spark off the chemistry. Possibly might have thought he'd throw that cat amongst the pigeons. I also confess to you, and I've no right to say it, I strongly suspect Earl never wanted me to be a producer-director. He knew I was getting very big for my boots. He knew James Archibald was about to go off and he became managing director of J Walter Thompson. So, there might be a vacancy in the executive corridor at the studio and JD was very cosy with me and we got on very well together. I wouldn't say he'd wreck a picture for studio politics but as a piece of schadenfreude I don't think he'd be at all sorry if it clipped my wings a bit. Actually, it cut them right off.

RF: Did you have executive ambitions?

RWB: I think I did. I can remember sizing up the situation *vis-a-vis* all the other producers. I'd been very impressed by my three years with Zanuck. I was very impressed with the way that job was organised in practical terms, how you were actually going to do it, I'd given a lot of thought to that, how you were going to run six pictures at once if required. I must admit there was an inkling.

RF: Do you think you were getting too big for your boots generally?

RWB: I think I was. I was riding high but I don't think I could be blamed for that. Quite honestly, I think that there would have been a tremendous crisis about what pictures to make and if I'd lost the battle it would all have fizzled into nothing but if I won the battle if would have made a tremendous difference to the history of the Rank Organisation. I'm a very firm believer that any industry needs a core and the Rank Organisation was that core. As cores go it was one of the best. ABPC couldn't touch it as an establishment.

RF: Theirs was not a class act. Occasionally they came up with something.

RWB: And it was with the Rank Organisation. Given that the Rank Organisation was very suburban — everything had to be very nice. I can remember when I was doing *The Weaker Sex* many years before, I had a very good actress Joanna Hopkins who retired almost immediately, and she was in the WRNS. She was in her bedroom one morning before going to report for duty. I had her in her dressing gown or blouse and skirt cleaning her teeth. Shock horror about this. I thought it was a piece of good propaganda for children, clean your teeth. Ordinary run of the mill behaviour. The heavens almost fell in — that was Paul Soskin, not the Rank Organisation. That was the all-pervading influence. Everyone had to speak precisely and clipped because it was nice.

RF: Certainly, the only visible morality in the country in films on radio and television was middle class morality. *The Singer not the Song* turned out badly, did you know this at the time?

RWB: Oh yes, I dreaded it. I believe it's become a cult picture now. I had no faith in it, no interest in it at all. I'm not interested in homosexual love affairs. I'm not interested in a priest, a little girl who tries to seduce him.

RF: It sounds like a picture for the 1960s, as if it was before it's time.

RWB: Bill McQuitty says exactly that. Immediately after it was made, we'd all been to the first night which was a special first night mounted for it and it had to be a big splash and all the proceeds went to the Central School of Speech and Drama. So, it did some good. They got a lot of money out of it which they needed badly. John Davis was on the board so he had to give them a premiere.

RF: Was it an expensive picture?

RWB: I think it was for those days. It was around £325,000. It was in colour. My first picture in colour I think. It was photographed by Otto Heller who was a remarkable man. Very good cameraman. He used to have secrets with the focus boy as to what bits of glass or gel were going over the lens and he would never let anyone know what they were or how he was doing it but the results were superb. But he wouldn't tell anyone what he was doing, he wouldn't tell the operator and the focus puller never really knew what was going on. He was good company.

SIDE 19, TAPE 10 Before *The Singer Not the Song* was shown I'd already started another film called *Flame in the Streets*. It originated as a play by Ted Willis called Hot Summer Nights. Since we were going to have to shoot it in the Winter we decided that wouldn't do. It was about Jamaican immigrants in the North Kensington—Notting Hill Gate area. It was still a Pinewood picture. Jack Hanbury was again an associate producer. I had John Mills who played a trade union convenor in a large furniture factory in the East End of London. He has a wife played by Brenda de Banzie who gave I think an absolutely superb performance. She was a very much underrated actress. She went about being rather grand and slightly off-putting but she was just a damn good actress. They had a daughter played by Sylvia Sims who was one of the most beautiful women of her day. She is a school teacher in a local council school. A black supply teacher arrives played by Johnny Sekka who in many ways was a Frenchman. He came from Dakar. He's been in Hollywood for years. I can't remember where we got him, I suppose an agent, but it was almost impossible to find an actor eligible to play the part. In those days, black actors were few and far between. We had Earl Cameron who was the doyen of all black actors. He'd made a film at Ealing, *It Always Rains on Sundays.* [Probably *Pool of London*. DS] He was a tower of strength and very helpful in advising me on how Jamaicans would behave. Vetchinsky was the art director and he did a marvellous job. I saw it at the National Film Theatre a couple of years ago and I wasn't altogether disappointed. But one factor was the accuracy of the settings which are superb. The settings look exactly right, exactly as they were in 1960. So, the story is about how the couple fall in love. The father is a straight down the line labour man who believes in equality of sexes and races — it was probably before it's time, it wasn't noticed at all and died when it came out — what is wrong with it is that it lacks a conclusion. Once you set up the business and jealousies and agonising of the white parents, the whole thing boils up and there were a few bother boys about who try and put the boot in and there's a riot towards the end. I believed in it and thought it was something which had to be said. I thought it was high time. Actually, I was ahead of my time. But there was no outcome to it. We set it all up in a most elaborate way but you've got no conclusion. The audience can draw their own conclusion and now it's become rather fashionable to have an unresolved ending. It is well said that life goes on and stories tied up in neat little bows at the end where everyone lives happily ever after is not true life as we all know it. I suppose the only way you can bring things to a true denouement is if somebody dies. But I don't think it's right once you've set up the vexed question about relationships which in 1960 were very different from what they are now and

they're pretty sticky now. In those days, it was quite sticky stuff. I enjoyed making it. I thought it was worth doing. I do think if you set it up that high with all those complications and inter-reaction of relationships you have got to give the audience something to chew on at the same time which indicates what will happen next without having a triumphant finale. A worthy picture. It was shown in New York one night and there was a riot.

RF: What were the circumstances?

RWB: I don't know. Somebody got upset about it. That brings to mind a remark made by Gary Merrill in Hollywood in 1952 in *Night without Sleep*. There was a cabaret in that. There was a restaurant with a small band and the band was black and the leader was Benny Carter. I knew him better than he knew me because I bought his records back when I'd been a jazz fan as a teenager. He was a first-class saxophonist and was quite a star. I thought I'd say I've got Benny Carter. During the film, he has to come over to a table where

Gary Merrill and Hildegarde Knef are having dinner and he joins in the conversation. I remember one of the people on the floor, I think it was an assistant, he said “you’ll never get this picture shown in the Southern states. A black bandleader walking over to a white man's table and talking to him”. I said you can't be serious. I said “that's rubbish, it wouldn't happen in England”. And it wouldn't have. People say we’re all anti-black, we weren't at all. There weren’t many around and the ones who were were stars, like Hutch, who used to play the piano very well. But with all those excuses no one would have taken a blind bit of notice about it. In the late 1930s I remember the Florida Club which had a glass floor which used to revolve while you were dancing and that had a black band. Fats Waller used to come and sit in when he was playing the Palladium. He used to walk round and talk to everyone.

So, I think the picture had no effect at all and after the disaster of *The Singer Not the Song.* Incidentally the ironic thing about *The Singer Not the* Song was that it was extremely successful in places like Italy, Spain and France, it is a cult picture. There you are I didn't know what I was doing, most of the time I was trying to know. But somehow it got through to audiences in these places for good or ill. I don't know if that overshadowed *Flame in the Streets.* I suppose it was before its time and people didn't want to see a kitchen sink story about blacks and whites living in a rather poorer neighbourhood of London and not getting on. Ann Lynn was in it she played a white woman who has been married for some years to Earl Cameron and this was to show an example of an established marriage between a white girl and black man as opposed to the potential love affair developing between our hero and heroine and she turned in an absolutely superb performance, it was tender without regret but you knew she had had her problems. She did it beautifully without self-pity.

RF: The question comes to mind around this time, 1961, there seems to have been some kind of social conscience operating at Pinewood because there was this picture and also a couple of Relph/Dearden pictures. Did it originate with Relph?

RWB: I think they put it up to Earl the way I put up the Ted Willis play.

RF: It was interesting that that kind of picture was being made Which was against the general atmosphere in the country. You said earlier there wasn't much of a colour problem. I think you’re wrong and there was a great deal of institutionalised prejudice. The only thing, as you said, there weren't that many of them.

RWB: Perhaps what I’m saying is that it wasn’t perceived. It wasn't manifest in my world at any rate.

RF: No, but we’re talking about those lining up to go to the Odeon every week in the hinterlands.

RWB: It never worried me at all.

RF: Me neither. I remember there were four of us in a bar and one of us was black and we were being[?] in people in another booth who were eyeing us with great disfavour. This line came over which I can remember 40 years later, they must be Democrats.

RWB: The audience at the National Film Theatre when it was shown there received it very well. I was very interested in the reaction because there were a lot of people in the audience who were Jamaicans or Africans. I just wish it had had a better ending. Johnny gave a very good performance. He's very well at that character leading man style. He was very true to form, an honest, decent shop steward chap. He was not a demagogue. He came over as being a damn good carpenter. I enjoyed that because carpentry is my hobby. That was the end of that and as far as I'm concerned that was the end of my career.
RF: Explain how that was made clear to you.

RWB: My contract came to an end. I entered the film industry on February 15th 1934, I joined the army on February 15th 1940, I came out of the army on February 15th 1946, and February 15th 1961 my contract with Rank came to an end. I'm always a little suspicious about that date when it comes around.

Around this time, I first got involved in making one-hour drama shows for television. After leaving the Rank Organisation the first thing which came up was a disastrous disappointment because Zanuck was going to make a picture *The Longest Day*. He was going to have three directors, a German, a British and American. I was on the list for this and I got screwed up. I had two agents, both thought they were acting for me but only one was and the other stuck his nose in and screwed it up and Ken Annakin directed the picture. There was nothing in it for me but what would have been really nice would to have been to work with Zanuck after the experience of working with him in Hollywood and would have put my name back with Twentieth—Century Fox. It didn't work out. I wasted a lot of time worrying about that. Some television started about this time. Then a man I'd never heard of before called John Pennington rang me up, it was an agent that rang me up actually, saying if I was free from the Rank Organisation, Mr Pennington had a script called *The Valiant* which was based on truth about the Italian frogmen in the war. They were awfully clever at it and were the first to cotton on to the fact that you could use it as wartime military wheeze, you could stick a diver down, stick something on the hull and blow up a ship. It was based on a French play. A warship in Alexandria picks up two Italian frogmen and realise some limpet mines had been stuck on the hull. The frogmen are put in the chain locker in the pit of the ship. Despite this they refuse to talk. The original script was by Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse. They'd just written *Billy Liar*. It was a good script. The two sailors were given some sour wartime humour. They wanted Johnny Mills as the captain and I was the man to contact him because we'd made so many pictures together. So, I did and with a certain amount of reluctance Johnny agreed to do it. From that point on we were more or less in business. I had Robert Shaw in it who was publishing his second novel with great success at the time. He had a formidable intelligence.

RF: Was he well known as an actor at that time?

RWB: He was known but not that well known. He hadn't had the success which came soon after.

RF: I suppose it came with *From Russia with Love*.

RWB: Fortunately, I had Larry Naismith again. I had him in practically everything I did. I liked him. He was a very good actor too. It turned out most of the money was coming from Italy and we had to go to Italy to make it. It was alright but the only warship I had was an old Italian ship which was falling to pieces. It had been there since the war. It was stuck in dock, it was on the bottom. The great thing about the story is the ship is at anchor and it never moves so you never have to have the ship move which made it a bit easier. But the hilarious moment was at the end of this when the bomb goes up and since they're in shallow water the boat just settles sweetly on the bottom and still above water. The sea was below the deck so they put on an enormous ploy so when the reconnaissance planes come over which they knew would come over to see what the damage was they couldn't see any damage so they put on a big military parade. The only royal marines band they could produce was a local band which didn't look like the Royal Marines. We just photographed it discreetly from a great distance and put a lot of noise on it. It was a bit comical. That wasn't an unqualified success.

RF: Was it a British crew?

RWB: It was a mostly British crew. Wilkie Cooper was the cameraman. There were a lot of Italians on the crew and they were all frightfully good, very hard working. But the main heads of departments were all from London. It didn't come off. In the meantime, I was very busy with my most ambitious project. I had a neighbour in Bucks who was a publisher, Pan Books. I always turned to him for material. He gave me one called *In My Solitude* by David Stuart Leslie. He had a job as a civil servant and written a few books under this name. It was a respectable novel and I thought it suited me to a T. It's the story, of a teenage boy in London, in the Cockney backstreets, with all the wild ambitions and none of the talent. I did a script which I knew wasn't right. Then I contacted a man who had suddenly come into tremendous prominence - he'd done a few things on television. His name was John Hopkins. Anyway, he came in and ransacked the script and it rattled down into a presentable script. I went to British Lion with it and they were sympathetic. We'd all been acquaintances since the war. They liked the idea and eventually we got it set up. David Kingsley was at that time officially the head of the company. He was a city man originally. He was an economist and financier. He had been the head of the National Film Finance Corporation when I did *Morning Departure*. So, again he knew me. It had to be made on the cheap but I managed to get together a wonderful cast of then unknowns but all turned out extremely well afterwards. I was having considerable difficulty in finding the right girl for it. She was a waitress in a cafe. She was pretty and she was jolly and enjoyed life and was bright and bubbly, but not bright in terms of intelligence. She was a bit easy going as far as the lads were concerned. Also, she’s a little bit older than them, she's twenty-five, whereas they're around nineteen which is a big difference at the time.

One of the agents said will you go and see this play because one of my clients is in it she might be suitable for the part. I went to see this play and there was this actress Nyree Dawn Porter. I'd never seen her before. She'd come from New Zealand and had originally been a ballet dancer. I thought she was absolutely divine. I fell for her like a ton of bricks. I thought that's the girl. And in the same play was a young man I'd never heard of called Michael Crawford I thought that's the best thing which has happened tonight, I'd found the boy as well. So, this was going to be a picture I was going to with my own company. Leslie Gilliatt, whose Sidney's brother and whom I'd worked with as a boy came in as producer. We started to assemble the rest of the cast and we finished off with David Hemmings, Julia Foster, Bernard Lee. Michael Crawford was a triumph. He was as good as you could wish for. He was very difficult, a bit of a nuisance.

RF: In what way?

RWB: I think he was trying to be a scene stealer which was ridiculous because he was the lead in any case, who was he going to steal scenes from anyway? He's it. What are you arguing about? He thought I spent far too much time with the girl. He thought I was getting too fond of her and was too interested in her instead of me, me, me all the time. He did one thing I'll never forgive him for because after it was finished he went around saying it was a disaster. It was uncalled for.

RF: It sounds as if he was very unsure of himself.

RWB: I suppose he was. He was twenty-one. That was it, they all had to be teenagers. They were all under twenty-one except Nyree who was supposed to a few years older. Otherwise they were all entirely genuine. They all tried and they all worked their hearts out but it was only a little B picture. Wilkie Cooper was the cameraman but he didn't like it. He probably thought it was a bit vulgar, a bit smutty. He'd done *The Valiant* but wasn't very sympathetic and I was rather surprised about that. I don't know what upset him. We were all making the thing under tremendous pressure. It only cost about fourpence. There was nothing to play with in the budget.

SIDE 20, TAPE 10

RF: It was rather surprising that they were making films like that in view of all the problems in the business. It went out on the circuits?

RWB: The great thing was that we must have a sneak preview which we did at King's Cross. I felt very tender and very touchy and keen about the picture. I saw a lot of my teenage life in it and it was the one picture in which I put a great deal of myself. All the others had been about other people and I rarely expressed my true feelings but this one I did. It's what disappointed me a bit about Michael Crawford because if I had the same relationship with him as I did for Hardy Kruger for instance it would have been a totally different thing. But he's not biddable. He's a loner. He was perfect for it and played it beautifully. There's just no heart about it. He's cold and cynical and didn't really care, a bit above it all. We had the sneak preview, and there were representatives from Rank Distributors and there were earnest talks but it all came to nothing. It was released with another picture and I think was only shown about four times and that was the finish of it. It was received by that audience in King's Cross with absolute delight. They loved it and it's bloody funny. It was before a lot of the kitchen sink pictures like *The Knack*. It was of that genre. It died and it's a great pity. It was shown later. BBC2 ran a "films from the early '60s" series and I thought it stood up rather well. It certainly never had a fair crack of the whip. But if you made a picture for British Lion at that time Frank and Sidney got their pictures in a grudging sort of way and the Boultings got their pictures released again in a very grudging way but anyone else the shutter came down and it was goodbye, forget it.

RF: What was British Lion doing in business? It was no way to run a railroad. What was there problem?

RWB: They were trying to keep their end up against a duopoly.

RF: If they never got behind the pictures how could they hope to?

RWB: They hadn't the money to get behind the pictures. They were completely undercapitalised. Really, they were running as a subcontractor to the National Film Finance Corporation. Of course, they had no circuit. If they'd bought the Star circuit when it came on the market… But they didn't have two red cents so they couldn't do anything. They might just as well have given up then and there but they stuck at it and the Boultings produced some very funny and some very good pictures, one or two Peter Sellers films and that sort of thing. They were very funny, very parochial if you like and Frank and Sidney made some good pictures. But this thing had no star pull, it had nothing going for it you just had to take it on its merits and try it out and try to find an audience. I think it would have found an audience because it was very amusing. But the circuits didn't want to know and in those days, there was no such thing as an art circuit. There was nowhere else to play it. So, it died. All around this time I had been getting more involved in television production.

RF: How did that start?

RWB: It started while I was still at Pinewood. There was a man there who made one or two pictures. He was an American and his name was Lawrence Backman. Larry Backman was one of Hollywood's crown princes.
He was the son of the man who ran MCI. He was also a champion tennis player of California. That was in the past. He was now a middle- aged man. He had seen *The One that got Away* and *A Night to Remember* and he was most anxious that I should do something with him and one or two scripts were discussed which never came to anything. They were never made so that came to nothing. But then he got a new thing going. He was going to leave Pinewood and he was going to studios at Elstree, the one that Soskin built. A wonderful studio, one of the best studios ever built in terms of four walls and equivalent. He was going there to make a television series and Nigel Patrick was going to be in it. Nothing would do for Larry Backman but I must go and do this. So, I went. And of course, I hadn't the faintest idea what I was doing. I hadn't really studied the matter. Admittedly we'd had ITV television by then for about five years or more, seven years. I don't think I'd really taken very much notice of it really. And the thing was a disaster. I let Mr.Backman down very badly and he was rather disappointed.

RF: Where did you go wrong?

RWB: I don't know. Just in the general direction of it. What it looked like on the screen and how it was handled. But I don't think the series was worth tuppence. It was a pathetic spy thing. It was about one of these mysterious outfits on the side of law and order which are going to save the world from disaster.

RF: What did you do differently from what you'd have done differently on a theatrical film?

RWB: I don't think I did anything differently and I should have. I
don't know clearly what went wrong. And I must say in my defence the scripts weren't very good. It was half hour shows and half hour shows are useless. I've never had a success with a half hour show. I'll never do another one as long as I live. It's hopeless, you can't do anything with them. Or at least I can't

RF: You can't do anything elaborate. It has to be very simple. There were some classic *Twilight Zones* and *Alfred Hitchcock* Presents in half an hour.

RWB: Fine, great, I'm very happy for them but not for me.

RF: That must have given you some pause about working in television.

RWB: Again, I haven't got the chronology worked out properly. But again, around the same time, I was involved with *The Saint* which was Roger Moore. I got to enjoy that. There again the stories were variable. Some were good and some were poor. They were well carpentered. It wasn't the case where you were presented with an awful script which you had to completely rethink. How does he know she's already done this if he's not there, this kind of thing. Purely technical considerations in scripts which I've had even recently.

RF: *The Saint* for me was the first British shot series which came anywhere near to American network standards and I'd been involved a great deal in American television. It was the first time it worked.

RWB: The partners were Bob Baker and Monte Berman. They'd had long experience in making pictures. Most of them B pictures. Bob had directed them and Monte was the cameraman. They made these things very successfully. They now blossomed into producing this stuff. They had a script editor who I think was Canadian, Harry Junkin, and he was a real expert. You hardly knew he was there. He wasn't one of those fellows who made their presence known. He was about and if you had a problem with the script, you could go over and talk about it with him. Generally speaking, it was unnecessary. The scripts were well prepared and well thought out and very well organised in terms of what you could expect to achieve in nine days shooting with a proportion of interiors and a proportion of exteriors and all that. They were timed almost immaculately too. Still to this day people come off the floor with seventy-five minutes for fifty-two. The point is that if they organised the script properly and shot it properly in the first place they would have a better product.
Because once you take a product and try to cut as much as seven or eight or even fifteen minutes out of it, it's going to butcher it. That was all very good, background and support. And they had some very good writers feeding in the stories. They had a considerable number of Saint stories to draw on.
I've never tried to find out how many of them were based on the original Saint stories and how many of them were cooked up as new ones. They may not have used any of the originals as far as I know. [though]Leslie Charteris always had the main writing credit for the stories. One other key to the situation which is the vital element is who is going to play The Saint. They had Roger. He had already been in at least two long-running series in America. There was one in which they all had to dress up in fur coats and they were all in the Arctic and he was one of The Mavericks. He'd been in quite a lot of movies too.

RF: He was one of Brian Desmond Hurst's discoveries.

RWB: The one great thing that he was, is that once you set up a hero like the Saint or Bulldog Drummond you simply have to have a big man with presence. You can't have someone five feet two playing the part. It doesn't made sense. It's just a requirement of the presence of the character on the screen. He just has to look bigger than all the other guys. Roger had all that. And he's marvellous looking fellow. Moreover, he turned out to be one of the hardest working men I've come across. I don't think he ever left the studio. He was always the first one to arrive he never left before seven o'clock in the evening unless he was going out somewhere for some special thing. Otherwise he really worked. He didn't have a great deal to do with the script. I don't think he needed to. He was a wonderful help on the floor. He was always cheerful, always jolly, bustling things along all the time. Very good with action scenes, like fight sequences. I got on very well with him and continue to be a great admirer. I haven't seen him since he did the first of the Bond films so it's a long time since I've seen him. But he was absolutely right for it and it was one of those things that all the elements were spot on for what was required. It was bound to be a success, which it was.

RF: Do you remember what the budgets were?

RWB: I've no idea. I wasn't involved. I should think that when they started they were for less than £20,000 each.

RF: How much of that would come your way?

RWB: I was paid £500 per episode and then it began to rise steadily.

RF: You said that was nine days. And how many day's preparation.

RWB: As soon as the script was ready you could have it and you could start talking to the art department.

RF: Was it a permanent arrangement, you and another of number other directors?

RWB: No, it never was. Sometimes they would say we've got — later on Berman and Baker were running at least another show at the same time — and on occasion yes, Monty would come and say to me we want you to do six. There will be three *Saints* and three of something else.

RF: But concurrently you were working on feature projects?

RWB: I was trying all the time, of course. I didn't make a feature picture for over four years during this time.

RF: But you were fully engaged with television work.

RWB: It got to the point where in one year I was doing 13 episodes. They were all hour shows and so since the prices were rising a bit I was amassing enough income to really support what I had to support at that time. I had all the usual young middle aged middle class problems of the time — mortgages, education and all of that kind of thing. I'd embarked on an extremely expensive education for my sons which thankfully was fulfilled and has been a triumphal success. But I was "beggars can't be choosers". I was in it up to the neck during this period and just had to slog it out. But when it came to doing 13 of these shows in one year the money was beginning to pile up quite well and I was probably getting as much as for doing a feature in any case.

RF: Did you ever get residuals?

RWB: No never. They were buy out contracts all the time.

RF: That also applied to features?

RWB: Yes except for *Two Left Feet* which was my own production but it never paid on it. *Flame in the Street* never made anything. But *The Singer not the Song* made a profit, believe it or not. I got the first cheque last year.

RF: Where is it playing, from television or cassette?

RWB: A bit of everything. A bit of overseas, a bit of showing it to the Royal Navy on ships. The life of a film is unbelievable. That's after Rank Distributors have charged every second lead pencil against it, right down to the last drawing pin never mind the lunches and cocktails.

RF: I've a long list of television series which we can just go through quickly.

RWB: I did eighteen *Saints*. I did eight *Human Jungles* with Herbert Lom. It was Julian Wintle, but he had an uncanny knack for getting really big names into these things. I had Flora Robson and Margaret Lockwood.

RF: Do you know what the knack was. Presumably the budget didn't stretch that far?

RWB: I don't know. He was sensible enough to cut corners in other parts of the budgets and then you can pay such star names. I'm only guessing.

The casts were really good: Susan George at the age of twelve, Peggy Cumming, Dennis Price, Robert Beatty, Roger Livesey, Rita Tushingham.

RF: That list sounds like people either on their way up or on their way down. Maybe that's partly the key to it.

RWB: You can't say that about Flora Robson.

RF: I certainly wouldn't say that about Dame Flora.

RWB: Nor Maggie. Not at that time. It was a terrible problem because it was having a psychiatrist and every customer that comes to him has got a problem, therefore a story. But the great bulk of it was this psychiatrist spouting this great long analysis. And Herbert said to me at the time that whenever he went into a restaurant for dinner, when they handed him a menu he started learning it by heart. That was a problem, how to photograph that and make it interesting. He does because he was a very good actor. Three *Gideon's Ways*. Then *The Avengers* popped up. I did seven of the first series. Again, Julian Wintle. Again. very good casts. I fell for the Avengers in a big way not only because of Diana Rigg who was wonderful and Patrick Macnee who was very good and very funny in a quirky way, I loved it because what happened in a way was that gradually they created a complete fantasy world. It was a hermetic world, it was completely self-enclosed and it was in limbo. The ideal *Avengers* scene would be Steed and Emma walking past Buckingham Palace and there's nobody else in the shot and there's no one else there. We never quite achieved that. But you never saw a postman, you never saw a policeman in uniform. You never saw anyone who was commonplace, real, down to earth and can't be refuted as a real person. Everyone was a fantasy person in a fantasy world. If a letter was delivered, there was a ring of a bell and you never saw a postman.

RF: Was there any point of reference. Was it comic strip?

RWB: No, it was just fantasy for its own sake. It started out something completely different. It was about a man whose wife is murdered and he goes after the murderer with another fellow who is a friend and this fellow has a girl.

RF: And they were dead straight originally.

RWB: Yes. Then you came to a much later stage where the fantasy took over and then it got sillier and sillier. It became useless. But I loved the original conception.

RF: Was that Wintle's idea? He sounds a very creative producer.

RWB: Possible. And Albert Fennel and Brian Clemens, he was one of the principal writers. He had been on the original series. He was really the one who ew more about it than anybody so the main input probably came from him. But there again I don't know. And then these things are very difficult to apportion precisely who was the key man. They all spark off each other.

RF: Also, things have an organic growth.

RWB: There were wonderful dotty things. The first one I did was in a country mansion. And a party given by a man dotty about Charles Dickens and everywhere there were busts and statues and everybody had to dress up as a Dickens character. There was always a gimmick, a style which derived from the story. Another thing which I thought was very clever was that the girl who was Diana Rigg she was always dressed appropriate to the story. I had one which all took place in a school which was empty for the holidays. She appeared, she wasn't dressed as a schoolgirl in that conventional blue serge and pigtails but nearly that. That was the first time anyone ever appeared on television in a mini skirt. The skirt was right up to here. She looked sensational in this outfit and she had these pair of gold rimmed granny specs. I had to retake the sequence because people said, including Julian, that you couldn't have her in granny specs, she looked too old. She looked wonderful. Everyone was very worried about the mini skirt and there wasn’t much of the long shot, it was straight into the close—up.

RF: Did you start the mini skirt trend?

RWB: No, we just picked it up early. Since we were going to be in these settings in a school, then the idea was to dress her in a style somewhat similar to a schoolgirl and schoolgirls wear short skirts and that was it.

RF: The hope with all these series was to get a network showing or a syndicated release for that in the States. To what extent were they deliberately designed for American television?

RWB: With *The Saint* quite deliberately. Everything was sort of mid Atlantic. They were too clever to ape the American or an American series but Roger had worked so long in America he was a star on American television already so he knew how to play it. He played it as the

Saint and he was honest about that and he played it as an Englishman but his accent was never really terribly British.

RF: And I should imagine with locations to a large extent it was a Hollywood concept of England, not a realistic one.

RWB: It wasn't much of England at all. The stories happened in Cuba or Paris or anywhere you can think of, shooting on the back lot and if it was raining Monte would say “so it never rains in Cuba?” so you went on shooting. The settings and stories were more or less vaguely international and there were occasionally American settings and American actors in it. We had one story in which someone sells an American Tower Bridge.

RF: Were there any blacklisted actors in it?

RWB: I wouldn't know because I wouldn't know who they were. I don't think so.

RF: This is the time of Hollywood England. There were a large number of American actors living over here.

RWB: So all we really need to say is that by the end of the four years I must have done quite a lot. Well over one hundred one-hour shows. One Friday there were four or five of my shows running, I’d just finished one and all five of them wanted me for the next show. Then Hammer films rang up and said they were thinking of making a film and would like to talk to me about directing it. The producer was Anthony Nelson Keys. Would I go down and talk to them? I went down to Bray. And I came away with a script and it was *Quatermass and the Pit*. Nigel Kneale had written it.

RF: Was that number two in the series?  It had been on television?

RWB: Oh, yes. But I’m not sure whether it was number two or number three. I think it was number three. There were three of them and it was the last one.

RF: Quatermass is quite famous.

RWB: The original BBC television was an overnight sensation. It stopped the country. Then it was filmed. Then there was another one and that was filmed. Then this one came up. Well I don't know whether it was better than the other two. As far as I was concerned it was an absolutely first-class script. It was one of those rare scripts which were copper bottomed. Apart from questioning a few lines of dialogue here and there, there was nothing to say about it. A very well written script. Tight and beautifully constructed and it went from A to B to C and finished at Z and nothing to argue about and I was keen to do it. And, again it was one of those pictures that went dead right. Lucky all the way through and it doesn’t happen very often.

RF: Do you know why they came to you, because you'd been out of the frame for four years?

RWB: No I don't know why they did. I think Anthony Nelson Keys wanted me. I feel our paths had crossed much earlier. I think we'd certainly met in a casual way but there's nothing I could put my finger on. Anyway, we started to organise ourselves. Originally it was to be made at Elstree. They were shutting Bray up. So, we started all the preliminary work and after two weeks somebody said Elstree hasn't got any space anymore so we can't make it here, we've got to go up the road to MGM. That was marvellous. That studio was empty so we had the place to ourselves and all the permanent staff were at our beck and call. They all came in with the deal. We had Bernard Robinson as the art director. He was the great man with all the horror[?] pictures. He started the Hammer pictures. He died not long after. He worked himself to death I think. He was a marvellous man at creating something out of nothing and his sets - in the Hammer pictures — this was a science-fiction picture, it was not a horror picture at all — this one was concerned with heavy mechanical effects. We had to have the underground railway, dig out a huge space for a pit and discover this vehicle so that his work up to that time – I'm sure he'd done practically every picture Hammer had made and he had a great reputation for the glamorous sets he put up for the Draculas and the Frankensteins, wonderful settings, wonderful romantic gothic styles, all made out of nothing and yards and yards of black velvet. He had a great touch and he was a much under-rated man. He was a great hero in that club of course. He was an ace but outside he never had much reputation which was a pity. The cameraman was Arthur Grant and he again was a veteran of those Hammer pictures and he was a delightful man who had never lost his country accent. Bert Batt was first assistant and he had a reputation for being very tough and forthright and straight to the point and we got on very well and we could run a picture between the two of us. There was no nonsense. Without any real crippling effort, we brought this picture in on schedule. I can't remember what it was but about six weeks. It ran like clockwork with all these mechanical and special effects.

At the conference before the film started there were practically twenty people in the room, Les Bowie who was going to be the special effects man and he started taking over the conference and he was making a special effects picture. I had to speak which caused a bit of a sensation. But I had four years out in the wilderness and I wasn't going to stand any nonsense from anybody.

RF: What did you do?

RWB: I can't remember? I said we'll come to the special effects as we go through the script and as they come up you can tell me exactly what you've got and I'll tell you what I want. In the meantime, let's just proceed through the script in order and we'll start at page one everybody and off we go. That sort of thing. I shut him up. I wasn't somebody who was going to be told what to do by anybody.

SIDE 21 TAPE 11

RWB: We've arrived at 1967 and *Quatermass and the Pit*. Since I'd done *Two Left Feet,* which was a financial and general disaster I'd not directed a picture for well over four years.

[Recapitulates material at end of Side 20]

I was introduced to William Hinds who was the executive producer and one of the part owners of Hammer Films, the other one being Sir James Carreras. I was given a script, I took it away and read it and it was an absolute humdinger. It was by Nigel Kneale It was the third of the Quatermass stories. He'd invented a character called Professor Quatermass and initially these stories had been set on television very successfully indeed. But in those days, television wasn't quite the influence it later became, it's still surprising Hammer took the trouble to buy the film rights and made these stories into films and the first two were very successful despite their having a large audience on the BBC.

RF: Hammer started out by making low budget pictures of various BBC series such as Dick Barton, that was their origin, so they already had that tradition.

RWB: All the three stories were very much on a par. Nigel was writing on the peak of his form. He was an eminent science-fiction writer and in Quatermass he certainly had a very nifty notion indeed. The notion being that the earth as we know it, [we] are not the original inhabitants, that this earth was colonised by the people who had the necessary space equipment to do it and they had to get out of their planet because they were burning up or something so our ancestors are all Martians which is where we get our warlike tendencies and anger and seven deadly sins. The great thing about Nigel Kneale's writing is that it is so wonderfully convincing that you cannot disbelieve it. It's totally bogus but marvellous. I thought this is my lucky break. At last I'm going to be able to get off the ground again. I tackled it with enormous enthusiasm. I found I had a marvellous team.

It was a very happy, very successful picture. Nothing went wrong. It was the first time I had Bert Batt as assistant director who was very good at moving things along. One thing I learnt from him was that if in doubt push on even if you're going to leave a lot of debris, a lot of unhappy people behind you. You just go on. There were plenty of other people following behind who will clear up the difficulties. The cast was excellent. Andrew Keir was the professor. I had James Donald. It was almost the last thing he did. He gave a marvellous performance as a scientist. Barbara Shelley was the beautiful girl and Julian Glover was the heavy. Julian Glover I had met while doing the Avengers and it was one of the biggest parts he'd had to this time.

RF: What about the special effects? Was there anything innovative? You had creatures.

RWB: We had Arthropods which were giant insects I suppose. They were beautifully made.

RF: How were they animated?

RWB: By pulling strings. There were hardly any electric motors inside them or electronic control.

RF: Any hydraulics?

RWB: I don’t think so because they didn't have to move much because the moment the air got to them, they putrified immediately and decomposed which was awfully convenient. Very sensible Kneale. One eye on the practicalities. In those days, this was over twenty years ago, in the past seven years the special effects department has become so sophisticated with every kind of resource of electronics and microchips and radio control and all this kind of stuff has taken off.

RF: Taken off and taken over.

RWB: Yes, because that’s the kind of film which is very difficult to do on television. It’s wrought enormous changes in the studio system. Firstly, television taught us we don't need studios to shoot films. We knew that when we started in 1904 but we forgot it as soon as sound came in. That turned out to be unnecessary but it was television which showed us it was unnecessary. The remaining use of studios is to make fantasy pictures of one kind or another. Science fiction and horror pictures and so on. So, special effects have taken over. Talking of taken over I well remember the first story conference with about twenty people around the table including everyone from the producer to the hairdressing department and everybody was eagerly looking forward to doing this. I proposed to take the meeting through the script and describe exactly how I saw it which was the purpose of the meeting and Les Bowie started to pontificate about how he was going to do the special effects and quite frankly I had to shut him up. We were never very good friends after that. But I was the director who had been ignored for four years. I was full of energy and I was prepared to be totally ruthless with anyone who got in my way and I was determined I was going to make this film and make it properly and re-establish myself. It all settled down. We weren't bad friends. We worked together several times after that.

RF: He was on the staff of the studio as the head of the special effects department?

RWB: No, he was brought in for the picture. Hammer never had a permanent staff.

RF: I was thinking of Metro.

RWB: I have a feeling Wally Veevers was called in on this because he was the resident maestro and Les Bowie was part of crew. He was a freelance special effects man. Hammer always used him and Hammer was his main customer simply because they had used him for years and he was good and satisfactory.

RF: He was good for the time.

RWB: He was.

RF: Let’s talk about the way Hammer worked. You were pleased with the script. Did Hammer hire people to shoot the script? What kind of leeway were you given as director, did you have a chance to go over the script?

RWB: Yes, very much so but in this particular case there was almost nothing to say because it was a good script. I suppose we might have changed a few lines of dialogue here and there. No radical changes of any kind. In later pictures for Hammer I think I did contribute considerably more in odd instances here and there. But Hammer were really good to work for in a sense that within the strict limits of their tight budgets and generally scrupulously economical approach to everything, they were very easy because there were so few of them. You never saw Sir James Carreras. You saw him before the picture and again afterwards, usually at a great big lunch. He loved lunches. He was very nice to me. Then there was Tony Hinds who took a much closer interest and the third one was Brian who was in partnership with Roy Skeggs. Brian was the money man and he really looked after all the financial arrangements and the distribution arrangements. Tony Hinds was more of a creative[?]than any of the others and is still writing scripts and getting them made. This one which is on the ice with Kevin Francis was an original story by Tony Hinds. He writes under the name of John Elder.

RF: Was the feeling of working for Hammer, was it of working for an exploitation house? Were they seemingly more serious than that? Obviously, they were in business to make money so what was their approach to making films?

RWB: Jimmy Carreras was definitely for exploitation and it is perfectly true that once somebody came up with an idea for a story he would call in people to design a poster and he would take that poster to Hollywood and raise the money to make the film on the strength of the poster. It's a fine art that. He was a brilliant salesman. That was his great strength, he could really sell films. Once they’d been made and sell the idea in the first place.

RF: So, it was American money not domestic money?

RWB: It was almost always American money and this was the curious thing. Everyone else tried pouring millions trying to get into the American market. He simply went to the American market and asked them to finance the pictures. And the pictures were made on the kind of level where there wouldn’t be any great argument whether we could get Clark Gable or whoever. The picture was sold on the poster and it was going to be as far as the Americans were concerned a rather grand style of B picture. I have been to one or two festivals in the past two or three years which specialise in what they call fantasy films and it’s very striking is the deterioration in taste. But in the days of Hammer they managed to achieve a kind of glamour about it. The pictures were always richly mounted. They had tremendous assets in the form of Bernard Robinson who was the art director on practically everything Hammer ever did. And he was a sort of small time genius. He really was, and oddly enough it deteriorated slightly to the end when they ran out of steam and they were trying to force ideas, and the ideas weren't flowing in but they had a good taste about them. There was nothing

sleazy or cheap or vulgar about them, towards the end yes, some I didn't see might have been a bit nasty, but there was none of that in the days of 1967.

RF: What would you put that down to?

RWB: Probably Tony Hinds. I think it must be. And to a certain extent to James Carreras. James Carreras did interest himself in the production of the film. I'm not saying he simply sold it and that was that. He had a lot to do with the casting, for instance. He must have had some influence.

RF: The policy was to use both good technicians and good actors.

RWB: Yes, the best they could get.

RF: Did they beat people down from their price?

RWB: I don't know. Hammer, of course, achieved quite a strong position in that particular market where they were not bidding for great big stars. They didn't want to get Trevor Howard or Sean Connery. That wasn't their category. They wouldn't even have bothered to think about it. But in their own market, as they got stronger and stronger they created their own market. And if they rang up an agent and said what is Miss So and So doing, the agent would know immediately that the price was going to be the price or there wouldn't be any part.

RF: You had a fallow period. Did they beat you down?

RWB: I didn't argue about it. I was anxious to do it because I knew it was good. I got the going rate. They wouldn't have tried tricks because of my weakness.

RF: I ask you because in retrospect they have a slightly cheapo image in terms of budgets and costs which may be unjustified.

RWB: This depends on your view, what is cheap. I was brought up in the production department, I was brought up at Gainsborough which is a very economical operation, I never had the attitude that when you have a problem you just throw money at it. Far from it. It never solves anything. Usually it makes it worse.

RF: Would it be fair to say whatever Hammer spent, it ended up on the screen?

RWB: Yes, I've no doubt the overhead was pretty grand for those boys and why not, it was their enterprise, their company. What they did with the profits at the end of the year was their business. But they didn't milk it and ruin it like some people did. They had lots of scripts written which were never filmed. There again not a lot of money was involved but money was involved. It depends on your attitude to a certain extent. The film attitude has always been extremely snobby. I remember it from my early days when Gaumont British was "It" and everything they did was absolutely wonderful they made some very big pictures for their day and some of them were very good, but not all of them, and they lost a lot of

money whereas Gainsborough did exactly the opposite. There was Korda, who had a great reputation for being extraordinarily lavish. Well he believed in the star system so he wouldn't make a picture without four or five really eminent faces in it and he would pay them well. If the leading man wanted a gold cigarette case for Christmas then he'd give him one, what the hell. That kind of apparently free spending attitude but…

RF: The difference being that was the Prudential's money whereas this was the Carreras family money.

RWB: Yes. They owned the company and if they pissed it all away they'd be broke. I must say I remember when I was first shooting my pictures at Denham after the war there was a very strong attitude that it was Rank money, he was a multimillionaire, it didn't matter tuppence what we did. My first picture went about three weeks over schedule and it was a perfectly simple straightforward suspense picture. We had some big and elaborate sets that's quite true. We built a boarding house from top to bottom, three storeys, and to that extent it was fairly lavish but there was no need to go over schedule like that. So the question you have to ask yourself is that if you have the choice between something which is going to cost five hundred quid to achieve a particular effect on the screen and the alternative is a thousand and it's just going to make it that bit better, you have to ask yourself am I going to sell £4,500 worth of tickets if I chose the bigger option or go with the smaller one. I'm a great believer in this as a stimulus to invention. Necessity is the mother of invention. And I think people can get very spoilt by having open ended budgets. And, in the end, they ruin the company like they did with Goldcrest. Really absolutely disgraceful.

RF: Ego intervened there. Would it be fair to say looking back at that time that ABPC and Rank were rather effete in their choice of subjects, rather rarified? I am recalling the conferences at Pinewood where they judged subjects whereas Hammer was more earthy and closer to their audiences.

RWB: Yes, it was a very virile company. James was particularly virile. Certainly, there was a lack of virility at Pinewood.

RF: The Pinewood pictures weren't arty, they were just toffee nosed. Everyone spoke with an accent.

RWB: I think everyone there was pre-war and what we wanted was post war people. The first time this struck me. I mentioned to you that I wanted to do a book by Kingsley Amis called *Take a Girl Like You* and he came in to do an adaptation to see if we could get the thing off the ground and I thought he would like to have his own interest in it and it was a very happy relationship. We got on extremely well and in fact we found we had a great deal in common. We'd both been to the same school. But the one thing that stuck out was that he was a post war man — he was only five years younger than me — but he was a post war man and I was a pre-war man. I was 22 when the War broke out and he was 16/17, still at school, university then went into the forces and then became a teacher. That was the first time it struck me. We're cursed with a kind of suburban, "will it be alright in Ruislip?", and

“we must not shock anyone” and all that sort of thing. When I was discussing the whole possibility of my being given a whole lot more responsibility at Pinewood first of all I think I should say I explained my own feelings about it but I don't know what other people's feelings were. It may be that it never occurred to them at all but I'll go as far as to say it must have crossed John Davis' mind at some point. I’ve got reasonable grounds for imagining that. But if it had happened I would have had one monumental task and if I'd solved that, everything would have been fine. I certainly would have brought people in to pictures like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Billy Liar*, *Darling* because Joe Janni was already doing them and he was at Pinewood. That would have worked if I and Joe Janni could have got it past his board and that is the real problem and it's anybody's guess whether I or Joe Janni or a team of people could have gone to them and to John Davis and forced the question through. There is a strong possibility, but my understanding is that if John Davis had given me more responsibility and I had stuck my neck out and said we must do these three or four pictures which you wouldn't like but they are pictures of the moment, they're pictures that audiences want to see, he may have said right you go ahead, make a fool of yourself and we’ll see but if it doesn't come off you’re out. That might have been a possibility. This is all airy-fairy nonsense.

RF: Not really, I was going to ask you, had you been made an executive producer what would you have done?

RWB: I was certainly already heading a much more modern style of story, after all I did *Flame in the Streets* which was about the problems of a white girl falling in love with a black African, how people lived in North Kensington. Then the pictures I proposed which were turned down.
One was a light comedy you had all that humour and fun to carry it. *The Long,and the Short and the Tall* was a war picture but it was alright but it gave a considered view looking back onto certain aspects of the war such as when you capture a prisoner what are you going to do, shoot him? To that extent, it was war, it was still a war, but it was not a heroic picture. Also, it dealt exclusively with other ranks. I don't think there was an officer in it. I would have pursued that line and I wasn't the only one on the lot. I think some of the others were thinking along that line. But the shop shut in 1951. The boat had sailed.

RF: Whence did that suburban outlook, worrying about Ruislip, come?

RWB: I can’t put my finger on it. Clearly J Arthur Rank was a very devout Methodist. Methodism is a left-wing Church of England religion which is strict and slightly puritanical and rather severe in its moral attitudes.

RF: Left wing. I’m not sure it’s the right word to associate with the Rank Organisation is it?

RWB: J Arthur Rank was an extremely prominent Methcdist.

RF: He was also a leading pillar of the Conservative Partv as indeed was John Davis.

RWB: I'm just trying to rustle up some kind of answer. The Board as a whole was small "C" conservative. They were all proper gents, there weren't any women.

RF: I suppose radical is the word we should use.

RWB: Yes, that's much better and I think the Methodist movement was a radical organisation. It inclined to severity of outlook which leads to primness and everything being refined.

RF: And great moral certainties, no questioning of values which was going on in such books as Sillitoe's, which were opening layers of society.

RWB: He was quite a card, Sillitoe. I had a lot of dealings with him over *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning.* It got as far as that, I was talking to the author. So, a lot of it came from JD although he was a gentleman who had a number of marriages and all this kind of stuff.

RF: Somewhat notorious in aspects of his behaviour too, such as the way he treated his wives.

RWB: Which doesn't lead you to think he's particularly suburban. I can't see him clipping a lawn on Sunday morning.

RF: If anything, it was a touch of the Hellfire Club.

RWB: There was the hint of the pirate about him. He was an accountant. That was his training and qualification. He too went to the same school as I did except he was ten years older than I.

RF: Was that a connection?

RWB: Oh yes, he laughed about it.

RF: What was this school?

RWB: City of London. It's not the kind of school with a genuine old boy network such as Eton or Harrow or Charterhouse such as the older residential boarding schools. The City of London school was not a boarding school and it qualifies as a public school but it really is a super grammar school in the original tradition of the great grammar schools such as the Manchester Grammar School, probably they are the best schools of all.

RF: It's come up a couple times in your story. Presumably it meant something to you and other old boys.

RWB: It meant a great deal to me although I didn't appreciate it at the time. The great thing I derived from it was they taught me to learn. I was not good enough to go to university. I'd have had to get there by scholarship. I came out of it with very ordinary results but I was eager to get out to work and into films. There was another one in Pinewood Studios and that was Cornel Lucas. He also went to City of London.

RF: I'm inclined always to ask for thumbnail sketches of people like James Carreras. We haven't mentioned Michael Carreras yet, was he involved in the picture?

RWB: Didn't meet Michael till sometime later. I don't know what he was doing. I think he was making other pictures outside the Hammer orbit. I'm not certain about that but certainly I didn't meet him for a little time yet, a year or so. There was Tony who was a quiet, very gentle, straightforward mind, good thinking in other words, clear and always to the point.

RF: What were his gifts as a writer?

RWB: You understood the kind of thing Hammer was trying to do from the point they started doing the imitation Draculas and imitation Frankensteins and the imitation ghouls. He's inherited it from his father Will Hinds who was a variety act, a comedian, very successful, he made a lot of money. He had a partner, a stooge they worked this act together. They were standing having a drink in a pub called 'The Clarendon' at Hammersmith Broadway. They were looking out of the window drinking wondering what they should call themselves in the act and they got it and called themselves Hammer and Smith because they were standing in Hammersmith. That's how Hammer Films got their name and from then on, he was always known as Will Hammer. Extraordinary man. Unbelievably mean. I suppose he started very poor and when he became rich he wanted to keep every nickel he earned. He was very cruel to his children, treated them like dirt and Tony Hinds and his brother and sister all had a miserable upbringing. But it was Will Hammer who first formed the company with old Carreras. He was more Spanish than he was English and the original logo for the company was a Spanish galleon. He and Will Hammer somehow got together and started making quota quickies and the company gradually grew and grew and grew and Will Hammer died and old Carreras died and they both had sons, James Carreras and Anthony Hinds. And they inherited the company and began to build it up. Hinds is a chain of jewellery shops and Tony has a brother who runs all that. There's another brother who served in the war, stayed in Germany and became a teacher. I've a feeling I met him once at a grand birthday party Tony Hinds gave.

SIDE 22, TAPE 11

Tony Hinds has girls who are grown up now, they were little children at this time. James Carreras had Michael, I think he was his only child. It was a very settled and prosperous company. The thing which impressed me most, having been to Twentieth Century Fox with its vast acres and 3,000 people on the lot every day, Gainsborough before the war, Gaumont British again with fairly elaborate apparatus to run the company. The first time I went to see them was at Bray. The second time was at the famous headquarters at Hammer House in Wardour Street. They owned this building and when you went in there was one telephone operator, James Carreras, Michael Carreras, Anthony Hinds and Brian regretfully I can't think of his name, Roy Skeggs, who was the accountant bookkeeper and general factotum, one secretary between them. That was the headquarters staff. It struck me at the time if you're making pictures two or three at a time, four a year at the most this is all you

need, why do you need all this other stuff, it's overweighting it and you start making pictures to feed the company not the other way. I was very impressed by this. A lot of people could learn lessons from this, believe me. They were learning them at the time.

RF: They were learning them I suppose at that time. The great lots in Hollywood had grown up at the time when each of them were making fifty pictures a year, they were releasing one a week, in some cases two.

RWB: On that volume of production it's justifiable.

RF: It had all become unstuck. Sir James was a bit of rogue.

RWB: A bit of a rascal but a very attractive one. He was fun.

RF: Was his word his bond?

RWB: I think so. I had no bad experiences. He was perfectly straightforward. He was hard-nosed and tough but he had all the ebullience and bounce of a really good salesman and that is what he was. By God he was good at it.

RF: Had he inherited this from his father?

RWB: I know nothing about the old gent who was pretty old when he died. He was pretty old when he started all this. He started it in middle life, he wasn't a young man. The family is by origin Spanish and Michael has a family tree which wanders all over Spain and he's hundreds of relatives out there. Indeed, he's gone to live in the Canary Islands.

The first thing to be said about *Quatermass and the Pit* was that it was a roaring success but I made a fatal mistake.

RF: Excuse me, who released Hammer films?

RWB: It varied. I think at this time it was Twentieth Century Fox therefore it would have gone through Rank and the Odeon circuit.

Yes, it had a good release. It picked up a prize in Paris for best science fiction picture of that year and indeed was listed in the critics all time ten best in France. Very highly thought of indeed. It certainly has the absolutely OK, slightly left wing political sentiments and its anti-militaristic.

RF: Early environmentalist too.

RWB: It's a picture which stands up well and still is attractive to new audiences. I'm very proud of it but a lot of the kudos goes to Nigel Kneale and he furnished a damn good script and without that you get nowhere.

For years I'd been haunted by a sort of doppelganger, a man called Roy Baker and he is a dubbing editor and it got to the point we were working on the same picture and the confusion was endless. It got slightly irritating. Then he moved into the same tax district I was in. So, the taxman got frightfully excited and criticised my accountant and said we believe Baker has other income which he has not declared. It took a lot of sorting out. I was silly about it. I should have put more mother's family name in the middle and called myself Roy Ward Baker.

RF: You hadn't done this before?

RWB: No this was the picture I did it. To a certain extent, it was fatal because some of the critics thought it was a new guy. I had very strongly hoped people would say welcome back Roy Baker after all this time and after one or two sticky pictures, he's come back on form but they didn't. However, Hammer did. I was absolutely the flavour of the month. Nothing would do but I had to do everything Hammer did. Almost immediately after I finished shooting *Quatermass* was that Jimmy Sangster rang me up. I'd sort of met him around the Hammer orbit at the time. We didn't know each other terribly well. He rang me up and said "I'm in difficulty. You know I'm making this picture with Bette Davis. I believe you know her". I've known her for twenty years. She's a friend, a close friend really. I'm absolutely sure that I'd seen Bette, I always did, she came to stay with us indeed in the house. *The Anniversary* was a play by a man called Bill McIlwraith. I'd had several of his scripts either on *The Avengers* or *The Human Jungle*. It was a play which had a very strong cast in the theatre. It had Mona Washbourne, Sheila Hancock, Jack Hedley, Michael Crawford. They toured it and during the touring they started chipping away at the script and it came into London and played quite successfully in the West End by which time they'd altered the play quite considerably amongst them. Then it came to setting up the film and Hammer bought it and Jimmy Sangster was to write the script and produced it. They wanted it as a vehicle for Bette Davis for they knew she would be willing to come — this had already been discussed, if you find something for me I would love to come and do it. So, it all went forward on that basis. Jimmy chose Alvin Rakoff to direct it. They went over to America, had talks with Bette, came back and started to shoot. Michael Crawford had dropped out of the cast, whether he was asked to be in it I don't know, I'm sure he would have been but for some reason he wanted to do something else. Of the original cast, there was Jack Hedley and Sheila Hancock but Bette Davis was to play the Mona Washbourne part. There then arose an enormous misunderstanding.

The play is about a domineering mother who is so fond of her children that she goes out of her way to ruin their lives. It's a comedy, an acid comedy. What had happened was that in the course of the tour the cast had come to dominate the mother rather than the other way around. They play was bought on the assumption that if you're going to have Bette Davis she's going to play the dominating mother. She's not going to sit there and have the cast run circles around her. It would be an absurdity. So out of this misunderstanding in the cast and presumably Alvin Rakoff, after three days Bette said I can't go on. It's just all going

wrong and I can't work this way. I'm sorry but it's no good. So that was why I was telephoned and everyone knew I knew her very well and it solved a lot of questions as far as she was concerned but it didn't solve any questions as far as the rest of the cast was concerned. They were all extremely upset because the thing was going to be completely reversed, they were going to go back to square one, do not collect £200 [an allusion to the game of Monopoly. DS]. So, it was quite a handful. With usual tact and self-assurance I said you can all shut up and accept it as it is although there were one or two weak sisters in it. I said the sets which were done by Reece Pemberton, he's a stage designer and a brilliant one, the sets were absolutely magnificent. Again, it was a cast where there were only two. But I had some alterations in those which he accepted. He realised that for film and the way I was going to film it, it was much more convenient to alter the shape of the staircase in the main complex- which was the ground floor of a huge house in somewhere like Stanmore [?], one of those big elaborate Mock-Tudor jobs, a modern house. The cameraman was Harry Waxman he was all right. Very good at photographing Bette. We started and had our sticky moments but we came up with a reasonable picture. It's an OK picture. It's never going to be a great subject which was going to make anybody's name. They all gave good performances, they all got their fair share of the cake. That comes back to my idea of director as ringmaster. Clearly Bette was going to play the central character, the mistress of everything she surveyed, particularly if she is going to boss all these children and ruin their lives. You can't have somebody just apologetic about it. Jack Hedley is a marvellous actor. Sheila Hancock is a superb actress. Eventually we all settled down and it worked out quite well. I don't think any of them should have been particularly disappointed in the end because they all got their due which I was there to do and I think I did it.

The picture got a release, I don't know, It's a kind of cult picture and you find a lot of people absolutely adore it and say "what a wonderful film". It constantly turns up. There's a lot of other people who say Davis was no longer the great Bette Davis and leave it at that. But she gave a marvellous performance and I must say one of the most thrilling things with an actress like that, and they're very rare things, and particularly in film, I remember once we did a close up and I whispered to her I think you can be a bit stronger with this, it's fine but you've really got to put the boot in this time. "Oh", she said. I nearly fell over backwards when we did the next take. It came through the camera and right out the back. Unbelievable power came out of that woman, it just went "zong". Tremendous power.

RF: How did one direct Miss Davis, who by all accounts was quite formidable?

RWB: She was a formidable figure of her time and place. She was grand and so anyone with any respect for quality and style would treat her as grand. You wouldn't push her around, move here, move there and all that sort of thing. But, certainly, she welcomed discussion of the scene with me and then with the other actors playing the scene, working out who was going to move where. She hardly ever altered anything that I suggested. We certainly never crossed swords.

RF: She'd take direction in terms of the performance not just the mechanics of the performance.

RWB: Oh yes. She was very anxious to have any reflections you might have on the sort of person she was playing. What that character might have in her handbag. The usual background things to give the actor something to focus on and then be that person and then it would come out as that person. That's what they do, isn't it, they suck up all the information you can think of about this bank clerk who might have a slightly bent back and left hand doesn't work very well and he's always got a pocketful of bus tickets and any eccentric thing you might know about them. They remember all that, put it into their imagination and play it exactly as that man. That's what they should do and she certainly did. She was devastatingly honest.

RF: About herself or others?

RWB: She was harder on herself than anybody else or anybody else was on her. When you get to that position you find yourself falling into funny little traps you don't know about. She always travelled with some sort of factotum who would look after everything, pay the hotel bills and do all those domestic chores and this person was sent ahead and created quite a fuss at the studio that Miss Davis wouldn't want this and Miss Davis must have that, and the dressing room must be repainted and all this fandango that this person thought was appropriate to the status of a star. Bette Davis, I knew her as a house wife and rather a good one, rather like Marlene, she could cook a darn good dinner and wash up afterwards. She was in her habits a perfectly ordinary person and didn't want to create that sort of atmosphere. When she arrived, everyone was in fear and trembling.

RF: But notorious for eating directors alive.

RWB: That I don't know. Maybe she was. She didn't eat me alive.

RF: Her history at Warner's and then poor Alvin Rakoff getting booted off. I think you were kind about that. I remember her account of it in the book, for some reason it sticks, Alvin Rakoff was in London the time it was published and arrived on her doorstep within a couple of hours, "I'm not even mentioned", and this was someone who had directed her in *Now Voyager* and a couple of others. He was beside himself with fury. I seem to remember her objection to Rakoff was that he was doing everything on counts of whatever it was. You walk in, take a beat of three, turn, and she wasn't having any of that. It wasn't direction was far as she was concerned. That was out of television.

RWB: Obviously there were deeper conflicts with Mr. Rakoff I don't know about, I don't want to. I deliberately refused to see the film he shot and I deliberately refused to use any of it. He had only done three days shooting. I said you can throw all that away and we start afresh which seemed the polite thing to do as far as Mr. Rakoff was concerned. I prided myself I was scrupulous about that. I've no reason and no right to be in any way critical of Rakoff. He went about the task in his own way but with a fundamental misunderstanding which misled everyone. The cast had taken over. They dominated Mona Washbourne, who is one of the most charming women you could meet.

RF: It was more her style of performance anyway.

RWB: But if you're making that story and you've got Bette Davis, don't be silly.

RF: The fact that you'd known Davis for twenty years was that any kind of inhibition in directing her?

RWB: I don't think so, we levelled with each other. She was quite funny about it. Quite early on, it may have been the first morning, she was there and all the cast were on the set and she came forward to me and dropped me a slight curtsey and said "good morning sir what do you wish her to do". By that time, I was a director of some experience and knew what I was going to do but if you're a new person and someone like Davis comes up to you and says "what do you want me to do sir, please", she's putting you on the spot and you could go to pieces.

It's a bit like the old stories in Hollywood of the cameramen who could size up a director in half an hour and there are two things that a cameraman can say to make a director uncertain of himself. One is "where do you wish us to put the camera sir?" That's one. And when he says "I thought you might do it from here", the reply is, "OK if that's the way you want it Guv". And the poor bugger is destroyed in thirty seconds. It's a game but it does bring up a crucial point. Another crucial point in film directing is the sheer inbuilt notion of where to point the camera and you can tell from the day's rushes whether the guy knows where to point it or not. If it's pointing in the wrong way you can see this straight away. You'd know this as well as I do. But there aren't many people who do and there aren't many people who have this facility.

We got on very well. She knew I was going to have a certain amount of difficulty with the rest of the cast. She was a bit naughty on one or two occasions.

RF: Legend has it there were a lot of tantrums on *The Anniversary* but perhaps that was the prior period.

RWB: No, there were tensions.

RF: No not tensions, tantrums. Were there tantrums?

RWB: Jack Hedley might have huffed and puffed once or twice but he's a very reasonable man. Sheila Hancock was more upset than any of the others. She was more anxious than any of the others. But she gave a damn good performance. She was well presented which is what they need. It cuts both ways. You're not doing the actor a favour, you're going the story a favour. If you don't present the character well and therefore you don't present the actors well, it all reflects back to the story. What we're really talking about is telling a story. We've all got to abide by that. And it can happen that you find yourself cast, and it's been going for about ten days and your part starts to roll and you do your part and you've got a

rotten part and you're not going to get anything out of this movie and when you read the script you think oh great.

RF: That was the worry that you, the director, and the star had ganged up on the rest of the cast that she was being unduly favoured.

RWB: That was the simple approach.

RF: Was there any element of truth in that. Were you throwing her the picture?

RWB: I don't think so.

RF: But you were conscious that she was the star and if anyone was going to bring them in, it was she. In any case that was the story. She was entirely reasonable about in in my opinion. She expressed herself in extremely forthright terms and used a great deal of very strong language indeed but that was her personality and it doesn't mean to say she was wrong.

We mentioned that after her problems on the Coast, she'd gone to New York to do a review. I remember some friends of mine designed the show, I can't remember the name, her behaviour, according to the story was absolutely impossible.

RWB: I'm not going to deny on her behalf, I have to emphasise once more I speak of Bette in all the personal traits [?] and I only made the one picture with her. We lived in each other's pocket quite same time in Hollywood, in and out of each other's houses. So, I refuse to theorise about things I was not a witness to but there is no question that there were plenty of witnesses but they ought to remember also that Bette was decidedly underrated and mistreated in her early career till she really established herself, as she put it, she discovered she could sell tickets.

And by the time she did *All About Eve*. *All About Eve* was an accident. It was originally to be Claudette Colbert and she got ill or something happened to her. Bette had to take it over at twelve hours notice. But it was a part she was born to play and she did it beautifully. And, in many ways, she would have been better off if she stopped right there and done nothing more. I remember a conversation with her in Hollywood at the time. And it was "what the hell am I going to do next?" kind of thing. And she was saying everything is rubbish and nothing was worth doing and I remember saying to her a very impertinent question. I said "look how are you fixed. Do you need to do another picture for the sake of doing another picture?" She said "I'm comfortable but that's all". I think that was a bit of an understatement because all her life she was slaving away to keep a number of other people in various shapes and forms. The adopted child turned out sadly to be worth only 10 pence in the shilling as they say, poor thing, and had to be put in a home. She adopted another child who turned out quite well. Tall fair and handsome. I saw him once when he came over to meet

her in England and he'd become a lawyer and he was working in Frankfurt in a branch of an American firm.

What's happened to him since I don't know.

The sad thing was that when she died, I didn't know who to go to or to where. She just vanished. She had a lot of pressures on her is all I'm saying. She had behaved badly with some people. She upset Jack Warner terribly and she was bloody right about that when you think of the casting of *My Fair Lady*, it's really funny, that's Jack Warner's judgement. But she had behaved outrageously in some quarters she had a lot of friends and a great deal of enemies and in a place like Hollywood you 're always up against a great deal of competition. If you can't get Davis, you can get Crawford, if you can't get Crawford you can get somebody else. You can go through six or eight people. They can be made to fit. They won't be as good but they will be sort of OK and we'll get the picture made and to hell with it. I'm not going through that sort of attitude. So, she had difficulty. Also, she was a compulsive worker. She was thoroughly unhappy when she wasn't actually doing a picture which is why she tottered off to New York to do this ridiculous review. Review is not really an American style at all.

RF: I'm not sure I agree with you there. There have been some very good American reviews.

RWB: Admittedly I don't really know Broadway well enough to say that.

RF: A bit less parochial than the West End, a bit more virile.
I remember now, it's coming back, I went to some rehearsals and remember her throwing a feather boa around and stamping on it and the line which comes to mind is "listen you cocksuckers I'm the fucking star". I don't want to do any disservice to her memory. The question is — John Murray Anderson was the director and he'd have a whistle and whenever he wanted to stop the rehearsal he would blow his whistle. — was it temperament or her concern for her work and an overview of the picture.

RWB: To me she was so honest in her thinking that I do think she was driven to be a great star and to have all that cut-throat determination but I don't think she would have done anybody a bad turn. I've told you she did me a good turn, and a number of other people. She had all sorts of obligations with relations and all sorts of hangers on who she had to keep.

RF: She also had unhappy marriages, which must have created great tensions.

RWB: Exactly. She could never find a man who she could really settle down with. There were one or two which never came to anything which might have been better. She had a long relationship with George Brent. It didn't stick.

RF: She must have been a difficult lady to live with.

RWB: She always wanted her own way, I'll give you that. I think if you were going to pull her leg you set it up in a way that she knew it was going to be a leg pull. If you dropped one on her she'd bridle and then look at you and realise.

RF: Are you saying she had a restricted sense of humour?

RWB: I think she was very proud, an intensely proud woman. No vanity really.

RF: Was that the New England side or the Hollywood star?

RWB: The New England side. She was a died in the wool New Englander. And that was one of the things which didn't go down very well in Hollywood. She drank a lot. Sometimes more than was good for her. She was indomitable. She was admirable. You have to take these people all in all for what they are. You can't say "she was so badly behaved she threw a teacup, she treated the director with contempt".

The point is it is happening more and more that the contribution of the director is being more and more devalued especially in television, partly for technical reasons, but it has, so you get now a breed of actor, I used to get them when we were doing *Minder*, you'd get quite a number who'd never been in front of a motion picture camera, they'd done it all for television and the clever ones formed their own views of a character and a scene and how it was going to be played and they'd arrive with it absolutely firmly fixed in their mind as if there's not going to be any director at all because they don't expect to have one. They find themselves, when they're very young, totally at sea. No one will hold their hand, no one will say "don't do that" or "I'll tell you what, you try this" so they have some guidelines. Failing that they have to invent than for themselves and there's no question that a lot of actors become director-proof or they try and make themselves director-proof. When they're dealing with, and they know they're dealing with a man who does know his business, even if his opinions may be at variance with theirs, they will discuss it with him, will do it in the proper manner and the outcome will be a good performance in a good picture.

Some, when mistakenly, or when they find they are right, find they are dealing with a fellow who's not a good director, he's OK, he's a glorified floor manager, but he's not what you or I would call a director who does direct, then they have to protect themselves and they take over and they ignore anything the director says. When you have a man like say George Arliss making the sort of picture he was making which has nothing to do with having a film director you don't really need one for that purpose, it's no shame on anybody. But I think if you talk about Alvin Rakoff or other guys, there's no doubt about it, that in Hollywood there were hundreds of guys, I don't know whether Rakoff was one of them, he was probably a very good director, there were unquestionably a lot of them around who really didn't direct at all, they just supervised the running of the floor.

RF: Alvin was out of the theatre so at least he had an appreciation of performance and the play, the piece. I think there is another dimension to it. She had been one of the principal

stars on the Warner lot and there was a certain lifestyle attached to it and it probably became a habit to a certain extent. If you are photographing *Jezebel* or *The Little Foxes* there is no doubt that you are the picture.

RWB: She had a very sound consideration of her own status and she knew that she was grand. I'll never forget the first time, very early on in Hollywood when we decided the four of us were going out to dinner and it was going to be my treat, so I booked the table in the name of Roy Baker. And I walked in and the waiter said "have you booked?" and I said yes Roy Baker and he looked over my shoulder and he said taking a tremendous gulp, yes, yes, and took us to the best table in the restaurant, unquestionably she walked in like the Queen of England. She was a grand person but in the modern world there is far too much anxiety about the grandeur of some people in the theatre and politicians. Now it's thought to be a bad thing but I don't think you can have the one without the other. If you have somebody of real stature, they're going to rumble it at some point, realise they have stature and then some people fall for it rather badly and become outrageous and overbearing. I'm put in mind of George Bernard Shaw's remark about Mrs. Patrick Campbell when everyone despaired of Mrs Pat, she was outrageous, she was wonderful, she could hold an audience like nobody's business, she was quite brilliant on the stage on a good night when she was feeling like it and everything was going OK.

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Mrs Pat was alternatively wonderful and a terrible nuisance and a bore and a drunkard and everybody believed so full in her talent and what she had to give to the theatre they all fell over themselves to help her. Bernard Shaw said she's like a sinking gunboat firing on her rescuers. A very good description of that sort of thing and you can say the same sort of thing about Bette. She was so proud that when the lifeboat arrived alongside she'd tell them to go away.

RF: What then happened?

RWB: Jimmy Sangster who produced *The Anniversary* said that he had written two books: they were spy stories, sort of Len Deighton, John Le Carre.

RF: This was the time of Len Deighton, The *Ipcress File*?

RWB: Yes, he was a big number and he called the first one *Private Eye* and the second one *Foreign Exchange*. The wheeze was that these two stories were to be made for ABC Television in American and rather like Sherlock Holmes stories, they had common characters, the girl and the man from MI5 were the same characters. The sets, his flat, the MI5 office, her flat were all common to both stories so the wheeze was to build the sets get the characters together and shoot the two films back to back simultaneously which was rather fun to do. We had an extremely good art director, Scott McGregor. He had taken over at Hammer

from Bernard Robinson who at that time was ill and died not that long afterwards — he probably worked himself to death, he wasn't that old.

There it was two rather good action spy stories, good scripts, quite sharp funny dialogue. So, the question is getting the cast. We got Jill St. John as the girl who was fine and Sebastian Cabot who was at the peak of his career. He played a butler in an American series and amongst the family there was a dreadful small boy. It was a comedy series and quite successful. He was known as Buster Cabot. I should tell you that the character of the central hero had quite a lot of Jimmy Sangster himself. He was a mercurial character who was manic depressive. He would sometimes make a hunk of dough, go out and blow it all on marvellous suits and rather vulgar camel hair coats and in five minutes they'd be covered in cigarette ash, soup stains and newspapers sticking out of the pocket. All this kind of dreadful untidiness.

RF: Was he part of the circus family?

RWB: I don't think so. Jimmy started as an office boy at Hammer and he was duplicating the scripts and reading them and he was taken under Tony's wing who treated him as a son so he was privy to what was going on. And there was a crisis over some script. They couldn't get it right. So, the next morning he walked in boldly and said I've rewritten the script for you and it was good. They shot it and, from then on, he was off. That's the way he tells the story. The picture opens with Soho very bleak and miserable, rubbish all over the gutters and this character shuffles along, not feeling very well, probably a bit of a hangover, a stubble on his chin. He struggles up to an attic office, lets himself in and the telephone doesn't ring. There's nothing in the desk. He feels in the drawer and he brings out a pair of nail scissors and starts to trim a fraying cuff of a shirt and then the story starts. That's the sort of character it is. We got an actor, Robert Horton, for it, cowboy star, big television star, had been in at least three top series in America and Jimmy went down to the airport to meet him in a hotel and all the other stuff and then I met Jimmy and he said “well he’s here I don’t know what you are going to do with him about his clothes” Well it turned out that Mr Horton was an absolute dandy. He always looked as if he had stepped straight out of a band box, as they say. The first thing he said to me was – apart from “glad to be here” and the usual stuff was “Tell me something, who’s your tailor. So, I told him and he went there the very next day and a very good customer I believe he’s turned out to be. Saville Row suits – he was going to wear them. When the bullets start flying in the seventh reel, instead of falling flat as any sensible person would do, he couldn’t do it!

RF: What, he was worried about his threads?

RWB: It was extraordinary. Now I must also tell you that this is another case that went extremely well. He was very fond of me, he and his wife and thoroughly enjoyed doing it and the two pictures, they were very workmanlike and damned good entertainment. Don’t think they have ever been shown in this country. Possibly once, one of them was shown, but

ABC in America were terribly pleased, it worked like a charm and the whole business of doing it back to back was very economical. A good time was had by all. I don't want to be critical of Mr Horton, but you couldn't have had worse casting – well not worse, but wrong, inappropriate casting. Quite ridiculous. I will say this, it did take a lot of character out of the story and once again you had the conventional American leading man, which audiences like and which is absolutely fine, but they are bland and shallow and they are just cardboard figures, and Jimmy Sangster had put a great deal of character into this man and it was fun and the poor devil was always driven by poverty, usually he was broke. You looked at this other fellow and he didn't seem to be under any pressure at all. Anyway, it's all water under the bridge.
RF: He'd presumably been cast by ABC?

RWB: ABC TV and they would not be moved.

RF: There is such inappropriate casting and there shouldn't be

RWB: Yeah, and they would not be moved. They are very silly to take that responsibility and not wait to hear what Jimmy Sangster and I had to suggest. Supposing we fail to come up with anything that's acceptable, then alright they have to exercise their right.

RF: That would presuppose that most people around a network don't really know what they're doing.

RWB: They don't, they really don't. It's a guessing game and they have accepted it, which is dreadful it seems to me. How can they live, all at sea, it's a kind of roulette game.

RF: Well yes, but that is the game, not making films, making television, its survival. None of them does.

RWB: Oh, none of them do, they all drown.

RF: I'm afraid that's what we are heading for in this country and its no way to do it.

RWB: Well the executives change every three weeks.

RF: So, that was an intermission.

RWB: That was an intermission, and then 1969 we come to. For the first time, I met with and made a picture with Michael Carreras himself. Now this again was not a bad, nifty, notion for a film. The idea was to make a space story that was almost exactly like a western and the original story had been written by a man called Gavin Lyall, who'd written many books.

RF: Have we skipped over *Five Million Years to Earth*?

RWB: No, That's the American title for *Quatermass and the Pit*
I suppose we must have had quite a big budget. The picture was called *Moon Zero Two*. Cameraman Paul Beeson, Scott McGregor was again the art director. Michael Carreras is a great expert in jazz, that was his main hobby. He used to be a bit of a rally driver – he did the Tulip[ motor rally] one year when he was very young. He tried to promote a jazz club in Soho at one time. So, he brought over a very famous man called Don Ellis who was a very prolific arranger and composer and exponent of Californian jazz, so he did the music. Mostly electronic trumpets if you please. I thought it was dreadful, but I suppose it didn't matter very much. I think that we were hamstrung for two reasons. I don't think the script was good enough, ever, and, secondly, we were making a space picture and it was early days, the only other picture was Kubrick's *2001*. And, in his picture if you look at it carefully you will see that it is not all in space whereas in *Moon Zero Two* we had a great deal of space, exterior space. I remember a conversation with Stanley Kubrick and he said that he had discovered one infallible way of getting rid of the wire. When you have somebody or something floating in space you have to hang it from the ceiling of the studio. There was no other way of doing it then. There is now. So, how do you get rid of the wire? Well Kubrick's answer which is very clever is to put the camera on the floor, shoot straight up, and then the man can dangle over the camera and you can't see the wire because its behind his back. Brilliant! But of course, limited. You haven't got many set-ups if you are going to do it that way. Before we were all very much older we realised we had nothing like enough money. These sort of space pictures, they eat up money. You simply don't know what the budget is going to be. The money just flows.
And so, I count it a failure. It wasn't a good picture.

RF: It was after *2001,* was it?

RWB: Yes, it was.

RF: Were you influenced by it or was Sangster influenced by it? To me its definitive in terms of space the way it looks and the equipment…

RWB: Yes, well it was a script by Arthur [C] Clarke after all. I think Kubrick had more to say about it than I did, which was meant to be a western. He had certain advantages and he certainly had a bigger budget. I'm not criticising *2001* because obviously it was a first-rate picture but if you remember towards the end of the film there are set-ups where you get the view of the Earth from space and there's a lot of travelling images rushing across the Earth..

RF: [interrupts] Erm, it's not the Earth, its Jupiter where he goes through whatever it is, the time-warp, to another dimension.
RWB: Yes, well he did that by getting a lot of helicopter shots of Earth and screwing them around in the laboratory, changing all the colours and all that. Of course, it's a very inexpensive way of doing it, brilliant.

RF: Yes, that's the section that gives everyone a trip, gives everyone a buzz.

RWB: I'd had a sudden burst of activity where I'd made five pictures which is very intense for me – I never used to make more than one a year finished up with *Moon Zero Two* and felt a bit depressed.
Oh,yes, the cast was decidedly shaky in that, again, a man was brought over from America. It was James Olson and he was in a picture with Paul Newman… I was very smitten by Mr Olson's performance and I thought he'd be alright, but he turned out to be a very strange man indeed. He would drink quantities of beer all day and then when we had finished – his hotel was some distance from the studio – and he would put on a track suit and run home, and he would run to the studio in the morning. I suppose he was trying to run the beer off. I thought he was hopeless.

RF: Who else was in it?

RWB: Oh well Warren Mitchell played the only other part pf any size, and he was all right. He was a good actor – I think he was just starting Alf Garnett at the time. Hitherto he had been in hundreds of pictures, he was another one who slipped in for a couple of days character work and then slipped out again and was absolutely marvellous. Became a big star.

RF: Had you been confident that you could pull it off, make something of it, and it was a disappointment for that reason?

RWB: [Pause] Difficult to say, I can't remember. I think I had a queasy feeling early on that I was in for a turkey.

RF: What was it, was it the getting the effects?

RWB: Just the sheer pressure of the impossible circumstances. We hadn't got the resources. We shot at Elstree on one of the big stages and I should think we ransacked England for every bit of black velvet that there was. And it was the whole ceiling and three walls. And we had to fly, someone like Bernard Bresslaw who was a very heavy man, which meant you had to have a thick wire – you couldn't have him on a tiny piece of nylon – he's not a trout! He's a very big whale isn't he. Lovely fellow, marvellous. There were some bonuses.

RF: Was it all flying, no blue backing.

RWB: No. I suppose we must have done some blue backing – I can't remember now.

RF: Anyway, it sounds instantly forgettable. It came and it went.

RWB: Yeah, yeah.

RF: Did you have percentages? Did you have points in any of these films?

RWB: No. Well the last time was Two Left Feet. I was a partner in that. And prior to that some of the films I made at Pinewood. But since then no percentage. There are two points of view about that – one is that the accounting systems in the film business are decidedly spurious and shaky, so that if you have a percentage you won't earn a penny unless the thing is such a runaway success. Otherwise the thing is to ask for a lot of money up front and just do it for that, and that's the finish. I would always have liked to have a percentage participation simply to have as a kind of pension fund. You know I've got about 150 one-hour television shows floating around the world at the moment and if I had tuppence half-penny coming in from each of them I would have a comfortable income.

RF: No residuals at all. Good Lord.

RWB: Never have been. Well there again the director is completely downgraded, everything was for the writers in television. They realised very early on under the sort of Lew Grade system, which was the dominant system for a long, long, time, was that you could never have enough material because it gobbled up material like mad, which meant that you had to have good writers and as many writers as you could find. When they got together and formed a union or whatever it was the answer was "For God's sake, give it to them, tell them to shut up" The directors and all the other people simply had no-one to fight for them anyway, and they were downgraded automatically by the way in which television was produced and still is to this day. You put the man in a box in some other part of the building and that's about all he's got to do with it. It's a great pity that the director was ever looked upon as a technician, because he isn't. You take a man like Rembrandt who mixed all his own colours, all his own glazes, all his own varnishes, and you could say he was a chemist. Well he was as far as oil painting is concerned, he was a bloody marvellous chemist, and then he did the painting. Just because a director needs to know and understand fully the technical qualities that there are in the business, craft, whatever you want to call it, you don't call him a technician. It's wrong, and I think it was a fundamental mistake right from the word go. I do sense that when I see these young actors coming in who are quite surprised when they find that someone is directing the picture. You can see it in their faces – it's actually quite funny.

RF: You are saying this Roy with reference to live television, electronic cameras, film material made for television, or the global picture? Features that are made?

RWB: I'm talking about the global picture, feature films. Quite a lot of them are made by people who are no more directors than they can fly in the air, and you can see it on the screen, but they get it there. Nursed by the unit usually. And, of course the actors doing what they can supply, making up their own characters, in their own way, doing their own costuming, wigs and all the rest of it, doing their own make-up. Let me claim that I speak of those aspects as somebody who has always had profound respect for the contribution that

can be made by every single person involved in the making of a film and particularly the actor: it's very interesting, once he's been cast and read the script. I should say that I always, unless it's absolutely impossible, I always interview them, several of them of course, largely to find out what their response is to me and my response to him. I don't mean personally, but as professionals, and I tell them the story, and of course I slant it and I slant the interpretation right from that word go. Quite a number of actors have come for an interview with me and got the part and read the script and then discovered that they've only got about three day's work, from the point of view of that character, so that he understands exactly what he is supposed to know about what's going on and everything else, all about his own character, all slanted from that point of view and some of them get terribly disappointed. Well I can't help that. Once that actor has been cast and you have talks before you actually start shooting, then it's up to him to do the talking. I'm very anxious to hear what he has to say, what's his contribution. He's not a dummy – I don't want robots, I want thinking contributors and I'd hate to give the impression at all that I ride roughshod over everybody, I want to know everything about what people think. I listen, and then I simply regard myself as what I am called: a director, and I direct all these ideas and notions through a kind of a channel which is me, and it comes out of the other end of the camera. The magazine in the camera if you like. That's the way I go about it, but I don't always achieve it obviously. One has ones successes, one has ones failures but I do feel very strongly, and have done for, oh, ten years or more now that there has been a chipping away at the reputation and the status of the director as a figure in the entire jigsaw, in the elaborate structure which television or film for television or film itself.

RF: By whom? Who has done that chipping? The money men?

RWB: The powers that be, the powers that are. In television, the people that actually run it. Not even financiers, below that lot, the management.

RF: The executive, so called.

RWB: The Heads of department, the head of drama or the head of comedy. All that stuff. They are almost always people with no practical experience at all.

RF: Does it relate to budget and schedule or…

RWB: No, no. The general attitude that the director is somebody that you have to have and you've got to put up with him. He directs the traffic, and if it's a one-way street we'll all be happy. It's almost a contempt now I think. For directors. I'm very sensitive about this, very touchy. I think it's all wrong and they are throwing away one of the greatest attributes…

RF: Let's be a little more specific. Do you find that operates on a series such as *Minder* for instance?

RWB: No, far from it. And I can't say that it's been my personal experience – I always regard myself as a slightly unknown man. I've never had any publicity of any kind, either good or bad. Apart from general notices, critics' reports, apart from that my name's never been mentioned. So, I can walk into a set-up where a lot of people knew me and that's fine and I have never had the feeling that my opinion was being dismissed or discounted, never anything like that.
Indeed, some places I go people treat me like royalty. Charming, and very flattering. I'm not grumbling on my own behalf but I do see it amongst the younger men coming up. I think they've got a problem, I really do.
They've got to reassert themselves. It's not going to be the Ken Russells, the John Schlesingers, the Nicholas Roegs who are coming more or less to the apogee of their careers, eminent names of today, but I think the younger men. They need to reassert themselves, not by putting on riding boots and picking up a megaphone and shouting at people, that won't work, they'll soon find that out. That's not what I'm asking but the people who are responsible for commissions for a series or for a number of episodes for television or any programme. They have their star directors, there are a few of them mostly in documentary but in drama they are almost non-existent. I think they are making a terrible mistake. They need a director, everybody does. It's no use just having one as a token, you've got to have one who will contribute something. Their function is going to be to co-ordinate all the efforts of these other people into one channel, scriptwriter and so on right on through until you actually get the thing on the screen.

RF: I'm somewhat surprised to hear you state this firmly, give me a for instance because the directors I know operating in that area are technical, I wouldn't have thought Piers was downgraded in his function.

RWB: Oh no, I'm not saying that everybody is, I'm saying that it's a general tendency, and even if they have Piers Haggard, I have got a thing that they don't give him the weight that he's entitled to.

RF: Sounds as if it's a matter of resources, budget, more than anything. Again, would you say this is confined to stuff made for the American market, or ITV, or would you include the BBC in this?

RWB: Yes, well I don't know about the BBC, I've never worked there, I don't know anyone who has worked there, I know almost nothing about that so I couldn't say. I suspect yes is the answer but I don't know. I suppose I'm talking about the areas in which the director's contribution is the major one, is one, discussions on the script; the script can come to you in so many different ways, so many different forms. Some have just got a damned good idea, some just terrible, some almost fireproof finished article, the ones like you get from Eric Ambler, like I got from Howard Clewes, for *The One That Got Away* where you hardly need to say anything and others where you have to work like a demon to pull it together and my contribution has varied all the way through in proportion. Recently in the last run of *Minder* I had a tremendous amount of work to do. And, again, the second one is casting, and thirdly,

the most important of all is really getting the actors balanced so as to present possible interpretation of their character. It's rather like – a little bit like – training race horses and indeed riding one. Once you get them balanced and the rhythm is there it's something you must do partly through the skin, you don't even speak, it's something about the scene, dummying out the moves all that stuff you do in the morning, it goes from one to t'other and you sense when an actor's going to do something wrong and you steer him that way, and hey ho he's moved round that bend beautifully, he's not going to get into a terrible skid and turn the car over, or whatever. He's going to go smoothly through it beautifully. Those three factors are so important that they ultimately determine the success or failure of the enterprise. I think you neglect them at your peril.

RF: Well yes, I agree.

RWB: A lot of practised actors, a lot of stars, can carry you through, a unit will carry you through, or the cameraman will say "Guv, don't put it there dear, or if you come over here a bit, then it will cut better", and they have to baby talk some of these poor buggers who've done three commercials and think they know all about it. There's been an increasing downgrade if a downgrade can increase, a decreasing appreciation of the value of the director.

RF: Again, I'm not wholly persuaded that this doesn't apply across the board, because usually the writer is not up to it or doesn't have enough time, obviously an actor doesn't always have the time to give the performance he'd like to, because of the demands of his schedule, so I think what we are talking about is assembly line television, the sausage machine just churning out crap.

RWB: Well, yes I would agree with you to a certain extent, but you see it depends what the demands of the enterprise are; you see you can have a very demanding picture like *Morning Departure* which to me was a very important picture, about something very important; *A Night To Remember* was about something important, a status of its own, a considerable stature to which everybody had to pay respect. On the other hand, as you say television is crap, well most of it, but…

RF: In theory stuff is crap.

RWB: …the thing about it is, its superficial, they get away with a lot on television and everyone thinks it's so wonderful which is a great popular superstition, our television is the best on earth and all this bullshit, it's rubbish, but they get away with it because it's all superficial, you never see a third act. You see the first two acts and then you're left to make up the rest of the story. You may advance the idea that its pressure of budget and schedule and this sort of thing, quite honestly, I don't agree because television is so superficial. Take a thing like *Minder* now you've got two actors, including the barman and the two detectives you've got five actors, who after one series or two at the most are so completely slotted into the characters, that providing the writing for those characters is not out of kilter, they can play them, without thinking twice. One of my valued clients, a man called Peter Childs who died

suddenly at the age of fifty, this weekend – he played Detective Sergeant Rycott and that man was a first-class actor, he really was. I cast him for it in the first place, so we associated for ten years. Now, *Minder* is a skit, it's superficial, so that you don't need, when some young new actress comes in to play a couple of scenes in a show like that, you don't need the full scenes and there isn't all that much to go into. The schedule was never a pressure on me. I shot every single one of those in ten days flat and never had any bother with it. Mind you it was a good show, in some ways an extremely lucky show.

RF: I think we've got to particularise. Are we talking about series television, are we talking about just filling a hole and selling Ariel and Volvo cars? Are we talking about a relatively small number of directors, who I sense have clout, as a few writers do, like … Denis Potter?

RWB: Yes, there are a few like that, and the man who directed it, Jon Amiel, sure.

RF: and the man who produced it, let's not forget Kenith Trodd

RWB: Yes, but you're talking about three people, and I'm talking about ten thousand.

RF: I think we're probably not disagreeing. I suppose I accept the fact that if you are making crap, then you don't need Orson Welles.

RWB: No, sure, that's accepted. But, even if you're making crap you've still got to have [Ends abruptly]

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RF: Even though one is making crap, yes, the pivotal figure.

RWB: You still have to have that pivotal figure. I remember, years ago I think it was Brian Desmond Hurst he was making a picture called *The Gypsy and The Gentleman*..

RF: [laughing] Any old Gypsy, presumably..?

RWB: No, no it was a lady, and I think it was Melina Mercouri but Brian was very strong indeed, pictorially he was very good indeed, he was quite an artist that man, and I don't know, I was at Pinewood at the time and I met him and I said how is it going and he said "wonderful" he said "its crap but it's going to be the most beautiful crap"

RF: Scented?

RWB: Probably scented, yes, as well. To me you can't do without this figure even if its junk, it's still got to be good junk, otherwise you see there is such a thing as unsuccessful junk. People don't assess it as such, you see one of the terrible besetting evils to my mind of television production is that the thing is bought and paid for long before it ever gets to an audience and when it's made, I mean some of these executives when they see some of these

things they shudder and they take to drink and they do all sorts of things when they see how

dreadful it is but then they shrug and say well they are going to see it anyway so screw it, and they are its going to be put on the screen even if it is terrible and that I think is a besetting evil of the whole enterprise because nobody gives a damn, once those contracts are signed that they are going to make this film or make this presentation with this cast and this director and this script the boat sails. There's no question of success or failure. If they do that often enough – and they do it pretty often – television is going to get like wallpaper.

another great superstition that everyone sits all day and all night glued to a television set is not true. They have it on. But they don't actually look at it.

RF: I don't think this is a resolvable issue. Obviously, it relates to what is being made currently, I think I'm suggesting we foreclose it. You think the director's job has been downgraded but very frequently the directors involved don't know their arse from a sprocket hole so maybe it is the unit carrying him.

RWB: I think that's true but don't you think that's true of so many walks of life.

RF: Yes, it's the Peter principle, very often people do get promoted beyond their level of competence.

RWB: Simply because of the weight of numbers in demand. We've had this in the teaching profession. One of the many things wrong with the education system is that they don't have enough tip top teachers. They're never going to have enough, there's always going to be dross at the bottom. But when you have fewer people going to fewer schools obviously the quality of the teachers is that much better and you could have higher standards. [RWB makes further points about education]. But as far as direction is concerned they had to invent hundreds more directors and obviously quite a few were not really competent.

RF: And really the demand for good directors is relatively limited because one doesn't need a director for a quiz show or a news programme. They're not really directors they're just people calling shots.

RWB: At the top of the heap, the first-class directors on that level, because so few pictures are made we've got too many, quite a number too many, ironically. They make one picture in three years, one picture in five years, it's absurd. At the top of their form, they should be doing a picture a year anyway.

RF: We'll come back to the role of the director at the end, because it's crucial. We're back to more Hammer's in a moment aren't we? *Vampire Lovers* is next on my list.

[They break for lunch]

RWB: *Moon Zero Two* was a failure. There's no way of defending it. The idea was a good one but it didn't work. The next thing which came up in my life was again a telephone call

from Hammer and a producer called Harry Fine. I think he's a Dubliner. He had some connection with Joseph Strick over the business of filming James Joyce's Ulysses. Now Ulysses was one of my hobby books. I managed to obtain a copy during the war when we were stationed at Wembley Park Studios, from a tiny second-hand bookshop. The second Paris edition. I treasure it.

I said I was interested in this project. Then he had other connections with David Frost who at that time was interested in motion picture production and he said they had got together a script which had been written by Tudor Gates, who I hadn't met at that time. The script was based on a longish short story by Sheridan Le Fanu called Carmilla.

I'd long been a fan of Le Fanu from my boyhood when I graduated from detective stories to ghost stories so I was very much intrigued by this idea. I read the script and it wasn't bad at all. Harry Fine had a partner called Michael Stine. He was a great big tall fellow, totally different from Harry Fine who was short fat and rather fun. He's the only man I know who always walked around with a briefcase and in the briefcase, he had some copies of a New York weekly paper called Screw and it was a pornographic paper. He would gleefully show this to you. I thought there was something a bit funny about all this. I don't really like this. Obviously, the story was based on the producer's approach to the short story which has lesbian undertones. I hadn't appreciated they were there. But since they were there I thought alright and I more or less railroaded myself into making it. I think this is the point where I should have left Hammer but didn't. I didn't because of economics.

RF: What upset you about the approach, the lesbianism?

RWB: It didn't offend me as lesbianism but it offended me if it was going to be an exploitation of that. So, from that point on it was a running battle for me to keep the thing on an even keel.

RF: May I ask had Tudor written the script as an exploitation script?

RWB: No, I don't think he had. It didn't read that way. I think it was all there for a director to make a rip roaring "come and see the funny lesbians" kind of thing which wasn't on for me. Having accepted it I determined I was going to do it properly and they were going to be proper lesbians which they were and the funny thing was that at the end of the day we came out with some good notices. One or two went out of their way to say that alright it's a gimmick to [have] lesbian vampires. I got away with it quite to my surprise but it was a very worrying time, I was very exercised and had to work very hard. The producers saw it differently. It emerged before long that they wanted all kinds of fancy stuff in the scenes which they were not going to get.

RF: They were leaning on you during the shooting?

RWB: When they saw the rushes. They were worried stiff. From their point of view, they would have been much better off with some other fellow who had a taste for sleeze, and wanted to do it on the cheap and nasty and they got me. They got me because I was so

popular with Hammer I suppose. They got me tidy and neat and utterly reliable and all those boring things. There was one, at least one, truly supportive person in the entire pack and that was Ingrid Pitt and she played the principal lesbian or the principal vampire. She saw it exactly the same way as I did when we first met. I said we know what we're in for don't we so the only way to play this is to do it properly and this girl is a lesbian. It's all got to be absolutely straightforward. They have to be treated properly. It attracted a certain amount of support.

Peter Cushing was in it and a lovely girl called Madeleine Smith. Kate O'Mara was jolly fine, a good actress, and George Cole. Funnily enough the great detective was played by Douglas Wilmer who was one of those great thespians who used to chew all his speeches, everything was very round, rather Donald Sinden-like, and yet again he did it with utter sincerity. You couldn't disbelieve him, however ridiculous you thought the character was, or the circumstances, it was tosh but these people really gave it honesty and sincerity.

RF: What did Peter Cushing think about all this because I believe he's rather straight laced, isn't he?

RWB: I can't remember. He read the script so he must have known what was going on. He's on odd sort of character, Peter. I'll tell one of your stories. Peter Cushing was in *Vampire Lovers*, *Asylum*, *And Now the Screaming Starts, The Legend of Seven Golden Vampires!* and *The Masks of Death*, all my pictures. He's written two volumes of autobiography and not mentioned my name at all. It comes back to your friend Irving Rapper who made 18 pictures with Bette Davis and never got mentioned in her biography which is quite funny. I don't know why. We always got on extremely well. I must permit myself to say it was an omission on his part at the very least. However as far as this picture is concerned I cannot remember what he did in it. I was rowing into the same pitch as all the rest and became a Hammer director.

RF: May I ask you about the script given that Tudor is currently the president of ACTT?

RWB: Oh, the script was fine. It's the only thing I've ever done of his or with him in any way. There was very little to be done about the script. I think it was in very good shape as far as I recall.

RF: Was it reasonably faithful to the Lefanu story?

RWB: No. There had already been other versions of Carmilla.

RF: The one which always comes to my mind is the Carl Dreyer *Vampyr*.

RWB: When I was going to do this, I went to great trouble to rustle up these previous versions so I thought it would be useful to know what I am about and see what they've done with it and whether the script is a better interpretation. Roger Vadim did one which I thought was terrible but I've no great respect for his work anyway. The Carl Dreyer: This took me back to the old days of the London Film Society and the Sunday afternoons at the Scala Theatre in the later part of the war which was where I rustled up very quickly my education

in films because I missed all that so I had a chance to catch up. I saw *Intolerance*, I saw *'Four Horseman...* all the classic movies you have to know about. I don't know whether *Vampyr* was one of them, no I think it was *Jeanne D'Arc* that Dreyer did, and also I saw a lot of Eisenstein and Pudovkin. I remember reading a lot about those boys before the war. There was a fancy magazine going around which I think was called *Contact*, very lavishly produced magazine, and I began to get the feeling that the wonderful thing about all these films is that they produced a wonderful number of beautiful still photographs but they didn't move. I retained that impression to this day. So much of the Eisenstein I've seen is so stagey it's not to be believed. A set piece of scenes where everything happens in front of the camera and when it comes to Carl Dreyer I find it even worse. I have to tell you that I thought *Vampyr* was a terrible bore. It was all so self-conscious and stilted and everything's buttoned down and nailed into concrete and also the one thing I resented most was that reams and reams of it were the manuscript of the original story. The gimmick of the picture was that the man discovers this old manuscript. Anyway, they put it on the screen and the man's voice-over read it out to you. So, he's just reading the story to you rather than showing it.

RF: I think it must have been another picture. I don't remember the manuscript in any of the versions I've seen. I remember it being immensely atmospheric and very frightening.

RWB: We'll have to give ourselves a treat one day and look it up and see.

RF: I think it was another Le Fanu story

RWB… and so he's just reading the story to you instead of showing it. I found it impossible, I know that what I'm saying is going to earn me the most, I shall lose all my brownie points with the establishment simply because Carl Dreyer is a holy figure. As far as I'm concerned it was a con.

RF: Well I think it must have been another film…

RWB: They produced wonderful still pictures but they didn't produce movies. Well…

RF: We can ask the archive to send the print in... we'll have a look at it. Why not?

RWB: [laughs] Well, help yourself, I thought it was a bore. But anyway, be that as it may it was a series of still pictures and that ain't movies. So, anyway, I did that and up came the next sensational number which was a proper Dracula picture, going to have Christopher Lee, absolutely straight down the line Dracula type movie. Anthony Howard wrote the script

RF: This is *The Scars of Dracula*?

RWB: This is *The Scars of Dracula,* producer Aida Young, photographed by Murray Grant. Scott McGregor was the Art Director, he was the Art Director on all his pictures.

RF: The very fact that Aida Young is now the Producer seems to indicate somethings changed here that we are now into an overtly exploitation period now, are we? Would you

say? Very efficient producer but I wouldn't have thought much more than that. Being tendentious.

RWB: I found her extremely difficult to work with. I suppose really, I found her totally unsympathetic. I don't think she liked me at all.

RF: What were the points of discordance?

RWB: Personality I think. Not so much about the performances I think, the performances… I think, looking back, I know that I was in a very bad mood. I realised that I'd done *The Vampire Lovers*, and I wasn't particularly proud of it except that I felt that I'd kept my own nose clean and I kept everybody else's noses clean and they ought to bloody well grateful, and to a certain extent they were. I was still Hammer's No 1 choice, so there was no loss of sympathy on that side but I was not in a happy mood and I realised that with *The Scars of Dracula* I was going to plumb the bottom of the barrel as far as the Dracula pictures were concerned because everything that was going to be done had already been done and the only thing I could possibly do was make it worse so I decided to make it as horrible as I possibly could.

RF: When you say horrible, horrible horrible or horrible parody?

RWB: No not parody. Now the one thing about it was and I think I can say, well I shall say it anyway and anybody listening can make up their own minds but I shall say that one of the characteristics of so much of my work, nearly all of it, is that I strive for truth and verisimilitude and reality. I try to convince the audience that this is all true and it's all actually happening. It is! Can't disbelieve it! I ask for not only the willing suspension of disbelief but even more than that and I try to lock them in in the first reel to the point where they can't get away, then they're hooked. And so, if this was going to be a horror picture, it was going to be a horror picture and they were going to be frightened out of their bloody lives, and so I brought to it a sense of reality which I don't think – you see the great thing about the earlier Hammer pictures that they were very slightly on a superficial level, and they were certainly fun, and they were very glamourous always. The girls were always absolutely smashing, the men were all dashing and handsome, and the sets and music was very romantic, highly romantic style and they were damned good at it. Now whether I knew that that was not my style I don't know. I'd certainly been through the trauma of *The Vampire Lovers* when I had to skate on very thin ice indeed and then again, I got away with it because I treated it largely as reality. I didn't try to ham it up, I didn't try to joke it. I couldn't do that, I'm no good at that. It's a disaster, I don't think I can do it. But, when it came to *The Scars of Dracula* I made it very real and it became quite frightening. I don't think it's ever been shown on television. I'm not at all sure that it ever will be and it certainly was censored and part of it was censored by Hammer before it even got to the censor.

RF: In what areas, what did they do, what did they clip?

RWB: Well there is a scene where there is a boy, not the hero but a sort of second lead boy where he's, I can't remember the details, he's trying, I think he's trying to make love to the girl, to a girl, again not the heroine, in other words it was a sub-plot and Dracula suddenly appears and he just points at the boy and flings an arm and the boy is thrown into the corner of the room all by magic you see – I'll come back to that in a minute – and Dracula gets to work on the girl, he starts to - Oh wait a minute, yes, I cannot remember why it was, you must accept there were reasonably good and sufficient reasons that he attacks this girl with a sword, I can't remember why, because normally he just sticks his teeth in their necks and sucks the blood out that way at any rate he rips the girl from stem to stern with the sword and then drinks the blood rather than sucking it from the neck and the boy in the corner finds a large convenient pot and he vomits into it and that was all cut. Well I suppose recounting it like that it's pretty strong stuff. Today it would be accepted. I'm not proud of it, but I was quite determined with the reality of it. I mean if Dracula is a vampire and he has these magic powers, he can just fling out an arm and a man goes flying across the room and then he treats this girl in this disgusting way and all that sort of thing and the boy can do nothing except cower in the corner, I wouldn't be at all surprised if he didn't throw up, you see, so I was working on a realistic basis.

RF: How overt was – I should have asked you this before – how overt was the lesbianism, the manifestations of the lesbianism in *The Vampire Lovers*? Were they in bed together?

RWB: No, never. Very discrete.

RF: 'cos we're now at a transitional period…

RWB: There was a lot of nudity, a lot of nudity in *Vampire Lovers*, not a lot, no, some nudity and women kissing each other, that sort of thing and fondling their bosoms and that was about as far as it went – very superficial, nothing overt.

RF: Did the BBFC cut anything to your knowledge?

RWB: I can't remember, I rather doubt it, I shouldn't think so.

RF: This was what the time of John Trevelyan? Did he turn up on the set at all because he was given to doing that?

RWB: Yes, I suppose it was, but no I can't recall that. He was, he figured in my life very early on when I came back from Hollywood and made that first picture at Pinewood, *Passage Home* this was 1954, and I had a run in with him over that, but…

RF: I'll ask you about censorship as a category when we have gone through the chronological things, but I was just curious in this instance whether or not, we are what in the late sixties still or early seventies?

RWB: Early seventies.

RF: …which was thought to be a relatively enlightened time was it not, the Sexual, whatever the Act is called had gone through.

RWB: One or two things that did please me about *The Scars of Dracula* one was that as far as possible I insisted on pumping up the supernatural aspect, in other words it happened just by inspiration of the moment, when Dracula had to pick up a girl who was swooning, or whatever, she was unconscious, he had to pick her up and carry her from one place to another, into another room and so there were doors and Christopher Lee said to me "Just a minute, I've got this girl, how am I going to open the door?" I said Dracula does not open doors or shut them, they open automatically. And so of course I had a prop man with a piece of string and so the moment Dracula comes along, the door opens and shuts behind him. That I thought was magic I thought that was good, there should be more of that. That's supernatural, and fantasy. Lovely. And, of course, the other thing, which I found in the book. I took the trouble to read the book, which nobody had done for decades, Bram Stoker's book. There's a wonderful scene in it where, what's his name, Jonathan Harkness, [Harker DS] the hero, he's up in this bedroom or whatever it is and he looks in the mirror and the wrong face is there and all that stuff, but he had one other thing where he looked out of the window and he saw Count Dracula, who is climbing down the wall of the castle. Well of course it was a hell of a job to do simply because I had to build a huge set for just one set up. This was quite difficult to get away with but there again, Scott McGregor, the Art Director, he pitched in, good guy, and he knew that it was a jolly good thing to do and so we managed to cobble together some sort of set. It wasn't as spectacular as it should have been a really great moment to see this man climbing downwards which is impossible but he did it – he was Dracula! So: the magic. So, I did that and I was very pleased with it because nobody else has ever done it.

RF: In these two films what was the extent if any to which vampirism as a metaphor for fellatio, I suppose you'd say, oral sex?

RWB: Well I'd never thought of that. I'm sure I didn't. I wouldn't. No. Oh no, to me, the Dracula legend, I just accepted the simple ideas, they weren't facts of course, just the simple idea that there was a Count Dracula – indeed there was as it so happens – and he died, but he was brought back to life by some magical blood and from then on, he would never die provided certain rules were observed: he must never be seen in daylight; he was frightened of garlic or crucifixes and he had to have a constant supply of blood, blood transfusions in other words. There was some magic about his body that he was dead but if he could have constant supplies of fresh blood, he could remain alive, but he had to do that and he could only do that at night, couldn't do that during the daytime. Well I accepted all that. Fine that's the legend, that's what we're doing, it's a fairy tale. Now what it all means in terms of interpreting, you'd better ask Sigmund Freud or somebody, not me, I'm not into all that, in fact I'm slightly sceptical of a great deal of all that, it's all better left alone, you either understand it, you feel it, you don't think about it, you certainly don't analyse it, you don't parse it. It means what it means to whoever is watching it. My interpretation was the simple one and then from that everything else can be derived by anyone who wants to derive it. I guarantee

to give them all the basic elements. I'm not trying to steer 'em off fellatio or onto anything else.

RF: But you observe the classical canons in this respect?

RWB: I think so. Yes, I would do that. I don't want to get into all that jazz, I mean you finish up contemplating your own navel don't you. Barmy.

RF: Well it motivates, rationalises…but anyway…

RWB: Well yes, some people need to do that, I don't, but I'm showing off a bit I think, of course I realise there are all those undertones and overtones and all that stuff and decidedly plangent it was I don't doubt. I think it's an instinctive thing again that you've, as long as you've strictly observed all the rules and canons as you say, of the legend and you present the legend fairly and fully, then all those other things will automatically come out, you don't have to. If you analyse them too much you'll probably find you are emphasising certain aspects over others and I don't think that's the way to go about it.

RF: Did your producers want sleaze again with *The Scars of Dracula*?

RWB: I don't know about Aida. I'd have thought that all she was interested in was being on schedule and budget. She never gave the impression that she had the slightest interest in, I don't know what she ever said about the rushes, I suppose she saw them and said "yes, fine".

RF: She really as I remember her, she wasn't much more than a line producer really.

RWB: It was a business proposition as far as she was concerned. I really couldn't get on with her.

RF: Well I think the Americans have the benefit of her currently. I think so. The last I heard, she'd been there for ten or fifteen years or so.

RWB: Oh, in America. I hadn't seen nor heard of her for a long time, so I suppose that's why. Oh well. Anyway, next picture, right?

RF: Yes.

RWB: Oh, I'll tell you who was in *Scars of Dracula*, that was Patrick Troughton. Now, there's another scene in there I suppose it's worth recounting. Patrick Troughton plays Dracula's manservant or slave and he's called Klove, which is a marvellous name, very good Anthony Highams thought of that. Klove's done something wrong, something naughty, something that Dracula doesn't approve of. Dracula stalks in and seizes a sword which happens to be in the fireplace – I don't know why, but it was and he draws the sword which is burning hot and he lays the sword across Klove's bare back. Well now there are fifty-six different ways of doing this, but of course they wanted a burning sword across a man's back, so I thought they can bloody well have it and see if they like it. I think I was going through a period

where I was disgusted with myself and I thought if they wanted a horror picture then, by God, they were going to get one.

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RF: This matter of self-disgust we'll come onto later as to why and how it manifested itself.

RWB: [laughter] well the point is I went into a hurried conference with the cameraman, Murray Grant his name was, a very nice man, and he was technically quite brilliant. I said how are we going to do this – must be a hundred different ways of doing it. He said "I have an idea". There had just then, not too long before, there had been invented a system not of back projection, but of front projection and the idea was that if you had a very responsive screen, of silver material which was so light sensitive that it would practically speaking throw back more light than you put on it, then you could project the image from the front rather than the back with such a weak light that it wouldn't show on the foreground image but it would show on this wonderfully reflective, super reflective screen. Some special material had been invented by, I dunno, ICI or somebody, somebody nothing to do with films but they produced this material, so he said, the cameraman, here's an idea then supposing we get a bit of this material and we put it on the sword, then we have the flaming fire in the background, which is not in fact a fire, and we front project onto the whole scene, a red lamp. When Dracula picks up the sword, the great virtue of it was that it didn't matter what Dracula did with the sword – he could wave it about, put it behind his back, in front, throw it about all over the place and it would still be glowing hot red you see. With any other system, you wouldn't have been able to do that. You'd have been able to present a sword in one particular place and say put a red lamp on it, or paint it red, whatever, but it would not be the same and would not allow him the total freedom of being able to brandish it about. He could throw it anywhere you like and it was glowing red hot and you couldn't disbelieve it. And so, he stuck it on this fellow's back in the foreground and it didn't half make 'em scream. So that was Patrick Troughton, a much lamented actor, and his son, or one of his sons was a great stalwart in the *Minder* series, playing one of the detectives.

RF: Is Patrick dead?

RWB: Patrick died a few years ago now, yes. And, of course he was in *Doctor Who*, he was one of the Doctor Whos. Anyway, onto the next thing, that was just a sort of footnote to *The Scars of Dracula*. At least one had a bit of fun here and there.

This all started at lunch in the canteen at Elstree. By that time *The Avengers* had finished, and Albert Fennell who had been co-producing or whatever, with Julian Wintle, and Brian Clemens who was obviously the other member of the team, Albert and Brian got together and they decided they were going to make films, and at this lunch – I don't think Albert was there, but there was Brian and one or two other people and we were talking about all the stories that had been done, all the Draculas, all the ghouls, all the Frankensteins and all the rest of it and somebody said "yes, and all those Jekyll and Hyde's I mean what can you do with Jekyll and Hyde?" and Brian Clemens without a second thought said " I know what we

could do, he drinks the magic potion, down it goes and he's transformed and he's turned into a woman" and we all fell about laughing and we thought bloody funny idea, very good…

RF: More sexual anxiety by the sound of it…

RWB: You see, you start to read all these things into it. To me it's an amusing notion. Let's see where it takes us of itself, don't let's start packing it with – anyway, nothing was doing, but eventually Brian came up with this script and they asked me to direct it. We had the benefit of an extremely good Art Director called Robert Jones. I don't think he ever worked anywhere else except at Elstree, he was their resident top dog Art Director on all their pictures, and a very good man he was. And, of course during the course of this picture I think he'd retired, he'd more or less gone away from films but of course when he came back, all the departments, the carpenters, the riggers, the plasterers, the prop men, everybody said "Oh wonderful, Bob's back!" and so they gave him the studio on a plate, so we really had wonderful service on this particular picture, for sets, there was nothing they wouldn't do, anything for Bob, but he's good. Now this where Sir James Carerras came into the picture in a sense, in a material sense because he was the one who was instrumental in casting the girl. Now we had I think more or less agreed that Ralph Bates was going to be Dr Jekyll and also Mr Hyde, but this time he was going to be Sister Hyde and we looked at a lot of girls for this and it was James Carerras who came up with the idea of Martine Beswick, who hadn't done a great deal, but when you saw her together with Ralph Bates, with a little bit of hairdressing and make up and all that, they could be almost the same person, so of course it was perfect. Now there was one fundamental flaw. I don't think it ruined the picture but it was a pity. By virtue of the given circumstances that Dr Jekyll makes up the magic potion, he drinks it, and lo and behold he turns into a woman, he looks exactly the same but he is female. Now this in other words, you've got two people but you have only got one body, so you can't have a scene between the two of them and this, sadly, was a drawback. I discussed this later at great length with Brian Clemens and we came to the conclusion that there wasn't anything one could do about it but it was a pity, because in many ways it needed it. We perhaps could have been bolder and stepped outside our own given conventions; perhaps we should have bent that rule at that time I don't know. It didn't occur to us, and we weren't bold enough or whatever but we didn't do it. From the point of view of the full impact of the story, a scene between the two of them could have been fantastic, it could have been very intriguing and amusing, him saying you've stolen my body, and I haven't got a body, and I am going to be you and you are going to be me and all this kind of stuff. Could have been very stimulating and could have brought the drama much more sharply into focus I think. Anyway, we didn't do it so it's no use arguing about it. Otherwise, yes, perfectly good picture, slightly nasty, not too nasty, a straightforward melodrama and finished up with a kind of Dorian Gray ending you know where she gets killed and he dies or there's a last-minute transformation. It was quite amusing, I don't think it was a bad picture at all.

That was 1971.

RF: How well is Hammer during these years, is it the tail end?

RWB: It was going down, it was the tail end. Hammer was going down gradually, gradually, gradually, it was deteriorating. They were making other pictures which were really a bit cheap.

RF: Running out of steam, running out of ideas.

RWB: Actually, Sir James Carerras was really withdrawing, he was getting to be whatever it was and he'd had a hard life and all that, he'd enjoyed it but…

RF: What kind of influence was Michael? It sounds from what you say the units were highly compartmentalised, they brought in producers, I call them line producers, were they line producers or were they people who'd taken projects to Hammer? I mean Mike Styles?? For example.

RWB: Well obviously *The Vampire Lovers* was brought in by Harry Fine and Michael Styles. *Scars of Dracula* was a Hammer picture, that was the only one that was actually.

RF: Aida was hired to…

RWB: So, Aida was brought in to be the producer. *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* had been brought in by Albert Fennell and Brian Clemens. See again, they were more or less sub-contractors, but yes Hammer was running out of steam, well by 1973, well it comes up later, it was running, ran, the last gasp. But the next thing I did in 1972, the following year was a picture called *Asylum* which funnily enough I regard as one of my best pictures. This was a man called Milton Subotsky. Never heard of him. Well I suppose I'd heard of him, that's wrong and slightly rude, but this was a case where my agent had I suppose got some enquiry from Milton about availabilities, anyway the upshot was that I meet Milton Subotsky and he has this script. Now the script was written by Robert Bloch, famous American writer, *Psycho* and all that, and Milton had read, actually Milton is one of the best-read men you've ever heard of, there's no book that he hasn't read. He'd read a lot of Bloch's work and I think he'd already done a picture which was based on a Bloch story, I don't know, but at any rate he was familiar with all this stuff and he got a notion to put three or four of these short stories into one bag with an envelope which he invented to carry, to make a structure of the thing and he sent all this to Robert Bloch who responded nobly and said ooh yes, great, marvellous and sat down and wrote it – did it out "proper". And it was a jolly good script. I had a sad thing over the cameraman. I wanted Arthur Grant. Now Arthur Grant had been the one that had photographed nearly everything that Hammer did including one or two things that I had done, he was a lovely man and a very good cameraman and he had a wonderful sense of drama and magical effects and all that sort of thing, but he said the one guiding principle is that the audience have got to be able to see what is going on. You can't light everything so dark that you can't see them. Well that's a very valuable principle a principle that was not followed in *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* I might say. That photography was very decidedly funny. I was never able to see what was going on.

RF: Who was that?

RWB: Norman Warwick it was. I moaned during the rushes, but I was assured no, no it's all going to be alright on the day. I don't think it ever was, but however… So, Arthur came along I introduced him to Milton. Fine, we're going to start in three-week's time, and about ten days later Arthur came to me and he said "I'm awfully sorry, I don't think I can do this film for you" "Oh" I said "What's wrong?" He said I'm not very well, T really wouldn't want to take it on. I'd love to do it for you of course. So, he didn't do it and he died within three months, so I suppose he must have known that he was ill. It was a great shame because he was an absolute peach of a man. A delightful fellow. We had to get on the telephone to all and sundry to get ourselves a new cameraman in two days flat, and it turned out to be Denys Coop who of course was terrific. Well now Milton was rather like Julian Wintle in a way in that he was marvellous at getting an all-star cast. I don't know how he did it but he did it, and the people in this picture were really very okay there's Peter Cushing, Britt Ekland, Herbert Lom, Patrick Magee, Barry Morse, Barbara Parkins, Robert Powell, Charlotte Rampling, Sylvia Sims, Richard Todd, James Villiers, Geoffrey Bayldon, Megs Jenkins. I don't think there was anybody else in it, wasn't much room was there? This was terrific stuff because they were all genuine dyed in the wool working people, no nonsense, good working lads the whole lot. One of the stories which I thought came off beautifully, was Charlotte Rampling who was a schizophrenic and so you have to have the other person that she thinks she is and this was played by Britt Ekland, so you had the same person being played by two people. The two of them played beautifully. I'm a great fan, well obviously of Charlotte Rampling, and she couldn't have been nicer and she was wonderful, a lovely girl, but Britt I really fell for, and really got on terribly well together. She's alright. There again she's a girl who needs, she needs a good director that one. If she's just brought in to do something, well she'll do it but it's not as good as it could be. Herbert Lom, again this is a triumph of absolute sincerity and belief. His part was one day's shooting, that's all. One day, and he had two or three scenes and he had to play a doctor who was mad – and they're all mad of course as this is a story about a lunatic asylum actually so everybody in it is mad, so Herbert is mad. And he is a doctor and he has a particular hatred for the man who runs the asylum and he has managed to manufacture a robot in the form of a doll about a foot high and it's got a sword, and he's able to control this and it goes off down the corridor, down the stairs, walks into the man's office, climbs up onto the desk, and he's sitting there and he sticks the sword into the back of the man's neck. Now this really preposterous tosh isn't it, I mean come on. If you were to see that picture I promise you, you would believe every word of it simply because of the utter sincerity of Herbert's performance. He was marvellous – he looked me straight in the eye and did all this stuff, and "yes I believe you Herbert, yes, yes, sure". It's wonderful what can be done

RF: Sounds as if someone had seen *Dr Caligari* at some stage too.

RWB: Well I saw that, yes there were a few bits and pieces of that. Patrick Magee who played the man who was running the asylum in fact he's not it turns out it's somebody else, however I won't tell you what's in the last reel, Patrick played the whole thing in a wheel

chair, he was marvellous. Always had a large bottle of Guinness down the side of the wheelchair but he's a terrific actor that one. Marvellous. Robert Powell was the guinea pig, he was the gimmick that runs through the whole thing, he's the hero in other words and he played it beautifully. Very Good. Richard Todd, his wife played by Sylvia Sims takes up with some mysterious African cult or voodoo and this irks him and anyway they're at odds, fighting and all that stuff and he decides that the only thing to do is to murder her which he does and he dismembers the body and just for the time being he wraps the bits up into brown paper parcels and puts them in the deep freeze and he goes upstairs to have a drink and gather his shattered nerves and all the rest of it having washed down the cellar and so on, where the dirty deed was done and he hears a rustling noise from down below and he can't think what it is and he goes down and opens the deep freeze and [laughing] a brown paper arm comes out. Yes, very good it was wonderful stuff and then all the bits and pieces start to chase him up the stairs including the head, which is wrapped in brown paper but you can still see the breathing, the paper is moving like a diaphragm in front of where the mouth would be. Quite ingenious all that, I thought. I liked that, all done by strings and brown paper.

RF: Was it all a bit of a giggle shooting it? You were having an outrageous time.

RWB: Oh yes. Sure. Well there again it's all a question of the degree to which you take it seriously. I took it very seriously, the whole aspect of the madnesses, there were no jokes about that at all. These people were all mad or what we call mad. Lunatics, mentally disturbed, off their trolley, whatever. They came over as sincere, simple people who believed what they believed. And the Herbert Lom reality was that he had made this doll and it was going to murder this man and it did.

It was a magazine picture, it had got all the virtues of that, you don't have to dwell on anything for too long and all that, they're a good proposition from that point of view and the writing was top class. Yes, I enjoyed that. A very successful picture.

RF: How was it working with Milton Subotsky?

RWB: Very supportive. We were waltzing round the set together. Just great. He became a great fan of mine as I am of his.

RF: Was he working independently or was he…?

RWB: No, he was in partnership with a man called Max J Rosenberg who turned out to be a thief.

RF: Yes? Who did he steal from?

RWB: Milton. They finished up with quite a little library of pictures. Milton had to sue him and I said to Milton, not too long ago, well how did it come out and he said oh well, sure I won and who got the money? The lawyers. Which is par for the course. But Rosenberg I didn't like at all, purely a business man.

RF: Present during the shoot?

RWB: No, no.

RF: Milton was the creative producer.

RWB: Oh yes that was alright Milton made the picture, it was just set up in the beginning by Max Rosenberg and then he took it over at the end and sold it. Oh Lord it was reported in Variety for example in the box office returns it was right up at the top for several weeks. There must have been some money and I was supposed to have a share of the profits I think, I can't remember now, but I never saw a penny.

RF: Well, worth a fortune now I would have thought, given all the ancillary uses.

RWB: That's the trouble, you don't get this money and there's nobody to fight for you.

RF: And Mr Rosenberg is probably now collecting it.

RWB: Oh sure, and now his grand-children. In perpetuity. But you'd need a battalion of lawyers and then they'd have a battalion of lawyers and fifteen accountants, it's all bent, it's all crooked, and you can't fight City Hall as they say. You've heard that expression before. So, Milton and me, now being so buddy-buddy and so chummy, I now do the next one that he does, which was called *Fengriffin* to start with, not a bad idea again. It was a book by a man called David Case and it was eventually called by Max Rosenberg, *And Now The Screaming Starts*, which is an exploitation title, silly. Peter Cushing, Herbert Lom, Stephanie Beacham giving an absolutely superb performance as the heroine, and really, she had to carry the picture. Ian Ogilvie, Rosalie Crutchley who was very good and a man called Geoffrey Whitehead who had a very important part to play. And he was good, too. It's a period picture, I can't really remember the story. It's a man, it's eighteenth century, or the early nineteenth anyway, a man who is grand, local Lord of the Manor or whatever. A young man and he marries, takes his bride home and all that stuff and then funny things start to happen on the wedding night, faces appear at the window and all kinds of stuff. It turns out that many generations beforehand, his great grandfather or whatever had behaved rather badly in the district and incidentally amongst other misdemeanours he had exercised his *droit de seigneur* on some young girl of the village and so her descendants all decide to take some kind of revenge on his descendants. That's roughly the structure of the story. In that one we had a rather good severed hand which followed people about. That was rather good it was clockwork. It worked beautifully, it would do that all on its own it would trot all around the set 'cos its quite funny when you are doing it, because one of the things which I think is quite misleading to a lot of people who are making these modern horror pictures which really are not horrible they are simply disgusting, they really are. I'm perfectly certain that you've never seen any of them but I have. I've been to one or two of these film festivals where they show this stuff and I've walked out on several occasions. I won't have it. Sorry. It's not for me. "Ha Ha", they all say. "Anglo-Saxon", well if that's not being Anglo-Saxon they can have that too.

RF: What goes on in them? What upsets you so deeply?

RWB: Well, disgusting stuff with chain saws and this stuff. I mean *[Texas] Chain Saw Massacre* has never been shown in this country which is curious and god forbid it ever should. I saw the sequel and that was pretty disgusting. I mean running a chainsaw straight up the middle of a woman in full view, I mean no question about it, brilliant special effects but the problem is, I was laughing about my hand that was trotting about the set. It was very amusing to watch it and it worked beautifully but when it was on the screen, some of my young acquaintances said "when I saw your film, when I saw that hand, that was frightening, oh god I had to hide under the seat" and all that sort of thing. You see when you're shooting it, it doesn't mean a thing to you and you have to beware of this because you can say "we need more blood. More blood" and people come along with a stirrup pump and squirt the blood all over the place and it's a lark, it's a great giggle when you are doing it but you have got to remember what the effect of that is going to be when you put it on the screen in front of an audience and I think a lot of these characters, they get led astray, and go mad with it, and think it's all very funny and it isn't funny. They sometimes excuse themselves by saying "oh it's a great send-up, it's a giggle and all that, nobody takes it seriously, do they?" Well, I'm afraid there are quite a lot of people who do. I think more is impossible. But that's just a side issue. And then Milton came up with another magazine story, which is called *The Vault of Horror*. Now he'd already done about three of these and this one was not the best, I think. It was alright but it was based on strip cartoons. You see Milton in many ways, I consider him to be a very under-rated character, because on at least two occasions – now he didn't invent the magazine style picture, that was a long time ago but I think he was probably the first person to get the idea of basing a film on an established strip cartoon. Admittedly *Modesty Blaise* had been filmed, that was originally a strip cartoon, but that was many years before, twenty, twenty-five years ago. I can't think of much else. Perhaps there were other things, I don't know, perhaps it wasn't his original thought but certainly he did it…

RF: No, I think he is in the mainstream there, because there has been, well so many American strips, Blondie, Buster, not Buster Crabbe, Flash Gordon, a lot. Anyway…

RWB: Yes. But any rate the next thing that he did, which I think was very much pioneering stuff, was sword and sorcery, and he formed a company called Sword and Sorcery Productions Limited. They never made anything I don't think. He was pre-empted by all the big boys.

RF: Ahead of his time, yes.

RWB: He bloody well invented it in my opinion, he was a much under-rated character is Milton. He's a good egg I think. He may not be madly efficient, he's got his faults no doubt, but I got on with him very well, I respect him. Great respect.

RF: Yes, I like him too. An interesting man I think.

RWB: The cast of *Vault of Horror* was as usual extremely good. We had Dawn Adams, Tom Baker, Michael Craig, Glynis Johns, Edward Judd, Curt Jurgens was in it, and we had Daniel Massey and Anna Massey playing brother and sister which was quite clever. Then Michael Carreras came back into my life, and he was now in full charge of Hammer. I forget what exactly had happened but I think Sir James had retired, Tony Hines had withdrawn. I don't know if he'd retired really, because he kept on writing as he still does to this day, but I've got a feeling they sold the offices in Wardour Street. At any rate Michael Carreras was now in full charge and sole charge and he managed to get together an absolutely brilliant idea to ally himself with the Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong, the idea being to combine the horror picture with the kung-fu picture, as they had just come into being at that time and he had a script called *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires*. Well as far as I'm concerned, it was an absolute disaster. The less said about it the better. I can't think of anything good to say about it.

RF: Where did the disasters enter into it?

RWB: Well, the Shaw Brothers was then and is now the Metro Goldwyn Mayer of the far east. There is nothing on that side of the Pacific, all the way down to Australia and back again that they don't control or run or have some influence on. In other words, a vast, and very important and strong corporation. Enormous. Their interests are fantastic. There are two brothers, one in Hong Kong, the other in Singapore. The one in Hong Kong, who has now been knighted, is called Sir Run Run Shaw I found delightful, a charming man and very nice to me. I suppose there wasn't any reason for him to be nasty but nevertheless he was nice. I got on quite well with him. The only thing I can think of is that many years previously, these guys had become distributors of films in the far east and of course that meant importing stuff from America. They had visited Hollywood where they had been duly and properly feted. I think they went to Warner Brothers, took one look at it and said marvellous. They went back to Hong Kong determined to invent something that would be exactly like that, but of course it was the silent days. Now that didn't matter to them. They built the studios out of corrugated iron, that's all, just glorified Nissen huts only huge and the reason that it didn't matter to them was that China has got about 856 different languages, and then all the rest of the far east has another 856 languages. The great virtue of the Chinese language is the written script, which is readable by everybody. It doesn't matter what language you speak. When you read it, you will put a totally different pronunciation on those hieroglyphs as words but they still mean the same thing. [RWB gives "examples" of this]. Which simply means that you don't record direct sound. You shoot everything silent. The actors can jabber away to each other in any language they like, usually Mandarin or Hong Kong Chinese. It doesn't matter a damn what they say, they don't even have to have a script or dialogue. Roughly speaking, they ad-lib the scene really. Well I was totally unused to anything like that. Hopeless. Of course, the one thing that you would expect and did get was magnificent art direction. The artistry for the sets and the way they do them is impeccable. Beautiful. Imaginative. The Art Director was a man called Johnson Tsao who was affable, and amiable and spoke English very, very, well indeed, so it wasn't all terrible but I was there for about

four months and it was a very stressful period indeed, it's one of the lowest points of my existence.

RF: Was there, is there, any kind of Occidental comparison, equivalent?

RWB: Well possibly in Italy they did somewhat similar things because they would shoot a picture, but they didn't want to shoot it in Italian particularly because they didn't give a damn about their own market, they wanted the English markets, so they would shoot something and then dub it anyway. I've been faintly amused at the rave notices some of the English critics give to the actors and actresses in these great Italian films, Fellini and all this sort of stuff and they don't realise that they are talking about somebody who has been dubbed, and so well that you can't really tell.

RF: Well its seldom done that well I would have thought. Was it a sleaze operation or in picture-making terms respectable?

RWB: No, I don't think so. There was a combination of kung-fu sequences as well as the intrepid professor who is trying to find the last golden vampire, but that was straightforward Hammer, old-fashioned, glamorous.

RF: But other than the tin stages, did you have decent equipment to work with?

RWB: No, it was pretty primitive. But you see when you go to Hong Kong, there is the island of course and there is part of the mainland which is known as Kowloon. Now the whole place, give or take, is about the size of the Isle of Wight and you've got over four million people on it. Now they've all got to have somewhere to live and they've all got to have offices to work in, and factories and all the rest of it, so there isn't much left outside that, so when you start saying "Well we're going to have the caravan crossing the desert", there ain't no desert, just a few square yards just overlooking the Chinese border. When you say "the caravan will be drawn by horses", well the nearest horses are in Australia. You can get a few horses, but they live and work regularly at the racetrack in Hong Kong, so they're race horses and you put them in shafts and they nearly went mad. That was all we had and that kind of thing is impossible, you simply cannot do it, it's a bit like being in Italy with that picture, the one about the navy that I did, where I had to have the Royal Marines band marching up and down at the end. There are some things you can so and some you simply can't do, and it's no good saying "oh well this man lacks inspiration or something" [laughing] you can't do it, and there was a lot of that. I felt slightly, well I had one particular delinquency about it on my part, which was that I wasn't sharp enough about the script. There were supposed to be seven golden vampires, all Chinamen, very Chu-Chin-Chow. Ying Tong Iddle I Po,[a derogatory allusion to a Goon Show phrase and record DS] actually. Now the story is that six of them have lost number seven. I don't know what's happened to him, I've forgotten now and they have to find this magic token or medallion or whatever it was and if they can find that, they can then reconstitute him or do something, and again, come to think of it, it's the old story, we had two acts but we didn't have the third act, because I put my finger on it after we'd finished shooting, which is a bit silly, but I'm prepared to admit that I'm not

totally infallible and this was one of those cases of awful fallibility. I should have insisted on a rewrite where they actually find the medallion and reconstitute the blighter. Then we've got seven and we can go into another act and then Peter Cushing has got another big problem to solve, as the professor. I didn't think of it – I just didn't think of it. And it would have bolstered up the story and we would have had a bit of a story. As it was it was nothing. Nothing happened. It was hopeless. Terrible picture, but some of the Chinese were very nice the leading man was David Chang, a nice man. The kung-fu people were alright. They went a bit berserk but I left that alone. The understanding was that they would do the kung-fu stuff and I would do the rest of it, which suited me no end I can tell you.

And then it was seven years again, almost seven years, that I did nothing but television, and I finished up again with Milton, doing a picture called *The Monster Club* which again had a marvellous cast, a very distinguished cast, who all worked their heads off and did it very well. That was again a magazine picture, several stories. I didn't think it was very good. The idea was to fill it full of pop songs and it had about four or five different bands in it, who appeared in between the stories. Well that was alright, but the pop world is so fragile that if you were to say today, "who are the top five most popular bands?" and you could go out and get them and take them to Elstree, stick them in a picture which would take a couple of weeks at the outside, but no picture ever gets released in less than six months after it's finished, or three months after it's finished. In this case the picture was on ice for a year before they actually showed it. Haven't the faintest idea why, they probably forgot they'd got it, but whatever happened by that time of course in the pop world all these things are totally out of date, gone, hopeless, so there was no value in that at all. A great pity. We would have been far better off without that aspect of it. Then to round off the saga, I did the Sherlock Holmes picture for Kevin Francis at Pinewood with Peter Cushing, John Mills, Ann Baxter. I'd met Ann Baxter she was in *All About Eve*.

SIDE 26 TAPE 13

RF: You'd known her on the Fox lot you said.

RWB: Yes. She came over to do that and extraordinary thing, six months later she died. She'd been in a television series about an hotel. Very popular. In America. I don't know if it was ever shown here.

RF: I think it was, yes. Miss Davies was in it I believe, originally.

RWB: Who was?

RF: Bette Davies.

RWB: Was she? I didn't know that. How funny, she took over, again.

RF: Well I'm not sure ever I saw it. They come and they go and my memory is terrible at the best of times. No, I think they were two separate characters. Baxter was one, and Davies was another. There's a Mel Brookes series currently playing in which – it's a parody I think

of that particular series- it's on television currently, I can't think what it's called. Extremely unfunny, as only Mel Brookes can be. Crass.

RWB: Well I don't find him funny. Crass, yes. I don't find him funny at all.

RF: Well I think it is a parody, intended to be a parody of that original hotel series. Right, so how did that one go?

RWB: Not too badly. The story was written by Tony Hines under the name of John Elder and the script was by a man called NJ Crisp. A very good writer who even at that time- this was few years ago now- was in that awful predicament, he was gradually losing his sight. That was terrible. I imagine it's got worse since. A very good idea, the notion, a pretty good one, which is that again everything has been done with Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, but what this one does, they're both in retirement, both very old gents, well quite old gents, but Watson gets involved in something or other, an intriguing mystery so he goes to Holmes and says "Look I know you're retired old fellow but you are the only man in Europe who can possibly solve this devastating crime", and away they go into another story, and it's a completely new story, it's got nothing to do with although most of them are freely adapted from the canon, they don't stray too far away from the style and they have produced another script called *The Abbot's Cry*. Well it's a better script than this one was, a good script and it's a longer one. It's going to be two hours rather than an hour and a quarter. Again, it's for ABC television in America but it was supposed to be that ABC wanted it for Christmas Day. Well they're not going to get it now are they? It's too late to start. Now what's happened about it I really don't know, and it's a pity and it had a good cast too, organised. Have to ask Kevin Francis about that.

RF: Well, I'm not sure how straight an answer one would get [they laugh]. So that brings us to the end of the motion picture chronology. We covered television to some extent, I think as I remember up to *The Human Jungle*.

RWB: The Human Bungle we used to call it.

RF: Right, well there used to be a series in the States called *Men Against Crime* affectionately known as Crime Against Man [they laugh]. One always has a pet title! *The Human Jungle* …You've been associated with some important series or mini-series. I suppose *Minder* is probably the most famous. *The Irish RM* and *The Flame Trees of Tikka*, which I never saw, that was good yes?

RWB: It was good. One that I liked and that I enjoyed doing and didn't really do much of it was *Danger UXB* [interruption]

RF: You said I think off tape that *Danger UXB* was one of your favourite series.

RWB: Yes, I was going through a rather odd time in my life, when it seemed as if practically everybody who had a problem with a show would ring me up to sort it out and quite frankly I didn't know whether to be flattered or not. I began to think once or twice well why the hell

didn't they ask me in the first place and then they wouldn't have had all that trouble would they? And *Danger UXB*, there was one show there where they'd brought some fellow in, I don't know what he'd done. Somebody said "well he's a poet" which I thought was very good, fine…

RF: Aren't we all? [they laugh]

RWB: Yes. He, poor devil obviously hadn't the faintest idea what he was doing. You'd see the stuff he'd shot and it didn't make any sense at all. Quite extraordinary. A couple of days work it was. There wasn't much of it so I had to go in and sort that out.

RF: I remember the series. It had, to me and it's probably unfair, one of the more boring actors around, Anthony Andrews.

RWB: Yes. Well he was quite good in it. It was a good show in the sense that it had thirteen episodes, and they were all linked. It did make it a bit disjointed some elements of the story, and you couldn't show them in any order, you had to show them one, two, three, four, so I liked that because things build. It was well written in its own terms. Again, it was a purely realistic, factual, wartime bomb disposal…

RF: Which was one of the reasons you were drawn to it presumably?

RWB: I was not in the sappers so I knew nothing about what they got up to, but of course I knew about the army, so all that was easy and it was rather fun. We had a very good platoon of assorted soldiers, Maurice Roeves was terrific as the sergeant. Terrific. Damn good actor that fellow. He's alright. Tony Andrews was quite good as the lieutenant, and it was interesting stuff. It was quite varied, for instance one of the ones I did all took place in Stow on The Wold. We shot the whole thing there – well nearly all of it. It was about a different kind of bomb. They were anti-personnel bombs, known as butterfly bombs because when they were dropped there was a tiny propeller which unscrewed a screw which then released a couple of flaps and gave the bomb which only weighed about two kilos, it gave it a soft landing so you'd no idea where they were. You couldn't find them even if you knew where they were dropped and of course people would stumble across them and get blown up. Vicious, nasty weapon. Really beastly – you'd find them up in the gutters of churches and down in the gutters of drains. They could be almost anywhere you see. A cat could find one or a child playing in a garden could find one. Horrible. So that was quite a nice episode to do, and we did the whole thing at Stowe. Made a lot of noise blowing things up. Very funny.

RF: You did quite a few of the *Minder* series, quite a famous series of more recent times and if we are going to talk about series television in this country, maybe we should focus on that as an example, in terms of audience approval and production values that were very successful and upmarket. Talking about such a film in the eighth decade of the twentieth century, what is to be said about that? At what stage would a director be brought in on a *Minder* episode?

RWB: To begin with, when the script is ready or the producers considered the script was ready, but you were always offered the script and then asked for any comments that you liked to make. You could either say “No thank you, I don’t want to do it, or Yes, but don’t you think in the last act this or that should happen or I don’t see why he do this and she does that” and so on. So, you could pick on anything you liked and talk it over with the producers who were to begin with Lloyd Shirley, who was really more the story man and George Taylor who was really more the production man. They obviously interchanged and had a finger in each other’s pies and did it all together. Its only latterly that Lloyd has gone back to Twickenham or Teddington or wherever it is, you know the Thames Television wherever it is. He had nothing to do with the last series. In the beginning, he had a lot to do with it, he’s a marvellous story editor, absolutely superb. Canadian. Very very bright on construction. Wonderful mind. I’d been doing *Danger UXB* which was for Euston as well, so they asked me to do the third episode. The first two were done by Peter Sasdy, I’m pretty sure and then I came in and did three of the first series and from then on, I did something in almost every series, particularly the last lot. I had a great deal to do with it, I spent the whole of last year doing nothing else.

RF: Does a series such as that have a bible? What were the confines in terms of story content and characterisation?

RWB: Well, there was an original statement of the affair which was produced by Leon Griffiths who invented it all and that outlined about five stories in general terms, one or two in quite specific terms, two or three more in general terms and characterisation, the style of things, what it was about. It was intended to be a successor to the Professionals, no wait a minute, not the Professionals, the other one, *The Sweeney* only the other side of the medal you see. This was all about petty crooks, whereas *The Sweeney* was about the flying squad, the police. It was obvious to me right from the word go indeed in episode three, that the core of the matter was entirely between Dennis Waterman and George Cole. Dennis had obviously been offered it from his work in *The Sweeney* which he’d done for years and years. I don’t know whose idea it had been to bring in George Cole to play the other part, but the whole success of the show turned out, and I swear to you I knew it, on the third day’s shooting of that episode, was the magic of that chemistry between those two actors. Absolutely marvellous.

RF: To what extent had that been planned or was it quite accidental?

RWB: I don’t think it had been planned at all. Accidental and real magic. But for a time in the earlier part of it there was an emphasis on the tougher side of it. The stories were somehow harder. They weren’t brutal, they were never that and they weren’t sleazy there was always a style about them and they were always beautifully carpentered, tailor-made they were but there was a bit more action, a bit more fighting. Certainly, at the beginning, until about the second or third or even fourth series, there was almost always an obligatory fight for Dennis Waterman to hit everybody and knock ‘em all over the floor and win. Which people liked, they liked to see that, they enjoyed that. But that dies a death eventually.

RF: To what extent did the original concept transmogrify then? It set out to be much more straight than it ended up, right?

RWB: And then it ended up – I don't know how you would categorise it, I suppose a comedy-drama.

RF: Oh, almost a sit-com in effect. An adult sit-com.

RWB: I had one or two successful shows in which you have them having an extended row going on for four pages of dialogue which is unusual in that type of show and they were exactly like husband and wife bickering with each other. It was very funny, hilarious the way they did it. There was never a hint of the homosexual or anything like that, they were just two men. George I'd known since *Morning Departure* he was in that. We'd met several times along the way. When we were doing one of the early Minders we were sitting in chairs on the street — all this stuff was shot in the streets, the back streets of anywhere — and Dennis was walking by on the other side of the road. As usual we were doing the crossword which became a great tradition and he said you see that fellow, you remember *Morning Departure* when we made that film, do you realise how old he was when we made that film. I said no and he said six weeks. They were marvellous together. There was never a cross word.

RF: Do you know how the series began? Did someone take the series to Thames?

RWB: Leon Griffith prepared the format and took it to him.

RF: He wasn't commissioned?

RWB: No but like all writers he would have been well aware that if you go to Euston with a format which followed up on *The Sweeney* they would take it. It was submitted more or less as a variation on the Sweeney. Leon has total creative credit as far as I know. He walked in with 10 or 12 pages. I've still got a copy.

RF: They developed it and launched it and in effect it assumed a life of its own.

RWB: Yes. It was quite tricky the first one or two series. It was not a great success. The second series was not all that big and then suddenly it began to…

RF: What caused this change?

RWB: This can only be a personal comment but television people don't seem to realise most people dine at eight so if they put on anything before nine o'clock nobody's going to be watching it. They call it prime time, I don't. *Minder* always came on at nine o'clock and it is my belief it wasn't a popular show but it had a cult following particularly among a lot of young people that I know who started using the slang. They would refer to "her indoors". They picked it up. They enjoyed it and thought it funny.

RF: I wouldn't have thought it was the dining classes that made a success of an ITV show. I would have thought of it as the people who have supper or tea at six thirty.

RWB: They didn't make a success of it but they started talking about it.

RF: It becomes a noticeable.

RWB: I was brought up on rhyming slang. These people had never heard it before and thought it was “killing my dear” and caused a lot of chatter.

RF: So, all this while the great unwashed had been assiduously watching *Minder* but suddenly the chattering classes, those who write in or about the media are aware of it.

RWB: There is no publicity worth a damn other than word of mouth and when you have people who are not the television critic but people who have a column about something totally different mentions of *Minder.*

RF: It's when it becomes a point of reference to everyday life

RWB: Yes, that's what it became. I never forgot being in a baker's shop in Aylesbury many years ago and there were two girls and one was buying a loaf of bread and the conversation was “have you been up the Odeon this week? What's it like? Dirk’s in it, it's lovely”. Half the shop was round the cinema that night.

RF: I have a flat in Wandsworth and I was talking two years ago to a neighbour about the more overt aspects of municipal corruption and my neighbour said didn't you know it’s known as the Arthur Daley borough now. I don’t know what else to pin down about *Minder*. Budgets wouldn't be known to you?

RWB: No, but they wouldn't be low. They were quite high. Quite a lot of money was spent on it. Good actors particularly in the last year.

RF: Did you get involved in casting?

RWB: Yes, it was your pigeon. You submitted the list to Lloyd Shirley and George Taylor.

RF: Did they produce or were they executive producers.

RWB: No, they produced. They saw the rushes.

RF: How much prep time did you have?

RWB: You could have as much time as you like as soon as the script was ready you were ready to start.

RF: You'd have it how long ahead of time?

RWB: About four weeks. Officially the contract was two weeks prep and two weeks shoot and two weeks complete. That was the standard but of course it never worked like that. In this last year, I did two episodes and then the Christmas show which was a long one, an hour and a half show. That's all I did but I was working the whole of the year on that, nothing else. I enjoyed it too. The great thing about *Minder* was that it became a family thing. Nobody did very many episodes. I did twelve plus the long one out of 65 episodes. Nobody did more than about that so there was a constant flurry of directors and writers. I did a lot of scripts by Tony Hoare and Leon Griffiths and was lucky they were very good, very clever. The second one I did was about a professional gambler who was shut out of all the regular casinos simply because he was so good at poker that they barred him. So, he finds a game up in the Seven Sisters Road among the Greeks running the sweat shops and they have a *spieler* in a back room. He gets rooked and then he gets his own back. I had two enormous poker games to stage. It was done in such a way that you didn't have to understand poker to understand what was going on. The other very good aspect of it was that the leading man was Jewish and there was nothing Jewish about him except his manner and the way he approached gambling, that came off rather well.
There were a lot of interesting aspects to *Minder*. I did one called *Whose Wife is it anyway*? It was based on a play about the man's who's paralysed from the neck down, based on *Who's Life is it Anyway?* The man in the *Minder* episode is an antique dealer who has been knocked down in an accident. He has a partner, a young partner and there's a bit of fencing going on and Arthur Daley gets involved in it. These two are homosexuals. And again, played absolutely straight. Not as figures of fun. Arthur is deeply shocked and as soon as he meets them starts speaking in a very masculine voice. That was good. That was how Arthur would behave with a couple of homosexuals.

RF: Was that in the writing?

RWB: Yes, it was all there.

RF: Were they well rewarded. Obviously hard work?

RWB: Terribly hard work, but you're doing something like *Minder* it's not unsatisfactory. I would willingly have done more.

RF: On balance how often did you get a *Minder* in comparison to the journeyman stuff? Just churning it out.

RWB: Not as often as one would have liked. As I said only got thirteen over ten years.

RF: Was it on that long?

RWB: Oh yes, 1979 – 1989. That was part of the game with the last series. It opened with Terry in prison and he's been put there because of a delinquency on the part of Arthur Daly and then the leg-pulling starts, you're too old for it now, you're over the hill.

RF: It will be interesting if people listening to this tape in the future will know what *Minder* is and if it will survive in any form. I think it will still be showing on Sky television.

RWB: other television things which I did and would have liked doing: One was *The Flames Trees of Thika*. That again was a seven-part serial. It was a straightforward long story. This is one of the ace virtues of television and it hasn't got many. If you remember a long time ago MGM decided they would offer us the *Forsyte Saga* with Greer Garson, Walter Pidgeon and they were going to show it to us in about ninety minutes. When you look at the book shelf you have oh about nine novels and short stories. The BBC came along much later and they showed it and they took twenty-three and a half hours to do it. Of course, it was wonderful. Brilliant. It was a soap opera. Galsworthy on a very high level. Super stuff and a portrait of a society and the interaction of a family and all these different characters. You can't do it in ninety minutes but you can do it over an extended series. *Upstairs Downstairs* was another.

RF: I have to interject here. Not only was it in ninety minutes but MGM's concept of it was, as they titled it, *That Forsyte Woman* in the States.

RWB: That's nice yes. Their privilege I suppose. *Flame Trees* was quite a good number. It wasn't as good as it could have been but nothing is. At any rate, we went to Kenya. We did the whole thing there. We built all the sets, all location of course. The script was, what we were doing was really a biography. Elspeth Huxley was the author of the original book: the original book is the first of a three-volume autobiography but she would never really admit it was an autobiography. She would say it was a novel based on many incidents in her life and her family life. Dealing with the first volume she's a child of about nine or ten and by the end she's about twelve or fourteen. There were really tremendous inhibitions on everybody's part. Really it should have been taken by the scruff of its neck. Elspeth Huxley should have been told to go and live in her country house and be happy, "everything is going to be fine darling" because we have to get to work on this thing because it had tremendous potential but there was always something was going to happen but it never quite did. The lion was around the corner and then it just ambled off into the bush. There was no real proper scene with the lion. Anyway, when it came to the characterisation of the other people, her mother was really a very eccentric lady indeed, a woman of incredible will, boundless energy and almost a certain failure at everything she touched. She was charming, dotty, an eccentric Englishwoman. Very upper class. Her grandfather was a duke and all that.

She married and the truth of the matter was that he was very handsome, dashing and a soldier, but he was a bit feckless and a bit of a wastrel, a bit lazy, took to the bottle and made quite a name for himself in the Second World War, looked after prisoners of war. He disappeared out of this woman 's life for years on end. All these things I've said about these two people neither of us would like to say about our mother and father if it was the case. But at any rate I got the feeling that Elspeth had pulled her punches all the way through about these people and therefore had not realised the full potential of the thing. The potential was there. It was called British East Africa. It wasn't even called Kenya. You went there and by

signing a form, you got an allocation of land from the Protectorate and you could go and farm it, grow coffee. It was very hard, arid, very difficult. You really had to cut the farm out of the Bush and get hold of what help you could from the local talent and train them, cajole them, whatever. Very adventurous and an amazingly bold thing to do in 1908 or whenever, but I don't think the husband had any real future in England because he wasn't really very good at anything. So, we played it as a perfectly straight forward happy family and I think we lost something. Elspeth was quite adamant that was the way it should be and that was the way it was.

RF: Expensive operation, taking cast and crew out. Did you recruit locally?

RWB: No but obviously we got a lot of help when we got out there, but the entire cast and the main part of the crew was from England. We must have flown out 45 people or more. It worked extremely well and everybody loved it. I was in the Arctic Circle a few years ago looking for locations for a Canadian picture which never got made. There I was up in Baffin Island staying at what they call the Inn, the only one in the village. It accommodated 23 guests in nine bedrooms so you never knew what was going to happen. We filled the hotel with the recce party but there was one other woman there, of 65 who'd come up from Connecticut. She was a bird fancier, ornithologist. After the third or fourth day, I walked in and she jumped up out a chair, threw her arms round my neck and said I've only just realised you were the man who made the *Flame Trees of Thika*. It was really quite out of the blue. And in Canada too people adored it. It was a very successful enterprise. Very popular. But again, it was not the sort of public which people nowadays write about. The "other" public, which I don't think is catered for anything like enough.

And the other one I enjoyed doing was *The Irish RM.* We shot it all in Ireland with the Irish.

RF: Was that RTE for Channel 4?

RWB: Yes. And Ulster [TV] had a bit in it. Very successful again. It was beautifully done, the costumes, style of it and location.

RF: I remember it, it was very classically done. Simply and straightforward, with great integrity.

RWB: it was an ironic picture of the ascendancy which amused me no end. And the Irish too of course. There was a great deal of leg pulling went on. They were wonderful. No trouble at all. Lovely cast. Peter Bowles, I think, carried it very well. He had to be a bit of a twit at times.

RF: He's the butt throughout. That more or less brings us up to date as far as it goes. Now what we need to do is tie up a few loose ends. [Tape 13 ends]

RWB:ItamusedtheIrish, no doubt on that. They were a lovely cast. Peter a bit of a star deserves credit

SIDE 27, TAPE 14

RF: It's the fourteenth tape, side twenty-seven. I made a few notes as we went through, none of them particularly important, in fact most of them very minor. I'm not sure we got your exact date of birth, I think you said 1916. For the record, we'd better check the date.

RWB: 19th December.

RF: Much earlier on you mentioned Mabel Baker as a continuity girl who went onto fame and fortune.

RWB: Muriel Baker.

RF: I beg your pardon. I wonder if you have any early recollections of her in that she developed into quite a member of the film business and establishment.

RWB: She was a very good and efficient continuity girl. She didn't do very much at Gainsborough. We had a number of girls, One I remember particularly was called Betty Wolf and she was there quite a lot whereas Muriel I can only really remember her on about one picture. Having lost all my pre-war records, you get no help from anywhere, the screen credits were absolutely hopeless and you only got the star names and the producers and the director. Quite often they didn't even show the writers.

RF: Well if you get hold of a copy of the Rachel Lowe book you'll get the writers. Do you know how she came in the business?

RWB: No and I had very little to do with the Sydney Box organisation. He once offered me a job. He wanted me to go with him which I didn't do. Apart from the fact that I was at Pinewood and they were at Pinewood and I used to see them in the canteen but that was about all. It wasn't until much later through Bill McQuitty. He's a delightful man and very scrupulous about keeping up friendships. I see them once or twice a year and that's been going on for donkey s years and we only made the one picture together. We like each other and we have a lot to discuss and enjoy together. He used to live on the estate on the top of Mill Hill which was originally bought by Sydney and there were a number of houses on this estate and Bill McQuitty had one and Betty Box had another one. Sydney had a herd of cows up there and used to drink his own milk.

RF: That's where the Gardiner's still are, yes?

RWB: Yes. After Sydney got ill and went off to Perth, with his nurse, Muriel was left there. They had a daughter who was a sculptress. Muriel was left there in this splendid house which was originally the stables. The original house was destroyed many years ago before Sydney got it. Then this enormous stable block was converted. And Bill and Betty McQuitty

lived next door. Bill was a great gardener and Betty too. Used to keep bees and all that kind of stuff. Muriel met Lord Gardiner who was at onetime Lord Chancellor.

RF: When she was continuity at Gainsborough was there any indication that she was going to go on to such a position of authority or power?

RWB: I don't think so.

RF: Was she writing then?

RWB: Yes. I know now she was but I'm not sure whether I was aware of this at the time. She was married to Sydney already. They used to write one act plays for Samuel French for amateur performance. They were dab hands at that.

RF: A little thing just to establish on the record that you and I met during the War at the Screenwriter's Association which was a dinky little club in a lovely little house at 7 Deanery St alongside the Dorchester Hotel which was run by Guy Morgan and it was a pleasant meeting place.

RWB: It was a lovely house. Genuine Queen Anne with panelled rooms

RF: Sparsely furnished as I remember.

RWB: I distinctly remember a very small bar and a restaurant.

RF: A little bar where you could never get any ice, and war time food. I remember having dinner once with Gabriel Pascal, angling for a job. Can you believe it me taking him to dinner it should have been him taking me! With all his consummate grace he looked at the food and said "poison". Someone, sometime should try and research it. It was quite an interesting little gathering and quite an eclectic gathering. There was you and me, Herbert Marshall who never stopped talking about studying under Eisenstein in Moscow and his wife Freya, he's now a professor emeritus having renounced communism and gone off in the opposite direction.

RWB: Everyone's done that.

RF: A thoroughly reformed character.

RWB: I can't remember who took me there in the first place. It might have been Stephen Watts.

RF: Wolfgang Wilhelm was another member and Gordon Wellesley.

RWB: It might have been Frank Launder or Sidney. By the way I was told on the phone the other day that Frank had had a stroke. He lives in France, Monte Carlo.

RF: That was just to get it on the record that the place existed and it’s rather sad it doesn't now. I don't think BAFTA fulfils that particular thing. You mentioned, and we kind of skipped over, Dorothy Parker.

RWB: A legendary figure and woman of some presence and style. Who knew that she had presence and style and wit and talent. She was a tiny woman. Always dressed in very dark clothes in spite of California where you can walk about in riotous colours and it looks fine. She always spoke very quietly, it was a just an affectation, you had to lean forward to catch what she was saying, she never raised her voice. She was an Easterner. Her real name was Rothschild. She was not apparently a Rothschild of those Rothschilds. I don't know much other than she was married to Alan and they divorced and he was in England a long time when I knew him quite well and he was instrumental in introducing me to a whole lot of people. Eric Ambler introduced me to Alan. Then Alan went back to America and quite madly they decided to get married again which they did. They fell apart and neither of them bothered to do anything else after that.

RF: She ended up a mess. She lived in a hotel where one of my bosses lived for a while and she set fire to herself in bed once.

RWB: The first thing which happened when I got to Hollywood was that they threw an enormous party and everyone was there. Laurence Olivier and Fritz Lang, Willie Wyler, you name them and they were all there. It was a jolly evening. I should have gone around with an autograph book. We had very little in common because we weren't working together so there was no contact on that level. She was quite disturbed by the whole business of the McCarthy era. She said she dreaded seeing those men walking up the drive in big hats, those G-men always wore enormous hats, Fedoras they were called. I remember a number of genial evenings.

RF: Any particular *bons mots* that she dropped?

RWB: No, not new ones. Only the classic ones.

RF: Then there were some technicians you worked with. Geoff Unsworth.

RWB: He did three pictures on the trot for me finishing up with *A Night to Remember.* He was under contract to the studio on a weekly wage and it was ridiculous what they were paying him but he had a wife and two children. Actually, I don't think Geoffrey was poverty stricken. Geoffrey as his name suggests came from Yorkshire and it was good solid middle-class stuff. I respected him as a man, he was a first-class cameraman. He was conscientious and scrupulous to the last detail. He was marvellous with women. In those days, there was a great thing about cameraman not being any good with women. They were great with actors, action or straight forward black and white stuff, but it was said that you couldn't find a cameraman who had the flair for photographing girls, and he could. One reason was that he liked then very much, which was a great help. Some of these fellows don't which was a great bore. They're always having their makeup fixed whereas with the men you can get on with it. Then you have the hairdressers and the wardrobe and she's forgotten her earing. One can see why some of these slapdash cameramen have no time for women and got

bored with it but Geoff never had that attitude at all. He adored women. He was very quiet indeed and he never raised his voice and I never heard him in an argument and I never heard him losing his temper. He had great charm. Of course, he went on to do picture after picture and got better and better until he was one of the best.

RF: Where lay his strengths?

RWB: Certainly in imagination. He wasn't just a lighting cameraman. He understood how to sympathise with the style of the film whether it was about a lot of down and outs in the gutter or whether it was a ritzy apartment in Paris. He knew the difference and could produce the difference on the screen. Quite a lot of them would give you something which looked exactly alike. But you can if you know what you're about, with the lighting do all sorts of things to suggest the atmosphere, the mood, and he was an artist in that, there's no doubt about it.

RF: Did he work meticulously?

RWB: Yes

RF: Lots of lighting units?

RWB: No. Not excessively. But he was meticulous and it had to be right. He wasn't at all slap-dash.

RF: Would he suggest set ups to you?

RWB: Yes, we did it together. I always regarded my cameraman as my right-hand man and the closer one can work with such a man and the more cooperative the effort is, the better it will be, but you don't get it very often. Particularly these days when it's just a chore.

RF: Who were your favourite cameramen?

RWB: Certainly Geoff. Eric Cross for *The One that got Away* because it was an exceptional piece of work and he did it exceptionally, brilliantly, I think. Denys Coop did a marvellous job on *Asylum* and other pictures. He was the man instrumental in making Superman fly.

RF: He was said to be slow. Did you find him slow?

RWB: Not on *Asylum*. He was a bit doubtful about doing it because he thought it would be a bit slapdash, and a bit hurry up kind of thing but he knew we were in a hole because Arthur Grant had suddenly and apologetically withdrawn and we had to find someone within five minutes. So, he knew we were up against it and did it. And then he was relieved to find out so long as you don't shoot unnecessary set-ups it's surprising how much work you can get through and how good it can be in a short schedule. Recently I was starting a series called *Saracen* and they asked me to do the first one and at the same time there were two or three directors who were preparing the shows which were to follow on. He had seemed to be very

bright and had had some experience and it wasn't until some months later I was talking to one of the assistants and I said how did he get on the with the show because I thought he seemed pretty promising. The fellow said “don't talk about it”. What was wrong? He was well prepared but he'd come in in the morning with a list of 32 set ups. Well if you get 22 in a day’s work you’re doing very well, so by lunch time he's only done six set ups and the rest of the afternoon is bedlam and “how am I going to cut?” because he got himself blocked into this wonderful scheme which he could never fulfil. The only way you can give yourself any peace of mind is to work out how the scene should best be covered in a reasonable amount of coverage. You have to take risks to a certain extent. You can't leave yourself with extra set ups which you can fall back onto in a crisis. You can only shoot what is going onto the screen. You've got to cut in the camera. You've got to know how the thing is going to be assembled before you shoot it and that will turn out to be not only the maximum coverage but also the minimum coverage and it will turn out alright but you've got to do it and stick to it. If you do you can go home at the end of the day not feeling beaten to death and the biggest problem of all and the biggest delinquency I've found among some other people is that they don’t rehearse because they don’t have time to rehearse. A quick run through and then they shoot. Well I rehearse apparently for hours and you can’t shoot until you know instinctively you've done the rehearsal and that's it, they're balanced, they know what they're doing, let's do it. The real battle, particularly with television episodes, is not the ten-day schedule as such, it is the whole problem of “how can I steal some rehearsal time because that’s the one thing not in the budget or the schedule?” You have to invent it.

RF: Can we come back to people. [Alex] Vetchinsky was someone in his time who was a lovely art director. What were your memories of him?

RWB: They were the fondest memories. Vetch was an eccentric character.
He was a great big roly-poly man. He was tall, bald, and Jewish, very Jewish, and very strict. He came from Whitechapel. He was born here he wasn’t an emigre. He was always extremely badly dressed and very untidy. I think he shaved about once a week, perhaps twice. he wasn't dirty. He was rather scrupulously clean but if he didn't feel like shaving he didn’t shave. Somebody once claimed that they went to see him at his house and he got a book off the shelf to find his place he marked his place with a slice of bacon. I don't know what bacon was doing in a Jewish house. But he wasn't very firm about that. Really the other important thing about Vetch was that he was a tremendous gourmet. He loved his food and it was tip top. It was a great joy to me to take this fellow who was the most unpre-possessing fellow to see, sit him down at a grand restaurant and go through the menu and the wine and the cigars, he loved it and he knew about it too and he had very good taste. He loved walking about with a great walking stick with a silver top. He was slightly flamboy-ant. He thought he was an artist, he wasn't very good at drawings but at one time most eve-rybody in the art department of every studio had all been through his hands and they had all learnt something from Vetch. He made them do the donkey work. He didn't do the donkey work, that's what they were for. And so, they got on with it and learnt something. Some said he just walked around schmoozing to the producers and us poor bastards had to do the work.

RF: Was it the American system at Pinewood, was he the head of the department?

RWB: No. No, you had an art director with his own department on your picture and that was all. I think he was under contract to Pinewood for some time. I was very fond of him. After you'd been shooting for four or five weeks you would say “where's Vetch I want to talk to him about such and such?” and they would say “we will try to find him” and he'd gone missing. During the afternoon, he would reappear rather apologetic, looking rather sheepish, dressed in his best suit and this was his negotiating suit. As soon as the picture was into it’s fifth week, he was off looking for his next job. Very funny. I loved him.

RF: Like cameramen, they suddenly disappear and are on the phone all the time.

RWB: Vetch had a very adenoidal speech with everyone imitated mercilessly. Also, he was, or said he was, rather deaf, but after a considerable number of years in the late fifties or early sixties, he went off to Israel. He had a daughter who'd got married and moved there. While he was there he discovered this wonderful doctor, who knew all about ears, sat him down and performed some operation on his and his hearing came back. It became a family joke because I was amongst all the rest of them that did a very good imitation of Vetch and if I raised my voice he’d say “don't shout Baker, no need to shout” and at that time he was as deaf as a post. They all pulled his leg about that. He was quite a schmoozer and got on very well with the Americans when they came into Pinewood in the early sixties and could deliver their kind of talk. He would come to you and always have a biro in his hand and would draw you a sketch, a plan of a set either on the palm of his hand or the back of your hand. I’d say that’s fine but what about the fourth wall. When I do that scene, I want to shoot that wall. And he’d say that's all right I’ll give you a piece with a backing. It was always I’ll give you a piece. I'd say Vetch you're not giving it me, you'll be paid.

RF: What happened to him?

RWB: He was very successful with the Americans over a number of years and didn’t work for anyone else except the visiting clients. He never did a Bond picture but he did all the others. He died about ten years ago.

RF: Where had you first met him?

RWB: At Gainsborough. He was the first assistant to Werndorff and all that. He’d been well trained.

RF: That leaves John Davis. You had greater liking and respect for him than a lot of people did.

RWB: Yes. He was very good to me and always treated me as I would expect to be treated.

RF: Did you see the other side of him?

RWB: Not a lot. He was one of those people. He had a formidable presence. He had rather a piercing stare. He would walk into a situation and frostily stare someone in the face and say “all well?” and it wasn't all well and they would start to confess their delinquencies which you don’t do. You certainly don’t do with John Davis. I tell you a funny thing which happened which I found rather disappointing. It was crisis time as usual. It was always crisis time in the British film industry and at Rank and at Pinewood. And John Davis came down and commanded a round table conference of all producers and all directors. There must have been twenty people there. We had this and it went on all afternoon and the lights were fading outside the window. He said we will all go downstairs now, have something to eat and continue. We went downstairs and there was dinner laid on in the restaurant for all of us. We sat there and everyone was decidedly edgy. He's been very cutting about some of the pictures which had been made and had been put up. “I'm asking you what we’re going to be doing, you're the people who are supposed to do it not me”, and so on. He was called away from the dinner table so we all chatted among ourselves. Then he came back and he said “good news, we've invaded Suez” and of course it went down like a lead balloon. We knew that was the biggest blunder anyone could wish to pull. That was one case where he was wrong. He was chiding everyone very considerably. It would have been about eight o’clock in the evening.

RF: So, he wasn't for you the monster many people perceive?

RWB: No because he did back the pictures. I don't know, some toes may have been trodden on. I told you how I read these two books which I wanted to film. They had probably been allocated to producers already. Possibly either or both of those producers may have had a director in mind and they may have been told by JD, “no Roy Baker's going to do these”. But certainly, he backed me fully on both of these pictures, particularly *'A Night to Remember'* because it was one of the few times the Rank Organisation got good notices He was a man of intense pride, and tremendous ambition and he did pull off one of the most important strokes any businessman had when he pulled off the rights to Xerox. I do know he was the one who went to America and bought it and signed the contracts.

RF: It kept the Rank Organisation in business.

RWB: It kept it going for twenty years until the patents were broken and the company is still eminent in that business.

RF: So as far as you're concerned he's good news. Should he have stayed in exhibition, should he have had a place in production in running a vertically integrated combine?

RWB: That's difficult to say. He was a businessman. I wouldn't confine him to distribution but I don't think he was more a natural distributor than he would have been a natural executive producer or a natural anything.

RF: He started in the exhibition side, hadn’t he?

RWB: But as an accountant. He was a financier. That was what he knew about. Accountancy, taxation, and all the politics of it and the City politics. That was where he was.

RF: But missing a magic element in assessing what's good and what's bad in terms of audiences.

RWB: I don't think he would have been terribly good on the subjects but he might have been terribly good on the people that he would choose or come across. But he wouldn't take any imaginative leaps on people or stories. But if he'd had a stronger executive producer it might have worked. The real tragedy was that to my mind the Rank Organisation was almost run out of the film industry by the media. And it was because of his pride. There was one significant thing for instance when the Rank Organisation decided it should have a presence at the Cannes Film Festival. Obviously, they should. They hadn't got anything very fancy to show. Everyone said "ha, ha, ha" behind their hands it got sent up. Well maybe it wasn't very good but I wish to god the people who do this sending up would think twice before they make a laughing stock out of something which may turn out to be every valuable indeed. Any industry, and if you consider the film industry as an industry which you have to if you're looking at it from this point of view, it's got to have some sort of core. It has to have a centre and even if that centre doesn't make brilliant movies or art house successes that may please a few critics in Hampstead, you need it for training, there's no focus to all the effort unless you've got something like that and for Pinewood it was ideal, it should have gone on, but to take the Cannes Film Festival incident, John Davis's reaction was absolutely immediate. He said "I will never show another film at any film festival throughout the world". He was wrong of course, he should have simply laughed and said "I don't care what they think. We'll be there next year and the year after, and eventually we shall turn up some films". It's strange because he had all the determination to bulldoze on.

RF: You make him sound an autocrat.

RWB: But if something hurt his pride he would react immediately. He was a very touchy man in many ways. I never had a cross word with him. At the end, my contract ran out and they weren't renewing anyone's contract and I just wandered off into the darkness and got on with it.

RF: Do you see him still?

RWB: No, I haven't seen him for many years.

RF: A few last areas then: When did you first join the union?

RWB: After the war. Before the war I was very young, completely unconscious of trade unionism. I was in a regular job and I thought I was being quite well paid and it never occurred to me that I should join just for the sake of maybe helping the others. Then I joined after the War and I think it was something like January, February 1946 and I've never done a damn thing except occasionally pay my subscriptions.

RF: You've never served on committees?

RWB: I've attended a few meetings and usually when I've said anything it's gone down like a lead balloon. So, I don't think I fit in at all.

RF: What was the sort of thing you said which didn't go down well.

RWB: I can remember one meeting and George Elvin was there. So that will tell you it was a long time ago, George Elvin and Alan Sapper. They were rattling on all the time about [Tape Ends]

SIDE 24, Tape 14

RF: …the poor underprivileged…

RWB: …the poor underprivileged number boys and clapper loaders and I boldly said "what about directors, I am far more worried about them". I'd good reason to be: any freelance director will tell you that. It is no uncommon thing for me to spend twelve months without a penny coming in and I'd no resources, I never had any chances to build any up. Only recently, not last year but the two years before that I didn't earn a penny for 24 months. Alright you have to be careful when you're earning money and spread it out.

RF: The taxman doesn't allow you to do that.

RWB: He does a bit but only a bit. it's not quite so bad. It's not so bad as it used to be. It used to be quite difficult which is why people of my age aren't that rich. We were never paid that amount of money anyway. So, I was rattling on about that. I think I told you the story when the working hours was shortened by half an hour which is two and a half hours a week which is two and a half hours off my schedule. They've never done a thing about residuals. Extra work on script, no help whatsoever which is why I've never understood why directors are a member of ACTT at all. It seems totally wrong.

RF: So, you think the ACTT fails directors totally?

RWB: No question. They've never done a damn thing. They're just so obsessed with all the other normal union matters.

RF: Do you think it would have been different if you' d participated in union affairs?

RWB: No, I'd have been completely outvoted.

RF: Now directors represent something like five or six thousand people in the union which is one fifth of the union.

RWB: If that's the case, maybe if we all got together we could refocus the union's mind to stop rattling swords at the TUC and get on with what they should be doing and stop worrying about the Government. I realise the unions were only created because of hardship and difficulties with the employees when they were invented they had to invent a political party which they did very successfully but when it gets to the point where the unions are doing nothing but politics there they went totally wrong. They must not forget, if their party is the Labour Party and the Labour Party is in office that's fine but the Labour Party isn't going to be in office forever any more than the Conservatives, but when the Conservative Party come into office, they've got nobody to talk to, they're not going to play it that way. It seems an idiocy to get bound up in the one political party. They should play the game with all of them come hell or high water. Just get on with what you want to do and your contribution to the industry as a whole, not just the lowest paid workers or the biggest number of workers. Concentrate on the industry as a whole and the general benefit which will derive from that. That's my view. Nobody will listen to that at the ACTT.

RF: The attitudes at the union are changing as the people within the union are changing. The trouble here is that we still have a few yesterday's men on the payroll. There's also a concept that the union exists for the benefit of the staff rather than the members which is one that I disagree with.

RF: Tell me do you think the Directors' Guild [of Great Britain] is going to be more successful in these areas?

RWB: No. That's the short answer. I say no because I think the timing is wrong.

RF: If the employers aren't going to negotiate with the ACTT they're not going to recognise any group.

RWB: There no need to. It's not a matter of being wilfully evil. They just haven't got to bother any more so they won't. I remember a conversation with Eric Ambler and I was grumbling about this. Eric said to me you should form a union of directors because I was quite eminent in those days because most of the other top dogs had moved off to America. I think I was in a position of sufficient influence to get the whole thing going. I didn't have the will. I certainly don't want to do it now. But I think if a union of directors had been formed in the early 50s, simply on the basis that the directors are not technicians and should have their own guild and do their own negotiating. Then I think it might after a long struggle have come off and when television came in got into that because a lot of television directors do get residuals and by now would have been a happy ongoing guild to look after those people and could have established those reasonable principles of remuneration. But now I think it's too late. It will come round again, of course. Because once again the pendulum will swing but it's very sad. There was a meeting again last week to talk about negotiating. I didn't go. I don't know all that was said but what I would say is that the Guild should march in here one day with a banner and march up to Alan Sapper's window and chuck him out the window.

It's an exaggeration. Just invade the general meeting. If there are five or six thousand people who qualify as directors at the next annual general meeting or big meeting of ACTT, somebody should blow all the trumpets and wave all the banners and make sure that every single one of them turns up, then just by sheer weight of presence in that hall then the whole thing changes instantly.

RF: One of the things which always worries me is the amount of representation directors have within the constitution of the union is never exercised.

RWB: Too lazy and individual and self—centred and lazy. And, of course the snag is that there's no point in saying to members of the Directors Guild you must all come to this ACTT meeting because a lot of them aren't members of ACTT. They might be ballet dancers or opera people, or Equity members.

RF: It's something on my mind because I think it's sad if we get involved in a fratricidal war, especially at these times. I would never think of attacking Guild members because they are my colleagues and friends whom I respect and admire a great deal. It all seems so unnecessary and pointless.

But again, whoever is listening to this tape will know better than we what happens.

Did have you any dealings with the NFFC? [National Film Finance Corporation]

RWB: Yes, I did. *'Morning Departure'* was almost entirely financed by them and they must have done very well out of it. The boss was David Kingsley who later ran British Lion. During the passage of Lion. NFFC supported British Lion more and more and more. It finished up they owned it and he was the chairman. Then again later they certainly supported *Two Left Feet*. That's about all I've had to do [with them] but of course, I'm not a producer

RF: Do you favour state support or state intervention for the film industry? Do you think a banking role such as that is useful?

RWB: I'm very ignorant about this. I start off first of all by having to say I'm deeply suspicious of state support for something simply because I am a great believer in that old adage he who pays the piper calls the tune. I've never known of an instance where people lend money and then don't interfere whether it be the government or J Arthur Rank, whatever, and I think it's a dangerous game to play because they're never the same three or four months together, let alone between parliaments. They blow hot and cold. Something happens in Suez, something happens in the North Pole and its all the greenhouse effect, and you're still waiting for the cheque to come in August. That's only a simple-minded reaction. I think so many of the arts, opera have become outrageously expensive to stage. But if you take the arts there's hardly ever been anything achieved without a patron at the top of it all so it may be that's it's unavoidable. It may be deplorable. In the case of films, it's certainly deplorable. You've got a potential revenue at the end of it which is simply enormous. We

don t get it. We can go into that in a minute. The money's there. If you can gross thirty million dollars in five minutes in America, there is a huge audience. So, it' s not like being a painter and can't afford the paints or like opera or ballet  where it is very limited audience or like classical music. It's very difficult to run a symphony orchestra on the kind of gate money you can expect it to command. They do their best with broadcasting and gramophone records and some do very well but there isn't the gate money. There is in football. There is a lot of money coming through those turnstiles, and they can afford to pay footballers and all those other people star billing and all that and still operate at a profit. They can afford it. The audience, they pay their four pounds to go in – it's gone up from six pence hasn't it? But however…

With films, admittedly we only have a potential audience out of 50 million, which is cut into heavily by television. Then you've got the rest of the world and anywhere else you can contrive to get your film shown. I certainly think there was a tendency to pay American salaries in this country which of course was absurd. Just because the producer was American, alright you can make a case for it. But if it's a British producer making a British picture, they should all work for British rates including the director. None of these £200,000 contracts. Back to the small money. What the external costs are such as timber I don't know and all that's gone up and we can't control that. But there is an audience, and you can operate an industry on the economics of what you can expect to get from the audience, the consumer. I don't see where else it can come from. If you think you're going to get it from the government the real problem is getting enough. I don't think any government is really going to hand on heart say we're going to put £100 million into the British film industry and if they put any less they're going to lose it all. If they put in £100 million, or even £200 million then they might have a chance of making some bloody good pictures, but they'd make some poor pictures too.  But simply to put a couple of million into Simon Relph, who has to scratch away for a living, is pathetic, it's hopeless. They might just as well not bother. But I don't think any government is going to say to the electorate we're going to put £100 million into film. It's a great pity because the film is a wonderful subtle propaganda medium. That is why the Russians took it up. The communists were very good at that. They took it up right from the word go, from the 1920s, and spent fortunes on it. And you have the example of the Americans, when they first came over at the beginning of the War everyone expected them to be like Gary Cooper. Because that was what they'd seen. They knew all about America.

RF: That is quite deliberate. There is no industry the State Department rushes to defend more than the film industry. You try and keep American films out of our markets and immediately the State Department gets involved. I don't think, our Foreign Office speaks for our film industry.

RF: Moving on then, have you ever had any experience of censorship? Political or otherwise?

RWB: When I said films are propaganda I meant that in a general sense. Any film and story has some kind of propaganda element.

RF: But you were involved in it during the War in a very specific sense.

RWB: Yes

RF: And my point about the American industry is that it presents the American way of life which in turn sells American goods.

RWB: Absolutely and that is something which has never been properly appreciated in this country. Unfortunately, when films first got going after the first World War they were looked on as childish toys of no consequence or value; flickers they were called.

RF: They were very much down market. Something for the servants.

RWB: As late as the sixties I was making some commercials for Watney Mann; Watney Coombe and Reid and I remember Sandy Watney saying he didn't have a television set. The servants had one but he didn't, which he lied about because he then proceeded to talk about something he'd seen.

RWB: Yes, that was an affectation. But that snobbery was damn silly and foolish. As far as censorship was concerned certainly we said all we wanted to say in *A Night to Remember* and certainly much of that was very daring. Nobody said a word to me about that. When John Davis said to me afterwards he'd had rather stinking letters from Cunard White Star and it was all my fault, he put it in a jocular way, he wasn't bothered particularly.

RF: The criticisms came from what, mainly corporations?

RWB: Well, that's what he told me. Only that one.

RF: Did you have much to do with John Trevelyan?

RWB: He was a thorn in my side. I couldn't get on with him at all. He was a school master I think. He certainly behaved like one and he had that fatal attribute most schoolmasters have which is pigeonholing people as soon as they see them. Trevelyan was like that. We certainly got off on the wrong foot. In *Passage Home* it started over a fight on the deck of the tramp steamer at night. Two men, one of them picks up a chain and starts slinging it about and of course it makes a wonderful noise on the ship superstructure but it doesn't actually hit anyone. It was very subtly done. One of the problems with this sort of thing which came up again in *Tiger in the Smoke* where some people chase a man up an alley and murder him and you don't actually see anything but the fact you don't see it makes it all the more frightening. Trevelyan. There was another controversial scene where the captain tries to rape a girl. There was a lot of chat about that. Then he developed himself into the doyen of the whole British film industry. He would ask to see the script before you'd even started. He would give guidance. He would come down and sit on the floor. He was always one for the free lunch. I thought he became impossible. One way and another he just wrote me off. I was just a commercial hack as far as he was concerned.

RF: With all these differences of opinion did he force cuts upon you?

RWB: Oh yes. He did.

RF: These centred around what, sex and violence.

RWB: Mostly violence because I hadn't done anything sexy till much later. *Vampire Lovers.*

RF: He used to love such films. He used to enjoy coming down onto the set when borderline scenes were being shot.

RWB. Did he? I wouldn't be surprised. He became terribly self-important. I couldn't be bothered with him.

RF: He did see himself as a spokesperson. His successor Stephen Murphy was a bit of a pathetic creature.

RWB: I never saw him. Never seen anyone since those days.

RF: Were they major cuts?

RWB: No,just the odd foot or so. I wasn't making films which were going to be outrageous.

RF: These were the days when they would cut out a frame if there was a flash of pubic hair.

RWB: Something like that. What they didn't know was, there was a lot of pubic hair in a picture I made, *The Vampire Lovers.* You had the usual procession of young ladies bustling around in diaphanous white nighties. I made a statement right at the beginning that I had seen a number of these films and very clearly on the screen a number of ladies were wearing knickers. Now I explained in the first place that this would be most unusual in the period that we're talking about because ladies didn't wear underclothing of that kind of all and if they had they would have been totally different from a little modern bikini thing. All the girls agreed. And if you see a girl walking away or coming towards you, you'll see she has nothing on under the night gown. It was right to do it that way. That white line across their bums made than look ridiculous. Either you're going to have a girl in a diaphanous white nighty or you're not. I can't bear a lot of these so-called sexy scenes on television where you have head and shoulder shots of a couple of people in bed and they've all got their trousers on under the counterpane. You can't do it.

RF: Well either that or getting out of bed they contrive to wrap themselves in some convoluted fashion.

RWB: Or a towel wrap.

RF: Which just emphasises the contrivance of it all. Roy, we're down to about the last fifteen minutes on this tape. Shall we try and wrap it on this one?

RWB: I don’t think I’ve got anything more to say. I’m exhausted.

RF: Looking back you’ve had your ups and had your downs. The downs were a product of the business itself, or of you, or of a combination? Do you feel bad luck entered into it or did you have an abrasive personality which rubbed people up the wrong way?

RWB: Even if I did have an abrasive personality. I can tell you a story about Charlie Staffell who is the king of back projection at Pinewood and he’s an old friend. I met him in 1954 when we were doing extensive back projection and blue screen and all that.
I went to see him with Paul Beeson who was the cameraman on *Moon Zero Two* for which we wanted front projection and Charlie was going to cart all his gear to Elstree and explained all this and demonstrated it. I said “what about blimping it?” He said “you can’t use a blimp”. I said “don’t be silly I want to play a dialogue scene”. He said “you can post sync it”. I said “I don't post sync dialogue scenes when they’re in close up”. He said “there's no way of doing it”, so I tore him off a strip. I said “sound came in in 1928 which was a long time ago, so you better get used to it”. He shrugged, said to Paul Beeson “there's one thing you can say about Roy Baker, if it's got to be said he'll say it”. I don't know if there was more of that than was wise or discreet or unkind. I know it’s been said I don't suffer fools gladly. I always appear to be frightfully decisive which I’m not, it's an act.

RF: I think it’s a requirement on the part of a director.

RWB: I’m not ashamed. There was a wonderful man I saw being interviewed on the television. He was an Englishman who went to work for Boeing, an enormous corporation he ended up in charge of it. He was asked how he achieved this and he said I’ve always had one guiding principal, when people ask questions any answer is better than no answer at all even if it’s wrong.

I think my sort of employment has been cyclical with the ups and downs of the industry itself except that period at Pinewood and even all of that was not contract. I certainly have made mistakes. I made one or two bad friends. I discovered the agency contract I signed in 1946 was one of those self-perpetuating contracts and I resented that bitterly. I didn't want to go anywhere else but it was just the irksomeness of being restricted. One of the things about me and ACTT is that I'm not a joiner. I'm not a member of anything. I never have been. I join things and then withdraw almost immediately. Three days in the boy scouts and then I’m off. I went to America which was an MCA contract, they’d taken over my agency in England. Then I went to America, they produced a contract. I said I'd already signed one. They said under Californian State Law I must have a contract with you. So, I said OK, fine. Then I discovered in California there was a statute of limitations which said no contract could run longer than seven years. So, hey-ho I only have to wait seven years. Then when I got back I thought I only have to wait three years and then I can go. In due time I did this and Jack Dunfie was outraged, he really was. My god what am I going to say to the headmaster. He flounced out and left me to pay for the lunch. This was at the Dorchester. I went to America

on business and Earl St. John rang up and said I think I ‘ve got Nigel Balchin to do the picture. His agent is in Hollywood and he’s called Hugh French. An Englishman, but becoming a powerful agent. During the course of the conversation he said “who’s your agent?” I said “at the moment I don't have one”. He said “I’ll represent you”. I said “OK”. I thought I’m never going back to Hollywood, this is ridiculous. The opportunity came for me to do a picture in 1961 or 1962 to do a picture with Zanuck, I was up for It and I think Hugh French had already pencilled me in. Jack Dunfie came on the phone and I don’t know why I allowed him also to intervene on my behalf and there was a clash between the two agents and I lost the job. Jack Dunfie had his revenge in the end.

RF: Did an agent ever do anything for you?

RWB: Yes, particularly recently. My present agent, Michael Whitehall I eventually went back to having an agent with a wonderful man called Otis S. Blodgett, that lead on to Lawrence Evans, and there was a young man in the office called Michael Whitehall who took over my business and he’s like a much younger version of Jack Dunfie, a bit “hooray” and “I say”.

RF: They're still around.

RWB: Of course, they are. Lots are. Michael is alright and he's steered me into one or two things. Steered me into Milton. I’d never met Milton.

RF: Few more minutes. Anything now that you wish to add because I’ve been doing all the steering. I think you’ve had your say.

RWB: In many ways, I've enjoyed doing this. I've told you a lot of my experiences which have never been told to a living soul before. That whole business about Jay Lewis screwing up my Hollywood thing and all those stories. So, I've enjoyed doing it. It’s been a great service to me if every I’m going to get a book together. I would like to thank you very much for the way you’ve conducted the whole enterprise. You've been clever and meticulous, doing all the things which is very helpful to someone like me who is just talking off the top of his head.

RF: Thank you for your compliment, and I bask in it. Now if you’re concerned about anything at all. There’s not one word of libel or slander in it. As you know we keep control of the tapes. Nobody listens to them without permission. If you’d rather people didn’t we will so annotate.

RWB: Obviously if you ever wanted to publish it, in the ACTT magazine or whatever, then I’d like to have a look at it before its published, but I have no restrictions to put on it whatever.

RF: It’s a major job of transcription because we are on what fourteen tapes it’ll cost around £500 to transcribe it.

RWB: Well if I get this job, I'll chip in.

RF: Maybe 50-50. Let's see how it goes. Well Roy, thank you very
Much indeed I found it a very rewarding series of sessions. Thank you – very useful, very valuable. This was your life and thank you very much. The End. [RECORDING ENDS]

[TAPE 15 SIDE 29 Recorded 16th October 1996. This additional recording covers part of RWB's career after *A Night to Remember*, with insights into the Rank Organisation, John Davis and *The Singer Not the Song*. Some of this material was also covered in earlier sections of the transcript. DS]

RF: Right Roy, so the picture's finished,[*A Night to Remember*] and you deliver it to the Rank Organisation, so what follows from that?
RWB: Well I think there was a realisation that the Rank Organisation had made a very bold effort with a large amount of its own money and what had come out was undoubtedly a striking picture, a striking film. They may have been slightly worried about its commercial success, because it's a depressing picture after all an unhappy ending to end all unhappy endings, but I think they also began to sniff in the air that they were going to get considerable credit for making the thing, and in making it the way that we did. I remember that there were some aspects of the film that were probably subject to some considerable doubt in some quarters, such as the treatment of the steerage passengers, mostly Irish and Polish immigrants/emigrants going to America to start a new life, because it so happens that in the first draft, Eric Ambler who was the screen writer, in his first draft there was very little mention of that. I can't remember what the other things were, but there were one or two other things like that, so I discussed it with him and he said "well we'll never get away with it". I said it's not a question of getting away with it – it's history, it's all in the enquiries, and in the personal reminiscences… Undoubtedly, maybe the ship owners won't like it but it's there.

RF: Was Eric Ambler's worry that it would be perceived in 1950s class terms rather than 1912 class terms? Do you see what I mean? In other words, it was that cosy Rank Organisation middle class attitude towards it that bothered him, was it?

RWB: Well it may have been partly that, we never really analysed what he meant by that. At any event, there were attempts to hush up the more gruesome aspects of the whole event, at that time and we were maybe letting the side down by exposing all this sort of stuff in 1912, let alone, 1957 or '58. No, I don't think so. In fact, he may have been wrong about it because when he put it into the script nobody noticed it. It was very good indeed and anybody who was anybody, like Earl St John or John Davis must have had the script and read it. I'm sure Earl would have read it and JD must have, as he was putting a fortune of money in it in any case, but nobody said a word. But, sometime after, JD saying to me that he'd had a very stroppy letter from Cunard White Star, and in the general sense never mind the special there were one or two opinions that this sort of picture should never have been made. It was a great tragedy, 1500 people drowned, and it was not a fit subject for the films.

RF: Was it more than “letting down the side”.

RWB: Yes. Well, I’m guessing a bit now, I’m putting words into other peoples’ mouths but I think there was a general feeling that the cinema was a place of entertainment, that people wanted to go and have fun, happy pictures with lots of pretty girls and handsome men, and that sort of stuff, and this sort of subject was not a fit sort of subject, having regard to the tragedy of it and the sad deaths of so many in this disaster.

RF: It was still an open wound.

RWB: Yes, but I don’t take the view that there was anything particularly political in it, but there was a sort of attitude that one might do this sort of thing in the theatre, or certainly in a book because you start talking about censorship which has to be different depending on what people are doing and a book has a different kind of censorship; theatre has another, television has another and the cinema has another.

RF: That in itself is a class thing is it not, because the cinema is for the general population, not the reading milieu, or middle-class theatre.

RWB: I don’t know about these class things at all, I don’t know any particular feeling about it. Certainly, I regard myself as being classless. I don’t see why one has to have a class. I’ve never taken much interest in all that stuff.

RF: Well, that’s true of you. It certainly wasn’t true in the fifties. So really what you’re saying is that the company was a bit worried about its appeal across the board.

RWB: Oh yes…

RF: Had they planned any kind of campaign that you know of?

RWB: … Well then of course they got the notices which were highly complimentary. It was almost the first time in the history of the Rank Organisation that they had a) good notices and b) notices which congratulated them in a sort of prestige way. It did a hell of a lot for the Rank image. It’s a pity it wasn’t followed up but there again the right subjects didn’t come up so it’s too bad. The opportunity was lost. I think if we’d been able to cap that success with one or two more, then I think probably the Rank Organisation would still be making films to this day, but it was only two years later that JD finally withdrew. He said “I’ve had enough, they hate me, they don’t want to know about anything we do” and that’s the finish of that. And to a certain extent I sympathise with him too. Anyway, we’re getting ahead of the story. We all went to the premiere at the Odeon Leicester Square, they laid on a super premiere, which was in aid of the Central School of Speech and Drama. A very worthy organisation because they not only concentrate on drama but on speech therapy. They teach people to

speak properly and make themselves understood, a lot of them being with some sort of impediment, or born with, you know, can't speak right. Or clearly, or articulate. It was a huge success from that point of view and they took home a huge bag of money, and a large splendid dinner was laid on. I had one personal pleasure, in that it happened that Bette Davies who I've told you was a friend of mine, and she happened to be in London at the time, and I asked her to come along to the premiere, which she did and I introduced her to John and he was thrilled to meet her which got the evening off to a good start. There was a curious moment there were still a few people drifting in and we were in a reception room before going in to dinner and there were three or four photographers taking pictures of John and everyone as usual and Bette and my wife moved away, and out of the room, and JD caught my arm and pulled me back. I didn't know what he wanted to speak about. So, there we were just us two and these photographers, so he just waved them away and said "no photographs" and then he suddenly went down on one knee and shook me by the hand, and I didn't know what to do. Well, this was very embarrassing. I went down on one knee with him and sort of started looking for half a crown. I didn't know what to do.

RF: Well that's a side of Davis that I think will surprise many people.

RWB: Well there you are. It's true. We laughed and then we went in to dinner together. So, then it was a question of what do you want to do next? My star was rising and I'd had two successes in a row, which was pretty good. Sydney Box said to me "come with me, and I'll find you the biggest office we've got and I'll put your name on the door in solid gold". I laughed and thought that was very nice. Unfortunately, I still have this impulse to go it alone, which was very foolish of me, and almost impossible to do unless you're Charlie Chaplin or somebody.

RF: Sydney was always known, was he not, as being a bit dodgy in his business dealings?

RWB: It never occurred to me. The point was that I thought he wasn't making the kind of pictures that I hoped to make, and I was very keen to see what I could do on my own; and then Bill McQuitty who was the producer, he wanted to form a partnership with me, but there again I didn't want to tie myself to anyone else, but it was obvious all around that the most successful people were Powell and Pressburger, or Launder and Gilliat or whoever, always two or three men who had got together, usually a producer, writer and director.

RF: Right. But you'd had a very good relationship with Eric Ambler in that sort of context.

RWB: Yes, well Eric, indeed even at the time of the premiere, I don't think he was there, he'd already made up his mind that he was going to work in Hollywood, so he had gone. His marriage broke up, and then he met someone else and married them and all that stuff.

RF: Married Joan Harrison, Hitchcock's secretary.

RWB: And later, producer. She appears in the crowd in *The Lady Vanishes* and I was escorting her. There weren't enough people on the platform so we were pressed into service.

RF: Really. So, we must look out for you in the scene before the train pulls away. Early in the picture.

RWB: I can't remember. Oh, I think it was later, when they arrive in London, right at the end of the film.

RF: Well that will set the buffs looking.

RWB: I remember Joan rather well. She sticks in my memory, because when I was shooting *The October Man* she was visiting England. I don't know why. Whether Eric had already met her or whether that was when he first met her I don't know. At any rate, she appeared on the set, we greeted each other; he told me "she likes you. Yes, she told me, one good thing about him, he doesn't shout at his actors.". So I've carried that with me all the rest of my life, 'cos I never have.
My motto: there's no point shouting at actors, it never does any good.

RF: Was that a directorial style, in the forties? On other directors' part?

RWB: Well then you see, you go back even further into the past and you realise that directors in silent movies, they had huge megaphones and they shouted every single movement to the actors. "Go on, take her in your arms, go on, kiss her, kiss her again" sort of thing. Now your parked, sit on the sofa, now darling, here comes the dog".

RF: And several units working side by side, so they are all shouting.

RWB: Yes, indeed but they – and there are, somebody told me only recently, there is a fellow doing this, don't know who it was, talked them through it; I've been asked once or twice by actors to talk them through it if it's a silent scene. I don't quite know, well obviously one can do that. But I'm not sure it's necessary, and you don't shout at them, especially these days.

Where are we going now? Ah yes, after one or two vague enquiries and flirtations, it came to John Davis. We eventually agreed. I'd still got one picture to do under the existing contract, so I was not really free to go anywhere else anyway. A lot of people would have said "sucks to you" and gone off, but it wouldn't have occurred to me. So, this was expanded into three pictures and also, I was to produce them. In a way, it was a mistake – it's difficult to define now what compelled me to do this. I think I wanted more power I suppose, more authority, though why I should be unsure of myself I don't know, but there you are.

RF: Was that based on unhappy experiences with your producers, with Bill [McQuitty] for example?

RWB: No, it wasn't you see. Not as if Julian Wintle, Bill McQuitty, George Brown or whoever it was produced all these pictures – it wasn't as if we'd had terrible rows or couldn't get on. All generally speaking quite happy experiences. But one way of getting into the story department was to be a producer. If you were a director you didn't get much of a look in to the story department so you had no idea what was coming up or being looked at.

RF: Was that someone's empire, the story department? Jealously guarded.

RWB: I think it was just the way Earl ran the studio, and the script would be shown to the director when it was ready, which was the old-fashioned way of doing it. Or was in those days. Still is to a certain extent.

RF: But didn't producers see any kind of summary of material that was being considered or had been bought.

RWB: Oh yes, they did their own research into what was being published.

RF: But they didn't have any direct coverage from the story department.

RWB: Oh yes, they did, producers did. Directors didn't. And another aspect was that if you were a producer you got all the cost returns. The custom in those days was that directors were asked to sign a document saying they had seen the budget and approved, and the schedule, to the best of my endeavours, etc., etc. Well theoretically if you go over budget by one day, they can sue you, but it's daft to expect someone to stick to the schedule, which they hadn't seen – well they'd seen it, but never the budget and I took the view that if the schedule fits the budget and the budget fits the schedule – which is your responsibility – and your associate producer and production manager then that should be sufficient. If I stick to the schedule, then the budget must be alright. If the budget comes out wrong, then it's your fault, not mine. It never came to that. I very rarely went over schedule except in my first couple of pictures, and therefore not over cost, but that was one aspect of it, and the other was that you got the returns and you got a share of the profits. They had been running a system, a gentleman's agreement, that the producer of the film at Rank, at Pinewood, he would receive 15% of the first £100,000 of profit but it was an understood thing that he would give the director 5% and keep 10% for himself.

RF: But none of that was contractual?

RWB: Not contractual – just a gentleman's agreement. Well in fact, the first time it paid off was with *The One That Got Away* and the remarkable thing about that picture was, that not only was it a bonanza, particularly on the continent, but it was a very rapid return. The money came in within two and a half months and Julian Wintle, the producer, called me into the office – I was already working on *A Night To Remember* – and he said to me "the money is now coming in, and I'm supposed to give you 5%, but I think that your work was

so instrumental in the success…," and without making a speech he said he was going to increase the share to 50% of his so I got seven and a half percent. He didn't have to do this, and sure enough the cheques came in, unbelievable, every month. I'm very amused in today's papers, the tabloids, have brought some criticism on themselves over their coverage of the forthcoming football match between England and Germany, stirring up xenophobic hatreds and all this kind of stuff. Now this is one of the reasons, that I wanted to make on *The One That Got Away* – I may have said all this before – [this line of discussion stops here, presumably because RF and RWB agree it has been covered in the earlier recording sessions. DS]

RWB: So of course, this all raised the main question which is what to do next. It's always a difficult position for any director when he's had a success, he knows very well that he's got to follow it. Same with the writer of a book. And it's very worrying. I went through any number of subjects mostly books, plays. I wanted to do *Take a Girl Like You* by Kingsley Amis. He came and stayed with me for the weekend and we talked about it. He agreed to write a treatment, which he did. He enjoyed doing that. But I could never get any further finance from Earl, he didn't want to pursue it, didn't think the treatment was good enough. We brought in John Mortimore on the same project, I think, for a short while.

RF: Roy, that would indicate what? Either an excessive authoritarianism on the part of the studio or less confidence in you than had been indicated by JD in the aftermath of the picture, if you see what I mean.

RWB: That may be so, though it didn't occur to me at the time. I knew perfectly well he would be extremely difficult to convince, about anything, he was used to saying no to everything.

RF: That was protecting his back. It was easier to say no. Safer.

RWB: Yes, it was. He was an abominable no man. The same thing happened with – what was the next one? There was a book by Julian Symons, it was a detective story, thriller, "Something… of a Crime". It had a very interesting aspect, there are two young tearaways, and one of them is involved in a murder, they are arrested, they are going to be brought to trial. It begins with the provincial press getting interested; then it gets to the national press. Really the focus of the book then is how the newspapers handle this, and also, they start putting up the money for the boys' defence and all the aspects of the crime. Julian did a treatment of his own which was very good, but I couldn't get it beyond that stage. We bought a book called *The Visitors*. Hopeless now, but it was a cold war story, but nothing to do with spies. It was the story of an undersecretary at the embassy in Poland. He's posted to Kracow, and he takes his wife, obviously, and I think there's a couple of children, As soon as his wife arrives there she goes shopping. And she finds a black market, and a few rundown aristocratic people who have valuable things and they need soap and tea and she gets involved in this. Obviously, the Poles weren't deeply worried about that sort of thing, but in fact they were being run by the Russians, and the Russians thought that this was a

chance, you see, and so this girl gets involved and there is an American war correspondent there, and a bit of a romance starts with that but they get into so much trouble, that the man is eventually sacked from his post at the embassy and they get thrown out. They simply go back to Chelsea or wherever, but they leave the Poles behind and they can't get out and are given a real going over by the Russians. I thought it was a nice idea to play with the people, and then leave them in their predicament.

RF: Were you a Cold War warrior, was that a factor in considering the film?

RWB: No, it had to happen during that period. But as far as I was concerned, nothing to do with the cold war. I wasn't interested.

RF: Difficult I would have thought to have divorced it from that. You couldn't just leave it as background, could you? The concept of what happened to the Poles vis-à-vis the Russians. I mean that's very specific.

RWB: Yes, well all that was there in the book. Oddly enough I went to Poland much later, and you could see the remnants of all that. But when I went, before the wall came down, it was much more relaxed, because it was coming to its end. So those were the sort of things I was playing with. There was a play called *The Grass is Greener* by Hugh Williams.

RF: Hugh Williams -Simon's father.

RWB: Yes indeed. And his wife. I'd have to look it up.

RF: They were a west end pair.

RWB: That was a light comedy, with an intriguing aspect which was you have the gentleman peer in his stately [home] in the country, and he likes his shooting and fishing and all that. His wife is a bit bored and stays the weekend at Claridges[Hotel] with some American fellow, which she's [picked up at some cocktail [party]. When it comes out that this is what she has done, instead of doing what he should do according to the usual morals of the church in particular and screaming for a divorce, he does nothing of the sort, but invites the lover to come and stay for another weekend and of course he shows him up in front of the wife to be not quite the fellow for her, and gets his wife back. I thought this was a highly moral situation and I spoke to my local vicar about it. "Oh no" he said "this should be a divorce".
There were three together. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, I got in touch with Alan Sillitoe about that, and he came and stayed for a weekend, and we talked and talked about that and there were other people in the market for that. The other one was *The Long and The Short and the Tall*, which is about a platoon in the jungle who, by accident, capture a Japanese and have no idea what to do with him.

RF: I thought that already had been made? With Reagan? Ronald Reagan. With Norman – Les Norman? No, I'm thinking of another play that had been made at ABPC in the late forties with Reagan. *The Hasty Heart*.

RWB: I put those three up together. In fact, with *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, Hugh Stewart who was on the lot, Earl put the two of us together, would we work together? He seemed to be quite keen. We went to see the play, which was on at the [Royal] Court I think. It was. Peter O'Toole and when it came to the Thursday lunch meeting to discuss future productions, all three were turned down one by one and that was a crisis moment in my life I mean I thought what can I do?

RF: Roy, tell me how they were turned down. At these production meetings, these luncheons, in what detail stories described were turned down?

RWB: Well I mean I spoke for each one.

RF: Right, you gave a brief synopsis of each story, possible casting for example.

RWB: Possible casting was obvious. I suggested Deborah Kerr for the *Grass is Greener* one; indeed, I went to Switzerland and talked to her about it, and she thought it sounded very good. I think she would have done it but the point was that we couldn't guarantee distribution in America – and she was an American star after all – so that wouldn't have worked. But that picture was made with Cary Grant and the other two were both made, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was a roaring success, and…

RF: [interrupting] sorry but to go into a little more detail, because I doubt this has been covered anywhere else, who was present, and what was the procedure, because on this basis the Rank production slate was set presumably. This was very important.

RWB: Yes, well there was John Davis, Earl St John, Olive Dodds, Mrs Dodds, who was the overall casting director for the Rank Organisation, and then anybody else who had something to say, or they wanted to talk to or question.

RF: So, all the producers were present?

RWB: No. Anybody else who was present, or who they had an interest in what he was doing, either way.

RF: So, it was like going to see the doctor or the dentist; you had an appointment, you went in and discussed a project.

RWB: When I say it was a luncheon, you had lunch afterwards. It took place about ten in the morning. It was just a general talk, there was no formality about it. They'd look at you and say "what have you got. What would you like to do?" and you'd say your piece.

RF: And he'd come out to Pinewood every Thursday?

RWB: Oh yes. And the other people would know generally speaking what you were talking about and explain the whole story. I suppose other people might have sprung a completely new one on them and they would say, "well fine, let's get a treatment done and come back next week and we'll see what we think".

RF: And all this was separate activity from what the, the scenario department, the script department was doing…

RWB: Yes, I've got a feeling that Joyce Briggs was in on these meetings, because she was the head of the story department at Pinewood.

RF: Yes, I'm still interested in their coverage because, presumably, they would read everything, see everything, and cover it and only the producers saw it which does seem so self-limiting.

RWB: Well they had a lot of readers you see so what they did in the first instance, books were published, or publishers would submit them, or authors.

RF: I did that for a time for one guinea a time.

RWB: Oh well you know. So, they would send it to a reader who would produce a three-page report covering suitability, what the characters were, what the drawbacks and advantages were, a complete run down on the story, a whole precis, of the plot with all the characters and settings so people could make up their mind if it was attractive.

RF: Well it still happens today. I think I'll flip the tape.

TAPE 15 SIDE 30

RF: Right so here we are in a meeting with JD

RWB: By now as far as my personal adventures are concerned, fifteen months had gone by. I hadn't found one that we could agree we wanted. The over-riding factor was that right at the beginning of this period, Earl gave me a book called *The Singer Not the Song* and I read it and I said "well it doesn't interest me at all, there's nothing in it, there's nothing I can respond to, I'm not a catholic and certainly I'm not interested in that old chestnut about the little girl who falls in love with a priest" People keep on doing it – they're still doing it to this day.
I said firstly it must be made in Mexico, which is where it takes place, and secondly if you want a director for it, you want Luis Bunuel. He said "who's he?". I don't know if he was pulling my leg or not.

RF: Suspect not.

RWB: It was a very good and sensible suggestion. He would have knocked the hell out of it, it would have been very successful.

RF: Either Bunuel or John Ford.

RWB: So anyway, this infernal thing hung like a shadow over everything. At the end of fifteen months I was desperate didn't know what I was going to do, and felt a bit guilty that I had not produced anything that satisfied everybody. Well some time later, Twentieth Century Fox had asked me to do a sea picture. I forget which one, it was either *Sink the Bismarck* or one of those but it was a big picture, and they were told I wasn't available, which theoretically I wasn't because by this time I owed them three pictures.

RF: Did they loan out, the Rank Organisation?

RWB: I don't think they ever did. They might have with actors, but I'm not sure even about that. They never got into that business. Whereas in Hollywood it's really big business, as you know, because if you want Clark Gable and they are prepared that the fellow that owns Clark Gable wants, then you can make a deal, and the other fellow has whatever he wants from you. So, it becomes quite a trade, and it becomes a regular thing. Well you know. No, Rank never did anything like that in this country.
So, inevitably it came up again. JD said "I want to talk to you". And so, I did. As usual we went to the Dorchester. We talked and talked and talked. He said "I don't understand you, you'll do it brilliantly, you are just the man for it, it's a perfect part for Dirk Bogarde, you've got to find someone good for the priest, and then there's the little girl, you know. "Believe me" he said, "I'll be frank with you, I'm quite worried about losing Dirk. He's coming to the end of his contract, we know perfectly well that he's itching to get away. He's now in Hollywood, making a film in which he's the star and we're frightened that he won't come back, and he'd be a great loss. He's a box office star and we don't want to lose him. Why don't you go and see him? Talk it over with him, tell him that we will back it to the hilt, we'll give it everything that it needs. It shall be there". Of course, I couldn't refuse at that time, I was just strapped. I didn't want to make it.  I hated it. Still do. I've never seen it since. They showed it recently at a film festival in France, where they love it. I refused to go and see it. They wanted me to go and introduce it – they were showing other films of mine- I went solemnly along with a bit of *parlez-vous* and all that stuff and happy to do it, it was very flattering and very enjoyable, but when it came to this one I simply couldn't face it. [They said] "You must be crazy, what is the matter with you, it's a great film". But that's me.
But that came out, and in England at any rate, the notices absolutely thrashed it, they rubbished it and me of course with it. By that time, I was making another picture called *Flame in the Streets* which was originally a play called Hot Summer Nights, by Ted Willis. We were going to shoot it in the winter, so we had to call it *Flame in The Streets*. It was all about

West Indians in Notting Hill Gate actually and it does provide a very authentic picture of what it was like in that time. A long time ago.
The theme was a bit corny, about the white girl who falls in love with the black man. I thought we did rather well with it actually. But there again it wasn't really a popular picture because nobody wanted to know. You see it wasn't a comic in any way. If you make a picture about blacks and whites, there's got to be something more controversial about it, and there wasn't really anything in it that was seriously going to provoke an audience into an attitude.

RF: Let's continue then with *The Singer Not the Song*.

RWB: Well I laboured through the rest of shooting *Flame in the Streets* and that coincided with the end of my contract and also the end of production for Rank. They withdrew at the same time. Not because I'd left [laughs] but that's what happened. To be absolutely frank *The Singer Not the Song* broke my heart and I was never the same man since. Everything went wrong from that point on and it wasn't until *Quatermass and the Pit* came up, which was a good picture - still is - that I began to pick up the threads but that got me involved with Hammer and I soldiered on with them for some considerable time.

RF: So, it was your *Ryan's Daughter* in a way, was it? The reception by the press and the dispiriting aftermath.

RWB: Yes, well I suppose I lost my nerve after that, that was what it was. I don't know why they hated me, but they decided they were going to thrash this picture right into the ground and they did. Horrible.

RF: Well they still do it, don't they?

RWB: What was I going to say? Something fabulously interesting.

RF: Well you were saying that it never went right after that until *Quatermass*.

RWB: You see, what I resented, what made me so unhappy was that I was at the pinnacle of my career which wasn't all that high but never mind. It wasn't the kind of criticism you get today when they are prepared to say "what on earth is this man doing making this dreadful picture after he's made other pictures?" they didn't refer to anything I'd done before, it was as if I'd come from outer space to this film, which they all seized on with glee. I still don't know why it happened. I have no idea. But of course, the ironic thing that happened was that after, as a producer I got the returns, and I got 15% of the profits of the first £100,000, and I gave 5% of that to the writer, and John Mills was given a bonus when the film came into profit, whatever it was. The returns came in every six months for year after year after year and after 23 years, I think it suddenly came into profit, so Ii got my £10,000. It still goes on. I didn't realise, after that I get 5%. It's the only film that I have that has paid off and I absolutely hated it. But I still take the money, I'm not going to send it back!

RF I should hope so. Let's stop there. [interval]
RF: Right so there we are after *A Night to Remember*, at the premiere in Leicester Square. How did JD react that night? John Davis.

RWB: Oh, he was really proud of it. No doubt about it. Well they'd put half a million [pounds] of their money into it, which at the time was a lot of money. He was delighted with it. Set up a grand premiere and a huge dinner after it. Somehow or other I was left alone with JD. We were in a sort of ante-room to the restaurant, John took me by the arm, he waved the photographers away. He said "No photographs" and suddenly went down on one knee, grasped my hand, shook it and said "thank you" and I was absolutely bewildered. For one thing you didn't expect John, with those big blue eyes to behave like that. I thought I'd better drop down on one knee and pretend I'm looking for a lost half-crown [coin] so from that point on he couldn't have been more generous. And so, I had to crack the famous nut that everyone who has had a success has to. I had to look for another one. I was made a producer-director, put under contract for three pictures. Bigger rates of pay and all that and that was to last until 1961, which it did. Looking at a book, *The Visitors*, which I was very intrigued with, very interesting story about the British embassy in Poland. Before the Berlin wall and all that, still the time of the cold war; a book by Kingsley Amis, *Take a Girl Like You*, which was made later, but I couldn't get the right script. *Progress of a crime* by Julian Symonds, an interesting story about a young tearaway who does a murder and the focus is really how the local press, the provincial press, and later the national press get involved in the proceedings of the trial. A new way of looking at the detective story really. Oh, and a number of other things. One of the first things I was offered by the studio, Pinewood, was a book, *The Singer Not the Song*. Just a story that didn't attract me at all. I wasn't interested in it. In any case it was the old chestnut about the girl who falls in love with a catholic priest.

RF: How old was the girl?

RWB: Well, theoretically she is about sixteen to eighteen. In the book, there is a time lapse of five years but we ironed that out. Nigel Balchin was the writer, a very interesting man, a very good writer. Oh, we did our best all through that period to find something I wanted to do. There was *The Grass is Greener*, a play by Hugh Williams, I wanted to do *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, but was really too late to get it. *The Long and the Short and the Tall,* which was a play at the Royal Court.

RF: They all became films eventually.

RWB: Very successful ones, too, but they were all turned down by the production committee for one reason or another.

RF: *The Singer Not the Song* was favourite of Earl St John. Do I get that right?

RWB: Well I am seriously at a loss to know as to who wanted to get it done and why. For instance, Mr Rank, later Lord Rank, why would he want to? He was a pillar of the Methodist church, he practically invented it. Why would he want to involve himself in a story which was exclusively Catholic and during the course of the story, the book itself is quite bold in some of its criticisms of the church.

RF: So, its anti-clerical, has a pubescent girl in it and isn't there a strange relationship between the two men?

RWB: Yes, there is the brigand – we are in a remote village in Mexico…

RF: It's very quirky for the fifties, isn't it?

RWB: The local brigand is very anti-Catholic and jolly well says so. He runs his local affairs, he runs the establishment and he is the boss and they throw out the priest who is there at the beginning of the story, he gets chucked out, and he's a beaten man incidentally. Well in comes the new priest, a man of considerably greater character, and it becomes a war of nerves and argument about the Catholic church between him and the brigand, and in the course of this they form a relationship. The brigand finds himself reluctantly attracted to the priest. He can't understand it, he listens to his arguments and he begins to think maybe there is something in it, and then other things happen, and the girl falls in love with the priest which gives the brigand a lever to discredit the priest in the eyes of the community, and then to throw him out just like he threw out the last one. It all finishes in a gun battle and everybody gets shot, but you know it's a very well plotted long story. We had, I thought, a very good script of it but I didn't want to do it. I put my heart and soul into it, I made it as best as I possibly could. I remember when JD came down to the studio to see it, and after we saw it- it is a very slow picture in its presentation, I should have sharpened it up a lot and I could have by re-editing a lot of it. John summed it up, he took me by the arm and he said "well, I don't quite know what you've done, but it's beautiful and it is, it's very pretty. If you'll permit a vulgar anecdote, but it took me back to Brian Desmond Hurst, making a picture called *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* with Melina Mercouri in it no less, and this was a romantic nonsense and I asked him how it was going and he said "well, it's a bag of shit, but it's the most beautiful shit you've ever seen". And that's what he did: he dressed it up, tarted it up. Yes, well any number of people have told me since about *The Singer Not the Song* that I am under-rating it, that I'm being very stupid about it, and certainly, on the continent of Europe, in France all over the place it is a cult and made a lot of money. It wasn't cheap to make, the outlay was about three hundred and fifty [thousand pounds] or something like that so in order to make money it must have been seen by a great many people and they must have liked it or they wouldn't have gone to see it would they? The only acid test of a film in my opinion is how many people go to see it; it's what films are for. It's not a chamber art.

RF: Anyway, coming to the release of the picture, it wasn't very well received and that seems to have had a very harmful effect on you, and on your career.

RWB: Well I was shooting – by the time the picture was shown and we'd had a premiere and a small dinner party afterwards with some rather interesting people. There was some uneasiness in the audience at the premiere, and I knew that it wasn't going down at all well and in the morning, we got the notices, and they were absolutely appalling, they were dreadful, they tore the picture to pieces.

RF: On what basis?

RWB: That I don't know.

RF: What was the tenor of the notices; what were they attacking? The content, the way it was made, the quirky relationships?

RWB: I suppose the content. At that time, there was quite a – I don't know how to put it – a dislike or, well I think Dirk was being rather hounded by the press and the critics; they knew he was a good actor, but at the same time he was wasting his time doing inferior stuff which he knew perfectly well.

RF: Was it his sexuality do you think? Because there he was looking all lovely in black leather in the picture

RWB: I don't know. Well yes, yes. How do you guard yourself against mistakes like that? Because it was a mistake on my part. Dirk came to me and he said he thought he was going to be the villain he should be all in black, which is reasonable enough, and he found a tailor in Rome who could make wonderful leather trousers (RF snorts) and don't forget the previous picture I'd made had Hardy Kruger in it as a German and he wore black leather trousers all through the picture. I didn't know that black leather trousers were supposed to be kinky, or in some strange sexual way. I didn't occur to me. Alright, so I'm naive, a BF [bloody fool], you can say what you like, but there's no need to be so downright rude about the picture. One of them said – I can't quote them any more – "when a picture is as bad as this, it really is bad. Creates a new record for bad films" or something like that.
Sucks to them all, because the film was ultimately a success, not in this country in the continent of Europe, Italy they loved it. Spain. It was made in Spain. The arguments we had with the Spanish censorship: enough to drive anybody up the wall. I didn't need all that, I didn't want all that. The catholic religion is absolutely nothing to do with me. I don't want to expose myself to criticising it in any way. One must have the highest possible regard for it.

RF: They were criticising the script or the final picture?

RWB: The final picture.

RF: Well, then what was the result of that for you?

RWB: The result was I didn't want to do the picture, as I say, I stuck about for about fifteen months not to make it, but I got myself into such a predicament that I was obliged to make it. I went into it with a good heart, made the best of it, gave it everything that I could and in the end, was successful. But not for me. These notices broke my heart. Looking back to 1960, thirty-six years ago it broke my nerve. I made another picture which was a disaster. I fiddled around tried to make a picture of my own which I did, put money into it. That was a nice little picture, with a wonderful cast: Michael Crawford, Dilys Watling, Nyree Dawn Porter, all sorts of people, all under twenty-one, it was about young people, and I was quite pleased with it, but nobody wanted to show it, nobody wanted to see it, we couldn't get a circuit release and so I went into television. I thought I have got to find out about that – well, not television, but making films for television. Which is a different thing I don't mean going into a television studio, I wouldn't have done that, wouldn't know how to do it. But eventually another film came along, *Quatermass and the Pit*, a first-rate script and made a first-rate film and gave me back a considerable amount of self-assurance.

RF: How long was that hiatus in your career?

RWB: Four Years. Four years in the desert.

RF: Four years a long time at what should have been the productive peak.

RWB: Oh yes, I missed out sadly. If I'd made another success like the two that I'd already made, which is asking a lot but it could have been possible, it would have given me the studio.

RF: In retrospect, Roy, what do you think was the key error? Wanting to be your own producer or…

RWB: I think that that contributed

RF: …studio politics with Earl St John? Subverting your projects.

RWB: Well, Earl was very wary of me getting on so well with John Davis, it was "John" and "Roy" and we were on the 'phone to each other and I think all sorts of very ambitious ideas were floating around in John's mind and certainly they were in mine and which might have had Earl decidedly worried. He was coming to the end of his time in any case. He was an artist at protecting his position – he spent more time doing that than he did making films.

RF: A survivor.

RWB: Oh yes, yes, he was a very devious character. He knew nothing about making film. He had been what? An exhibitor and a distributor. Originally the manager of the Plaza.

RF: And a good publicist. Right?

RWB: And a good publicist, yes. And he I think was well regarded by J Arthur [Rank]. This again, one of the besetting evils of the whole operation was the obsession with getting release in America, Which is hopeless. You never get it – you never will, except if you have a picture they want to show. [If so] you'll make a lot of money, be rich, oh that will be absolutely fine, but it will not be a precedent. Never has been, never will be. One fundamental thing that these idiots who run what is left of the industry – they still try for it. They import second rate American stars, they try all sorts of things and they don't understand that America has enough films of its own. It doesn't want a film from anywhere else on God's earth. Even that fundamental fact hasn't got through. This goes back to 1934 when I first went into a film studio they were doing it then.

RF: Well in many ways *The Private Life of Henry the Eighth* was the downfall of the British film industry in the thirties.

RWB: That's absolutely right. Misleading as ever was. Yes, very curious the whole thing.

RF: I think we have enough there Roy unless you want to go on.

RWB: Well I've booked a table for one o'clock and it's two minutes walk.

RF: Well we've got a bit left on the tape. [Pause] I think we have enough there. I feel I'll have to do some editing.

RWB: Well I don't mind how you edit it. Up to you. If by any chance you [ENDS ABRUPTLY]

Final thirteen pages transcribed and edited by David Sharp July 2017.