BECTU History Project - Interview No. 7

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Interviewers: Alan Lawson, Arthur Graham, Rodney Giesler

Interviewee: Sidney Cole

[Sidney Cole, producer, director, editor, ACTT pioneer, ACTT activist.]

Tape 1 Side 1

Alan Lawson: Where and when were you born?

Sid Cole: I was born in Oakley St., Kennington not very far according to one report from where Charlie Chaplin was born. If the wind was favourable it was within the sound of Bow Bells, so I suppose I could call myself a Cockney. That was 31 st October 1908.

Alan Lawson: What schooling did you receive?

Sid Cole: I had ordinary primary school education until I was 11 when I was fortunate to win a scholarship which took me to Westminster City School which is just off Victoria St.

Alan Lawson: After that did you do any specialised training?

Sid Cole: I did nothing that prepared me for my career in films. During the normal course of eduction in secondary school I got interested in drama and with a couple of friends founded the school dramatic society and I wrote a one act play for them to perform. But what I studied was economics and I got a scholarship to the London School of Economics where I was for three years.

Alan Lawson: Did you take your finals?

Sid Cole: I took my finals in D.Sc Economics.

Alan Lawson: What made you decide to go into the film business?

Sid Cole: At that time it was very exciting. Although it was the period of changeover from silent to sound, it was also a great period for seeing films for there was a cinema called The Avenue Pavilion which was more or less where the Columbia is now and they showed an amazing variety of films from all over the world. One saw films *Caligari* and things like this and this made me feel that if I had to go out after graduation into the cruel hard world and no longer have a nice time as a student I'd better start thinking about what I really wanted to do. I decided the only thing I really wanted to

do was work in films. So I started writing around to all the studios and companies I could find out from telephone directories and yearbooks and got the usual sorry replies. The only person, interestingly enough, who did answer me who was a director rather than company, was Anthony Asquith, and I always remember how good it was of Anthony to invite me down to Welling Garden City where he was making a film which must either have been *A Cottage on Dartmoor* or *Tell England*.

I always remember sitting in his office while he walked around talking which I later came to realise was a general habit with him. Anthony wasn't able to do anything - he just encouraged me in a sense although he wasn't able to do anything practical about it. Then I went to visit Westminster City School as an old boy and I was talking to one of the masters who asked what I wanted to do and I told him I wanted to get into films and he said I can help - I'm a neighbour of Sir Oswald Stoll, I'll give you a letter of introduction. He gave me the letter and I sent it off with a brief note. Two days later I got a letter saying please call at Stoll Studios, Cricklewood at 9.00 on Monday morning. I went to Sinclair Hill's office who was the director of productions and sat down - he offered me a cup of coffee and a cigarette - and I was in. I saw Ossie Mitchell and he said you can start right away, £1.00 a week for six weeks and we'll see how it goes.

Alan Lawson: What was your parent's reaction to you going into the film business?

Sid Cole: My parent's were separated. My mother had kept me going- I realised later on how sacrificing she'd been - she'd set her heart on having me well educated. So when I went home and told her I'd got a job and how pleased I was and how I was earning £1.00 a week, her face somewhat fell because she'd originally thought of me being a lawyer or journalist or something exalted like that. It reminds of the Desmond Dickinson story "don't tell my mother, I'm working in the film industry, she thinks I've an honest job playing a piano in a brothel."

Alan Lawson: What were your duties?

Sid Cole: I was given an extraordinary silly job for someone who had no idea how films were made. I was a reader in the scenario department which meant I came in every morning - picked up a pile of short story magazines - and I would read through these all day, never finding one they could really make into a film. I also read the scripts and story ideas which were sent in. I did this for several months and then went onto the floor as a supernumerary assistant. My very first job was to be the sea. This was in a film called *The House of Unrest* which was directed by Leslie Howard Gordon who was the script editor I'd been working for as a reader. This film took place on an island and consequently in almost all the scenes there was a background of noise. In those days there wasn't any dubbing. All sound was recorded direct. So the sea had to be recorded at the same time as the dialogue. I had a kind of drumhead and pounds and pounds of lead shot and I stood at the side of the set enthusiastically moving this drum backwards and forwards to produce the sound of surf. The first few times I did this, I asked the sound recordist, Dallas Bower, how it was and he said fine except the sea was rather too loud, so I moderated it after that. There was an idea of going into the camera department and that didn't work. But I started learning something about editing because Thorold Dickinson was editing films there and I became an assistant to him and started learning about how films were really made.

Alan Lawson: Where were you living and how did you travel to work?

Sid Cole: I was living at that time where I'd lived for much of my youth in Victoria around Vauxhall Bridge Road. So it was very easy - I got the 60 bus which went all the way to Cricklewood Broadway.

Alan Lawson: What was the working day like?

Sid Cole: It wasn't very onerous - it was 8. 30 to 6. 00 and we worked Saturday mornings till 1.00.

Alan Lawson: From that humble beginnings on the drum give us a progress report.

Sid Cole: The next thing I worked on was *The First Mrs. Fraser* which Sinclair Hill directed, but not for Stoll's, at the Wembley Studios and I went there as a floor assistant. It starred an actor who was as famous in his day as Olivier, Henry Ainley, and he had a drink problem. Not that he drank a lot but he had a low toleration of alcohol. I remember one day Sinclair Hill found him a little difficult after lunch and saying that's what comes from his having a couple of glasses of sherry. All sound had to be recorded direct and since there was a cabaret sequence in *The First Mrs. Fraser*, the music had to be recorded at the same time. So the editor, who was Thorold Dickinson, had to work out this elaborate plan with the director as to whereabout the music was when any particular shot was being taken and various cutaway shots had to be taken to fill in any discrepancies between the planned length of the music behind the dialogue and what actually happened. Going back to my early days at Stolls, I was a very enthusiastic clapper boy and the clapper board used to carry the name of all the scenes being covered so you would probably have about six scene numbers to say and bang the clapper and one banged the clapper also at the end of the scene, a practice which died out later. And I remember that one of the first days I was banging the clapper I was crouched at the edge of the set like someone about to set off on a 220 yards sprint and I thought I saw the director signal end of the sequence and I ran on and said scene 108, etc and rushed off the set and everybody looked at me because the signal hadn't been for me but for an actor to make his entrance and I'd entirely ruined the take.

At Wembley I became interested in editing. I went into the cutting rooms at Ealing as a second assistant to Thorold Dickinson on a film called *Perfect Understanding* starring Gloria Swanson. It was very ironic title because everything possible went wrong on that picture. It was interesting to watch Dickinson editing a sequence with one character winning a motor race down at Cannes played by Michael Farmer, a rich playboy married to Gloria Swanson, and the character who lost the race was a young promising actor called Laurence Olivier. Swanson decided whatever other qualities her husband might have he wasn't such a good actor and consequently they changed the story around and Olivier had to win the race. It was fascinating watching an expert editor like Thorold contriving this cinematic miracle of reversing the result of a motorboat race. And that began my being terribly interested in editing. I worked on a few more pictures at Ealing and the went to British International Pictures at Elstree which is still there and still very much as they were in those days. That happened out of the blue. One of the people I'd written to years before was BIP and I suddenly got this note saying would I go down there and I was interviewed by this interesting character, Walter Mycroft, who was in charge of production at the studios. He was a small man who had the disability of a hunchback. There's black comic story about a conference he was having where Mycroft said "Now listen boys I've got a hunch" and nobody dared laugh because they weren't sure whether he'd done it deliberately. I've always thought it was deliberate, he was that sort of character - he wanted to see what the reaction was. I was offered a job as editor. I worked on five films including the first Marcel Varnel made, *Freedom of the Seas* with Clifford Morrison and

Dance Band which had Charles Buddy Rogers who later on married Mary Pickford. I went on cutting pictures there for some time and worked on quite a few films in a short time. I also worked on *Royal Cavalcade*. It was designed to celebrate 25 years of George V as reigning monarch. Everybody in the studio worked on that - all the editors, all the directors. And it was run so close to time that 36 hours before the premiere was due at the Regal Cinema I was waiting for the rushes to come through from the laboratory to complete a sequence I was working on and when I completed it I had to go to the laboratory to talk to Bert Craik who was the optical printer there and say I need some wipes and since the theme of the picture had been based on a coin - I think it was a penny coin - and I used this as the theme for the wipes. I asked him to make me 16 centre to side circular wipes and I needed them yesterday. Bert just looked at me and said "OK. Is there anything else you want?" He produced them on time. One of the great advantages in those days was having the laboratory right next to the studio so you could get rushes very quickly. On that picture everything was chaotic that the audience were sitting in the cinema about an hour and a half before the picture actually started while cars were rushing like made from Elstree to Marble Arch with the various reels, some of which got showed out of order and one reel never arrived at all, some shots were in upside down, some archive material, so it must have been one of the most unfortunate premieres ever.

I started at Elstree in 1934. Around 1934, 1935 pictures were shot very quickly. So in 18 months I edited 5 films as well as partially editing a couple of others. After that, at the end of 1935, I went to Ealing to work on *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, Carol Reed's first film, where I was a cutting room assistant. Thorold Dickinson was the editor. Before leaving, I was interviewed by Stapleton - I told him I was leaving and he said why and I said Ealing was going to pay me twice as much money as you're paying me here. I was earning £5.00 a week to edit pictures at BIP whereas at Ealing I was earning the magnificent sum of £10.00 a week. I always remember going to see Mycroft afterwards and telling him I was going and he said he was sorry. He asked me if I'd seen Stapleton and I said yes but he hadn't done anything and hadn't offered me any more money. And that was that. I went to Ealing and worked on *Mr. Midshipman Easy*. It had two young people who became rather more famous later, Hughie Green and Margaret Lockwood who became more famous later. I enjoyed working on it very much particularly as I was working under the supervision of Thorold Dickinson who has always been a great helper and encourager of young people. As I wasn't on the staff of Ealing at the time I had a brief excursion into editing what later became known as quota quickies. They were the pictures American distributors had to make - as a kind of tax almost on their ability to distribute American pictures here - they weren't very interested in them and they were shot very quickly. These were made at Welwyn. One was called *Beloved Impostor* and the other *The Avenging Hand*. And on the latter I treasure my worse one of my worse editing notices in the trade press, Kine Weekly I suppose. Reviewing *The Avenging Hand* it said that the story of this film started off as being pretty hard to follow and the editing made it totally incomprehensible. I always thought that was one of the nicest reviews I ever received. I went back to Ealing to edit *The Lonely Road* starring Clive Brook whose Hollywood career was coming to an end but was still a considerable name and directed by an American, James Flood. The film also starred Victoria Hopper who was married to Basil Dean. After a week Flood found that Vicky was also being rehearsed over night by Dean and this made his work very difficult. They were at daggers drawn. [Sydney Cole went on location at the request of both Flood and Dean - Flood wanted to prevent Dean overseeing the editing of the film - Dean wanted some one to keep an eye on what Flood was doing.] So off I went and had a glorious week down in Dartmouth because I had no work to do. I would watch the unit working. We had perfect weather. We were staying at a very nice hotel. I was able to go back and

tell both my masters that everything was OK. In 1937, I worked at Ealing on *High Command* which was Thorold Dickinson's first directorial effort. It was made by independent company, although made at Ealing with a lot of Ealing personnel, and they ran out of money. I worked for a month or so without being paid. As Thorold was a great friend of mine I didn't do what other editors had been known to do when the financial situation became difficult which was to take the cutting copy home under my arm every night until they paid up. Many, many years later, after the war the front office, Reg Baker, who was joint managing director sent for me and said do you remember a film called *The High Command* made by Fanfare Productions. I said indeed I do. He said well I have news for you - here's a cheque for £3.12s.7d in full and final settlement of your outstanding account.

Alan Lawson: Going back to your time at Stoll's tell us about Sinclair Hill.

Sid Cole: He was a very jovial character - he was quite encouraging. He wasn't put off by my mistakes and he just laughed at them. I liked him. He was a capable director, he wasn't a great director in any way. In his day, he was commercially very successful. But you could never tell for sure by reading the trade papers. He got very good trade reviews. But you could never be sure how true these were. I remember Asquith telling me a story many years later. The first film he did, he read a trade review after the trade show and he was very pleased because it was such a glowing, fantastic review and he went into the studio the next day and said what a marvellous notice it was and the studio head said I should bloody well hope so. It cost us enough.

Alan Lawson: Also at Stoll was Ossie Mitchell who was known as the Panther.

Sid Cole: He was the studio manager/general manager, at any rate he was in charge of the finances. My first job was at a pound a week for six weeks and if everything was alright at the end of the six. weeks I was to have an enormous rise of 50% to 30 shillings a week. Well six weeks went by and nothing happened and seven weeks weeks and eight weeks and finally I was emboldened to ask to see Ossie Mitchell about this and I went in to remind him of this and he said if you don't like it here you know what you can do and I crept out. I mentioned this to Sinclair Hill who put it right because a week or so later I did get my rise. Mitchell was one of those people - like Stapleton at Elstree - who functioned to the situation he was in - he felt his function was to keep costs down and just be tough about money generally.

Alan Lawson: Did you work with him when he became a director.

Sid Cole: No. He didn't make anything very distinguished - mainly quota quickies which a lot of directors did in those days.

Alan Lawson: You've mentioned Stapleton in reference to your time at BIP. Did you have any other contacts with him at all?

Sid Cole: Not particularly. But I remember a story I think Bert Dates who was one of the editors at BIP, he and Les Norman, when I worked there told me. Around 1937 he was engaged to be an editor on a film being made by a much more extravagant company. Then to his horror he discovered Stapleton was the man in charge. But he found Stapleton was quite different from what he had been at Elstree because he had much more money to play with. When Bert suggested some enormous sum of about £15 a week Stapleton agreed without any demur so he was one of those people who fitted into whatever situation he was in.

Alan Lawson: Did you work at the Bush during this period?

Sid Cole: No, I never worked at the Bush.

Alan Lawson: Tell us about Dean. Did you ever work on a picture with Dean.

Sid Cole: Not really, except going back a long way, my first contact with the film industry was when I was still at the LSE. An assistant theatre director, who had worked with Dean, directed a production at the LSE of Hans Toler's *Masses and Man* that I played in. When Dean was making the film of Galsworthy's *Escape*, this chap asked those who worked in the play if they would like to earn a little extra money in the vacation through doing crowd work. So I spent two nights at Hyde Park Corner sitting by the Achilles Statue and all I remember - apart from getting £1 a night and getting free food - was hearing the sound recordist saying that take was no good - Mr Dean's voice was all over it. It was one of Dean's earliest sound pictures and directors were still used to the idea of talking to the artist while they were performing.

Dean was a great theatre director. He was a very brusque sort of character. He wasn't very good at doing films. He was very brusque with artists. I had to go up to Shaftesbury Avenue where he was rehearsing a play. I had to wait in the stalls while he completed what he was doing and I was absolutely amazed to hear the way he addressed star artists, people like Edna Best. He treated his stars like dirt.

Alan Lawson: Going back to the early days what were production techniques like? How much did they change over the years?

Sid Cole: They changed a great deal. In the period since 1895 the technological development of film is equivalent to the kind of development there's been to the aeroplane. They've gone from the Wright Brothers flying a 150 yards to the Concord and outer space. Development before the Second World War was at a slower rate. Of course you had sound being freed from the tyranny of everything having to be recorded at once and the idea taking its place that sound could be put on afterwards or even recorded beforehand. Post synch and pre synch was fairly well developed by the time the Second World War started.

In editing - my own field - there were considerable advances. Synchronisation of the sound record and the visual record only existed in my early days in a very basic form. When I started editing at Elstree, there was no system of synchronising every foot of sound to the equivalent foot of the picture so when you got the rushes apart from the clapper at the beginning, you had to wind through on the synchroniser and make with a china pencil a series of synchronising marks on both sound and picture. It was some time before rubber numbering - which Thorold Dickinson was one of the pioneers based on ideas from America. This was an elaborate code so that edge numbers could be printed on every foot of both sound and picture so you knew every single frame. Otherwise it could be very difficult when you started cutting things and then wanted to put a bit back; your assistant had to write on every single frame and there was always one little frame you could not find and it was always the vital piece.

Alan Lawson: What about changes in the editing equipment?

Sid Cole: I don't think they were very great. We still went on using the upright Moviola machine which made a considering clattering noise and with take up spools which fed the thing off through a

synchroniser through the Moviola back on to the synchroniser with a foot pedal release and starter and everything was wound on by hand. We used them right up to the War.

Alan Lawson: You worked at BIP, Stoll's, Ealing and Wembley. What do you think was the difference between them?

Sid Cole: The interesting thing about working at Ealing was that in its day it was the most up to date studio in Britain because it had been built, although much smaller, on the model of RKO. It was connected with RKO to begin with and therefore had been planned. It hadn't just grown like most of the older studios including Elstree which had just been added to bit by bit. It was really designed e.g. the stages were opposite the background workshops such as carpentry and electricians which was very labour saving. It was the first place to have mechanical operated doors to the stages and to have a console control for almost everything happening on the floor. I don't remember much about Wembley. In terms of equipment, for instance, I remember that Sinclair Hill had a tracking shot on *The First Mrs. Fraser*. In those days, on a shot like that the microphone boom would be stuck on top of the camera. And I remember Gunther Krampf, the cameraman, refusing to allow this to happen. He wasn't going to make any concession to sound. Consequently, instead of having one continuous shot, it had to be done with an off-scene microphone boom hanging over the set. The tracking shot had to be substituted by a series of movements and stopping, and then the dialogue and moving on and dialogue and moving on and dialogue which was a very bad thing. The sound always seemed to have a chip on its shoulder in those days since it was made to feel an intruder into the sacrosanct world of the silent movie.

Tape 1 , Side 2

Alan Lawson: As an editor did you find the use of sound tracks as a limiting factor or was it something you quickly learned to live with?

Sid Cole: No, I came in as a sound editor although I had been brought up as a viewer on the silent cinema, when I came to learn the technique of editing, it was the technique of sound editing so it didn't constitute any difficulty. Later on I did found it hard to take to tape, as did many editors of my generation, because on sound on film you had a visual signal to see as well an aural one to hear. Consequently especially with variable area recording, which was RCA rather than Western Electric which was variable density, you could read the soundtrack once you'd mark it up. When one was having post-synching done, one could take the original track and the post-synched track and provided both were marked up, you could wind them together through the synchroniser and match the peaks and valleys. You couldn't do that with tape - you had to do it purely by sound.

Alan Lawson: In those early days of your career, which technician gave you the most help and encouragement?

Sid Cole: Well the name has come up several times already, it was Thorold Dickinson who I met at Stoll and I worked for him quite a lot on and off as an assistant. He encouraged me very much as an editor. After the years '34-'35 at BIP, he sent for me to cut *Midshipman Easy* and gave me a great deal of encouragement. Then he got me involved in ACT, like he did with a number of other people.

Alan Lawson: That first film you edited, did it establish you as an editor or did you have to revert back to being an assistant?

Sid Cole: No, once I started editing, I went on editing with varying degrees of success. But I just liked doing the job and sometimes it's almost more interesting to work on a film which isn't very good because its more challenging than working on one that is good because there are so many things to be put right, like the thing I mentioned, the quota quickie I did for which I earned the notice about being totally incomprehensible. But that was because it was such an awful film anyhow I just decided to cross cut everything in sight in order to try and make it look more interesting. Incidentally it had an actor in it called Noah Beery, Wallace Beery's brother. Quota quickies were shot back to back and they were needed so quickly that my time schedule in the cutting room got totally reversed and my assistant, Julian Wintle, who became a director himself, and I finally got to the point that we were coming into the studio just as the shooting crew was going home. In those circumstances all what one could do was to try and jazz it up which I did with disastrous results in the case of *The Avenging Hand*, I used the term just now back to. back which might be confusing. It means quota quickies were shot continuously, two weeks each, and one was finished on Saturday night at midnight and the next started Monday morning at eight.

Alan Lawson: Which director made the most impression on you in those prewar days?

Sid Cole: I don't know if I could pick out one particularly before the War. It was interesting observing different methods of working. Thorold Dickinson, for instance, with his background of editing, was very interested in making a film which could be edited interestingly. Carol Reed, with his theatre background, concentrated on the direction of the acting and relied a great deal on his cameraman for his set-ups. Although later on Carol must have learnt a great deal about this. I remember Carol telling me that when he was directing *Midshipman Easy* that he looked on the floor and Basil Dean was directing something at that time; he had been Basil's assistant director for many years, he had been his assistant in the theatre too. He had had to put up for many years with Dean's brusque way of talking and bad temper and authoritarian manner and he said ‘Thank God I don't have to worry whether the chandelier is the right size or shape or not”. Marcel Varnel was interesting because he told me that when he became a film director in Hollywood - this was after he had a career in the American theatre - he realised he didn't know in practice much about film. So he told the company that he was working for that before he started directing he wanted to spend a few weeks in the cutting room to see how films were put together. And when I came to cut pictures for Varnel, I found he understood the editors problem and what an editor could contribute to a film.

Alan Lawson: You went to Spain during the Civil War?

Sid Cole: The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. It was another aspect of the advance of fascism in Europe duringõ those desperate years in the Thirties. On the whole the democracies were letting the Spanish republican government down by creating a thing called nonintervention. It was meant to suggest that nobody should interfere in the War and what it really meant v1as that the only interference on a large scale came from the two fascists countries, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. For people of liberal to left beliefs in this country this was a very traumatic time and increasingly I was one of those people who felt one ought to make a gesture against this ominous rise of fascism. Ivor Montagu, who I'd known for many years from when I'd worked with him on the Film Society was very involved in making films. He'd already been out there and made some films e.g. *Defence of Madrid*. In 1938 he had this project for making more films out there and assembled a group of people which included Arthur Graham, Alan Lawson, Thorold Dickinson and Philip Leacock, who afterwards became a well-known director, and off we went to Spain. Originally we were going to make three films but eventually we only made two because of

problems of having to get away from Spain with what material we'd got. We made two films. One called *Spanish ABC* and the other *Behind the Spanish Lines*. The set up was that Alan and Arthur were filming. Philip and Ray Pitt were editing and Thorold and I were co-directing. As it turned out Thorold did most of *Spanish ADC* and I did most of *Behind the Spanish Lines*. One felt one was doing something. It was our first experience of warfare, out first experience of bombing from the air which would seem very small and trivial nowadays but was frightening enough. I remember one morning in our hotel in Barcelona, we were both shaving and the Italian planes came over and the first time I realised what the phrase meant frozen with fear. I stopped in my place, lathered up and my razor blade in my hand and was actually rooted to the floor as one heard the sound of these bombs coming down. They weren't very big but they hit the building next door to us and we went out into the street and we saw some bodies being carried out. We went to Madrid and went into the trenches but I don't remember any heavy heavy shelling there. Ivor compared the official accounts in the newspaper with the map and we realised that the Fascist forces were getting very near to cutting the road back through Valencia which would take up up the coast to Barcelona. We decided the sensible thing to do was to get back to Barcelona and not find ourselves cut off in Madrid where the material we shot would not have been much use. So we did that and came back and edited the films and, of course, particularly *Spanish ABC* has passed into documentary history. I saw it quite recently and it stands up very well.

Alan Lawson: You've had a long association with Ivor. Tell us something about him.

Sid Cole: He was an intellectual maverick. A fascinating person, so skilful and accomplished in so many ways. I admired his speaking ability. He would launch on the most elaborate paragraph with sixteen subordinate clauses, all of which were grammatically correct, and just when you thought he'd lost his way in this verbal labyrinth, he would triumphantly come out out at the end with the correct tense and the appropriate verb. He was a great enthusiast for films and a great enthusiast for films meaning something. He worked on a film on which I was associate producer, *Scott of the Antarctic*. He managed to get a script out of a mass of material which other writers like H.E. Bates had tried to do and had failed. Be was a great man. He founded the Film Society which in those days was the only way you could see a lot of films, particularly Russian films and films which would never have any kind of chance of being shown commercially. It was largely Ivor's idea. He also founded the world table tennis federation which was the first sporting organisation to put in its constitution that nobody should be barred from play on the basis of creed or colour or belief. He could have had a longer career as a filmmaker - he was an associate producer for Micky Balcon on some of the early Hitchcock films at Shepherds Bush and he made some very entertaining short films himself but his main interest in life was political, working for causes, particularly in the thirties the anti fascist cause. He devoted his life much more to politics than to movies. He had so many interests He had so many interests and so much energy, he managed several careers simultaneously. Perhaps he did not do as much as he could of done if he had been less interested in other matters.

Alan Lawson: What did you do during the War years?

Sid Cole: At the beginning of the War - just before it broke out - I worked on a couple of reels of *Jamaica Inn*. The editor was Robert Hamer and I was called in because they were in a rush to get it out. I didn't get a credit on it. I'd worked on a couple of films with Erich Pommer who was the producer. He wanted to change the ending which was difficult to do with a Hitchcock film - Hitch had gone off to the United States. He found he couldn't change the editing because Hitch used to

shoot in such a tight way. It was always said that if he wanted to say yes he would give a signal to start and as soon as the actor had said yes he would say cut and in effect saying, “Muck around with that if you can.” So Pommer found that he had to reshoot some scenes at the end of *Jamaica Inn*. I remember that because I was cutting that particular sequence and I said to Pommer, “How long will you be doing these shots” and he said “they'd be through about half past five” and at midnight I was still sitting at the side of the set because Laughton just did everything differently every time. Finally Pommer said “We will print takes 1, 7, 11, 15 and 19” and threw the whole lot into my lap. We probably used take one.

During the war period there was the Call Up but it didn't affect people unless they wanted to volunteer or people over 30 and there were reserved operations, a list of technical people deemed necessary to the war effort. They'd realised for every armed person in the forces you needed around 13 or 14 people in civilian life as a back up to that. Partly, no largely, because of the efforts of the union the authorities didn't make the mistake that they made in the First World War which was virtually to kill the British film industry which had been fairly thriving up to that time. This time it was realised that entertainment was needed for the public in wartime and that films, even entertainment films, could make a contribution to the war effort by encouraging people and making them aware of what was going on. Consequently you needed the technicians to do this so various technicians were a reserved occupation. This meant one went on making films during the War. It was an interesting period apart from the external events such as being in the home guard and travelling miles to throw a single hand grenade which frightened the life out of me and I never wanted to see a hand grenade again and spending in ‘training’, I think the word used was, travelling miles and miles and miles to fire ten rounds of ammunition on some rifle range. I worked on a series of interesting films, perhaps the most outstanding was working with Leslie Howard on *Pimpernel Smith* in 1941 at Denham. Leslie Howard had a great sense of style. He was starring, producing and directing. He was a very pleasant man to work with. He was also very practical and down to earth. He had not directed much before so he liked to surround himself with all the technical aid he could summon. I was made supervising editor on the picture and he asked me to be on the floor all the time so he could ask my advise. Even when he was directing a sequence which involved music he had the music director there. I found it very stimulating to work with Leslie. I think that picture and another which he later did, *First of the Few* on which I was also supervising editor, I found very rewarding because Leslie had considerable style both as an actor and a director, you took this as the keynote of the way you edit the film. If you took the rhythm of Leslie's performance, that was the rhythm you did as an editor to carry the whole stylistic approach into the final film. And that was a contribution to the war effort because it was about a modern Scarlet Pimpernel rescuing people from the Nazis. I was also supervising editor of *First of the Few*. But in between I'd been approached to become editor at Ealing. I did this and then Leslie Howard was about to make *First of the Few* so he rang up Balcon and asked for me to be supervising editor on *First of the Few*. So I was in demand both by Michael Balcon and Leslie Howard which was rather gratifying. I was commuting between Ealing and Denham for a time.

On *First of the Few*, when the film was finally edited, William Walton was doing the music. Leslie, for some reason, could not be at the running of the film for Walton so he told me very elaborately what he wanted from the music. So after we had the viewing I went up to Walton and repeated what Leslie had said as accurately as I could. Walton listened very carefully and said “Oh I see, Leslie wants a lot of notes” and he went away and wrote The Spitfire Fugue. I was now on what was to turn out to be a 11 year stint at Ealing Studios. I worked in various capacities on a number of pictures. To begin with I did a film Cavalcanti directed called *Went the Day Well,* which still pops

up from time to time on the box. This is a story originally written by Graham Greene about what seems to a platoon of British soldiers going into a quiet English village. These turn out to be a lot of Germans who form the advance guard of a possible invasion of the country. I'd known Cavalcanti slightly before but that was the first time I'd worked with him. Cav had an amazing sense of structure in film and appreciated editing and I found it a joy to work with him and it was probably one of the best editing jobs I did. I still find it possible to look at it when its repeated on the box and still feel pleased with the work I did. It is very tightly shot by Cav and very tightly edited by me. Rather like I said about Howard, he had this sense of style - he had been an art director in France before he started directing and he had that kind of stylistic approach to the way films were made.

Alan Lawson: Tell us a little about Cavalcanti?

Sid Cole: Cav was interesting. I admired him very much as a director. He was a great encourager which people who very good at their job tend to be. There are some people who are fairly skilled at what they do yet seem to be afraid to encourage people and hand on their skill and experience but the really top people are never like. I've mentioned Thorold before who taught me a great deal about editing. Cav was always appreciative and critical - one doesn't want indiscriminate praise all the time. Cav, I always thought, in relation to his earlier career when he first came to Britain and was working in documentary with Grierson, Cav' s contribution to the British documentary movement has always been grossly undervalued. Grierson was a great promoter, he sold the idea of documentary. But despite *Drifters* I never thought he was a very good director. Cav's enormous contribution was to contribute his sense of style, his knowledge of sound filmmaking - what you could do with sound - his experience with editing and his ability to encourage and bring out the best in younger people. All this was an enormous contribution to documentary filmmaking which has not been fully appreciated yet.

Alan Lawson: How would you define a documentary film?

Sid Cole: In the early days, it was called realist film, that was the real nature of documentary. Documentary is probably not a good term. It meant trying to represent reality. This is what the British documentary movement did with different types of approaches. It did things which have now become commonplace. One of the early documentaries used the technique of the deliberate straight face to face camera, face to face with the people whose life it was examining. That was a film called *Housing Problems* which was quite remarkable in its day because nobody had really done that people speaking directly into camera as far as I remember. I don't think it had any narration on it - it just let people speak for themselves. That was the kind of thing documentary did at its best. That sort of approach has become commonplace especially in television.

Alan Lawson: Would you agree Grierson was the founder of the British documentary movement?

Sid Cole: Yes, that's true. I had an on and off relation with documentary. I can't remember when I first went along, but it was in the early days when they were working under the title of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, where I met various people who were very young then. Particularly, I met Harry Watt. He narrates an exaggerated version in his own biography, but it makes such a good story, I'm going to consider that's what happened. I was working on a script for Grierson in a back passage of the offices in Oxford Street and there was a young man whitewashing a ceiling. Harry's story is that we got talking I said to him that's no way to whitewash a ceiling, took the brush out of his hand and proceeded to whitewash the ceiling and show him how it should be done. It was totally

untrue but it makes a good story that that's the way I'm going to tell it in future. But that was the first time I met Harry. We had a lot of discussion while he was doing that and I knew him a great deal later. The thing about Harry was that he always wanted to bring more of narrative and more sense of dramatisation into documentary which he did fairly successfully in films like *North Sea* and create some kind of story value instead of it being a straightforward documentary without any narrative element to it.

Alan Lawson: Did Grierson or Cavalcanti influence you at all?

Sid Cole: Cav did but that was later on at Ealing. My involvement was on and off. I did a film with John Taylor called *Smoke Menace* which was about pollution from the amount of smoke being pumped into the atmosphere. There's a story which John and I always remind each other of. We got to the stage of recording the commentary and suddenly realised there was blank where the script said blank tons of soot were deposited on London every year. So we invented a figure and put it in and recorded it and the film went out and its been solemnly quoted ever since in official documents. Nobody ever corrected it. So much for reality!

Alan Lawson: What are your reactions to Empire Marketing Board, Crown Film Unit, GPO Film Unit, these various other units?

Sid Cole: I worked on a film for the Empire Marketing Board which never got made. It was very amateur in many ways, agreeably so. I did a film called *Roads Across Britain* (1939) and I remember when I was cutting some archival material together I got a lovely shot of a tram going down that underground place in Kingsway and Grierson saying that's a nice shot I hope you can find the negative - we've been looking for it for years. I never was with them for a long time. I met Flaherty at White's or Brooks just before he was going off to shoot *Louisiana Story*. He was the most amazing raconteur. He told stories which got wilder and wilder. He said he's been given $150,000 to make a film in Louisiana and he'd already spent $100,000 so he reckoned he better go off fairly soon and make the picture. Grierson was a promoter He had this ability to go round different people in different government organisations and different public utility companies and point out what wonderful propaganda it was for them if they just sponsored a film unit or individual films.

Alan Lawson: Did you have anything to do with MOI or COI?

Sid Cole: No not really - only after the War - in relation to Ealing when Cav made a film in French called *Trois Chansons de la Resistance*. Then there was a film Ivor directed for the MOI called *Man One Family* which was part of the denazification programme that was introduced into Germany. It was to expose the fallacy of Nazi racist philosophy and show that all race theories were total nonsense. He had Julian Huxley as an adviser and it was a very interesting film to work on.

Alan Lawson: Did you ever work for Film Centre?

Sid Cole: No. That was Basil Wright's set up.

Alan Lawson: Or Realist?

Sid Cole: Realist in the sense that '???? ' was made by Realist and that was John Taylor. I know John well. But didn't work on that number of films. I knew Grierson to some extent from working

with the Film Society because he was on the Board. I didn't work much with Grierson but knew him quite well.

Alan Lawson: Let's go back to Ealing because I'd like to talk about your association with Micky Balcon. But first of all, what was the task of a supervising editor?

Sid Cole: I was in charge of the cutting room. Ealing was making a number of films at the same time. One would look at the rushes and discuss the approach to the editing. Sometimes take a sequence and do the final cut oneself. Generally overseeing everything that went on. I've got some notes that I was supervising editor of *Went The Day Well* as supervising editor but I actually cut that film myself. Sometimes although supervising editor, you would occasionally edit a film yourself.

TAPE 2, SIDE 3

Alan Lawson: When did you first come across Micky Balcon?

Sid Cole: I can't recall when I first met him. My first working acquaintance with was when in 1941 I went to Ealing and I stayed there for 11 years. I came to know him very well - I liked him as person. I liked him for a number of reasons. One was that he was obviously someone prepared to learn in all sorts of ways from experience. I didn't know him when he was in charge at Gaumont in the days of Victor Saville and Alfred Hitchcock at the Bush but I have a feeling that the influence of people like Ivor who worked for him then and coming into contact with the younger generation of filmmakers that he used at Ealing he learnt a great deal from them not just about films but approach to life and learning from the political and social attitudes of young people. The War itself in a way helped because the War crystallised a good many people's attitudes about things like the Nazis, it concentrated people's attention very forcibly - they had realise what was going on in the world and secondly they had to understand what if anything they could do about it. And I think Balcon learned something along those lines from the people he employed. Also he had a talent which fairly successful people in his position have to have which is to have some skill at selecting the people who worked for him. And as an editor myself one particularly appreciated that so many of the people who became directors and associate producers at Ealing started as editors - Charles Frend, Charles Crighton, myself, Robert Hamer - which showed that Mick was pretty astute in selecting people. The other quality which followed from that was that within reason he was prepared to give people their head and do the kind of subject that they wanted - he kept a tight control over it. He developed a kind of family thing at Ealing which I suppose like all family situations had its good points and its bad points. Perhaps to some extent we got too involved in our own little world. But it did mean there was a great deal of co-operation and one did feel you were all pretty united - we would see each other's rushes and rough cut and rushes, and talk, not necessarily together, but nobody kept what film they were doing totally secret and away from the other people working there. The defects I suppose were that we were a bit parochial. Mick himself was a little parochial. In terms of subject matter one of his failings was that he distrusted any approach in story values to what might be called sexual themes and when that kind of material came up he was very inclined to soft pedal and play it down in a rather genteel attitude to things which meant he would come in conflict with a director like Robert Hamer, for instance. Robert had a great ability at his best to handle relations between the sexes in an amusing way as in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* or a tougher way as in *It Always Rains on Sunday*. Mick was rather gentlemanly in his attitude towards those sorts of things and with Robert Hamer, for instance, there was a book which Robert wanted to make and the rights were bought and because sex was such an important element in that story Mick said,

when it was about to start preproduction, “On second thoughts I'm not going to do it” which hurt Robert a great deal and that happened twice and he changed his mind and was again going to do it and again it was cancelled. That was the defect. But compared with Korda for instance, Korda is historically regarded as the man who put British films on the map which has some truth to it, but Mick's contribution to British films was much greater because it was consistent, because it dealt specifically with British themes not in a narrow nationalistic way but because that was the native soil from which subjects ought to come. In any country the importance of national culture in films is very strong and Mick believed in that, not in a flag waving way. Although one is a little taken aback when one sees the old Ealing films with the background with the Union Jack fluttering away. But he dd make during the War years the kind of films such as *Went the Day Well*, *Nine Men,* which was Harry Watt's film about the fight in the desert, *The Bells Go Down*, which was about the fire service. *Undercover* was a slightly different thing and that was interesting politically. It started life as Chetnik and that was about the resistance to the Nazis in Yugoslavia and in this instance the group was the Chetniks and their head Mikailovich and the story started off about Mikailovich and then the ex-ambassador turned up at the studio one day, at I think Ivor Montagu's instigation, and we showed him the rough cut of this film, I was supervising the editing, and he said, “Oh dear this will never do” because the situation is that Mikailovich is not fighting the Germans but the other resistance group which is Tito and Churchill had decided Tito's group was to be backed by the Allies. So we had to alter everything which mainly consisted of a lot of substitutes for the references Draja such as leader, the chief, whatever word fitted. It wasn't a very successful film. The film took a long time to complete and we wanted to reshoot a scene in which there was a dog but six months had elapsed and the dog was somewhat bigger - there was a beehive in the background of the shot and in a moment of creativity I said let's build the beehive twice as big and that will make the dog look the size it was before and everybody looked at me and finally one of them picked up the courage to say what are we going to do about the bees - where are we going to get bees twice as large. So we abandoned the idea. While at Ealing we were approaching a period when the War was coming to an end and Priestly had written a play which was liberal, vaguely socialist look into the future of what might be called *They Came to a City* which was very successful in the theatre. I saw it and thought it might be a good idea to film it. Balcon immediately agreed. Partly because it was a successful play but also because he had learned a great deal and thought it was a good idea to make the play anyway. But by the end of the War we couldn't go on making films about the war and then came the Ealing comedy series and in some ways Mick was happier being studio head when those films were being made than when we'd been making the more serious stuff.

There were two films at Ealing I was particularly fond of. One was *Dead of Night*, a film of four or five stories coming together which still doesn't look too bad. We used four directors - Cavalcanti, Crighton, Basil Dearden and Robert Hamer. It contains a sequence which was always regarded was one of the very best things Michael Redgrave did as an actor which is the story about the ventriloquist's dummy. It was a very cooperative effort. We had two units shooting parallel and shot the whole thing in four weeks. Everybody saw each other's rushes and there was a kind of friendly competition between the two units about what they could do. The second film was one of the first colour films made by Ealing, *Scott of the Antarctic*, which was a project that Charles Frend, the director, and myself thought up. The music director at Ealing at the time was Ernest Irving who was a very old experienced musical director, quite an Edwardian character, and he said the thought the right composer was Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams read the script and thought he would like to do it but insisted that he must talk to Charles Frend and myself before anything else to make sure we were on the same wave length about the subject because this was very much VW’s period and

generation. We sat alone in a restaurant with VW and went through the script. Charles and I had already worked out where we thought there should be music and Vaughan Williams had marked up his script where he thought there should be music and we went through and we agreed on every point except two places. One where Vaughan Williams thought there should be music and we hadn't and the other one where Charles and I thought there should be music and Vaughan Williams disagreed. So in a very sensible compromise, Vaughan Williams agreed to write both and see what happened. In fact Vaughan Williams turned out to be right. At a recording by the London Philharmonic, I was listening in the monitoring world, and Ernest Irving over the intercom said "Dr Williams", he was always very punctilious, "would like a word with you". And he said "What did you think about that music?" and I said "I think it's great". And he said "I know it's good music but is it right for your film?" A marvellous example of top people. Reverting back to *They Came to A City*. We used a piece of Scriabin which hadn't been recorded before. We recorded the whole piece and used it as we needed it and J. B. Priestly said he'd love to hear the score and we hadn't dubbed it then and I ran *They Came to a City* just with the music score track, and we did have music over a great deal of it, and when the lights came up Priestly said "Eeh, its much better without the dialogue isn't it?"

Alan Lawson: We now come to when Ealing closed.

Sid Cole: I wasn't there at that moment - I'd gone to Group 3 to do *The Angel Who Pawned Her Heart* - and it was a great shock. It was a great shock to everybody who worked at the studios. Sandy Mackendrick who directed *Whisky Galore*, *The Maggie*, *Mandy* and *The Man in the White Suit*, said he didn't know anything about it till he was coming in one morning on the train to Ealing from town and he opened the paper and saw an announcement that Ealing Studios had been sold and was closing down. It was a great traumatic shock. We were talking about Michael Balcon a little while ago and that was a kind of moral cowardice on Balcon's part because he didn't, as he should have done, call a meeting of the studio staff and explain to them face to face what was happened and why. He left it to his very nice stalwart general manager Hal Mason and he delegated to Hal the responsibility of telling people what was happening. That was a pretty bad moment really.

Alan Lawson: That was a difficult time for you.

Sid Cole: It was.

Alan Lawson: Then you branched off.

Sid Cole: First I did *The Angel Who Pawned Her Heart* which introduced Diane Cilento. Grierson, John Baxter and Micky Balcon were the three people in charge of Group 3. I remember Grierson seeing the picture and saying "I don't know what you were trying to do but I don't think you've done it" which seemed a little un-encouraging. After that there was a hiatus for a while. After that I went into television. I filmed the Robin Hood series. This was the era of the Hollywood blacklisting, the McCarthy era. An American woman producer who came over Hannah Weinstein - I don't think she was blacklisted herself but she was very involved with people who were such as Dalton Trumbo - to promote something. We met through mutual friends and she had this idea of making either a series about King Arthur or Robin Hood and she asked my advice and I said Robin Hood, the great thing about Robin Hood is that it enables you to sympathise with outlaws at the same time as feeling they're good people. So you could be against the law and still with it as it were. Off we went on

Robin Hood. Ralph Smart was the original producer and I was associate producer. We used a lot of blacklisted American writers not under their own names. There were a number of house pseudonyms - somebody wrote to me from Finland the other day asking about the early days saying he found it very difficult to find out who wrote the scripts and for the life of me I couldn't remember because the same pseudonym would be used by different directors. Anyway the series was enormously successful. It was made in conjunction with Associated Television, who was Lew Grade. It went for 4 years and went for 143 episodes. It starred Richard Greene who I came to like very much as a person. His best performances were as Robin Hood. He fitted the part. He was a good swordsman, he was a good archer, he did pretty well all his own stunts. By the time we got over 100 episodes we got to the point where the episodes almost made themselves. I remember the editor we had, Thelma Connell, a very nice person and very good editor, came to me on one of the latest episodes and there was a big ambush scene in the forest of Sherwood and said Sid all you need to get the director to shoot for the sequence which went on about 7 minutes was two shots: one, a close shot of Richard, and a close shot of Archie Duncan who played Little John because we have so many ambush scenes and everybody was dressed if they were the sheriff's men in chain mail or if they were Robin's men in Lincoln green, not that the colours mattered because it was in black and white. So she could put together the most wonderful ambush from the previous 125 episodes which you couldn't do today because you would have to pay repeat money. We made a number of other things. I found it very interesting doing those films because they were quite challenging. We used Lindsay Anderson on some episodes of *Robin Hood*. I remember Lindsay telling me he was asked to write an account of his experiences on *Robin Hood* - probably by Sequence - and they expected a kind of smart-ass thing because Lindsay belonged to the intelligentsia, in fact, he's been overwhelmed by the atmosphere which at its best can exist on the studio floor where everyone is matey and doing a good job together. Lindsay found this for the first time in his life. He made under the Hannah Weinstein/Lew Grade banner a number of other series, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot*, *The Buccaneers* which had Robert Shaw. A series we made which wasn't as good as we hoped it would be but was interesting because of the people in it was the series *The Four Just Men* based on the Edgar Wallace stories and we had Jack Hawkins, Vittorio de Sica, Dan Dailey and Richard Conte. We had two units shooting. I produced half of them and an American producer the other half. It was very interesting working with Vittorio de Sica because at that time he was regarded as one of the greatest of European directors and here he was acting in a series. I said to Hannah Weinstein when she said she's engaged Vittorio wow one can see possible problems ahead with a director of this status being just an actor. But in point of fact not at all, he behaved just like any other reasonable actor. I always remember on the floor at Walton on Thames where we were shooting, Harry Watt was directing but he was directing on the other unit and I wanted him to direct another episode and he said he wanted to direct an episode with de Sica in it. I said he could do that if he'd agree to do another couple of episodes for me so that was fixed. He directed this episode with Vittorio and I remember de Sica behaved quite reasonably. He would suggest to Harry that he would try something. Harry would watch and say I'm sorry Vittorio I don't really agree and he would accept it. I remember sitting on the floor with Harry on one side of de Sica and me on the other and we were talking about his use of non-actors which he was very good at. We'd just seen a picture called *Il Teto*, The Roof, which was about the problems of young Italian people trying to get homes and he's produced tremendous performances out of two Italian non-actors. We asked him about that and Vittorio said after a week, well after a week they're professionals. We then went on to talk about various films of his and Harry said you've had a very successful career, what is the secret of your success. Vittorio replied all you need is entusiasmo. So Harry said that's fine but even you must occasionally have found yourself directing a real turkey of

a film, what do you then. Vittorio put one arm round Harry and one arm round me, then my dear Harry, my dear Sid you need even more entusiasmo. It didn't work quite as well - partly for script reasons - as we'd hoped. Dan Dailey who had starred in Hollywood musicals was a charming person. Vittorio, I've talked about. Jack Hawkins, I've a story about him. Hannah Weinstein had acquired a new husband who had come over and she'd put him in charge of financial matters. Jack's agent had insisted on certain clauses in his agreement which they wanted to vary. This new financial wizard said leave it to me. He offered Jack an increased salary of £250 a week, "Now I'm sure you'll agree to give way on these other clauses!" and Jack said, "No not at all" and still insisted on having the right to agree to director and script. Jack told me afterwards and said "Of course I took the money but as long as its you producing and Basil Dearden directing I've got no worries".

Alan Lawson: Can we have some dates?

Sid Cole: Robin Hood was around four years, 1955, '56, '57, '58. *The Four Just Men* was '59. *The Buccaneers* was shot parallel with *Robin Hood*, it must have been '58. Robert Shaw, the star, was a very good actor and subsequently wrote some very good novels. I worked on a series around that time called *The Sword of Freedom* which took place in Medieval Italy and starred Edmund Purdom and one of my favourite actresses, Adrienne Corri. That takes us up to 1960. For the years between 1955 and '60 the eminence behind the throne was Lew Grade, who I always found an agreeable person. Among other things he had this habit of summoning you to conferences at the ATV building at Marble Arch at 7. 30 in the morning where he would be already smoking one of those enormous Havana cigars he was famous for. He didn't offer you one, for which I don't blame him, they probably cost about £7 each even in those days. He was in a way a great person who can bare comparison with some of the Hollywood tycoons because he was not a cultured man but he had an instinct for what seemed to work with the public. He lost his way later on but at that time he was very successful by following his own likings. In himself he was very agreeable - you could trust his word implicitly. He hated being asked to put it in writing because he thought that was insulting since if he said anything it was true. When I came to an end of the contract period with ATV there came a moment when I wasn't sure what was happening because I hadn't heard anything about a renewal. Suddenly the payments of my salary stopped. I didn't know what to do about it. Then I got a message to go and see Lew and he said I've heard the financial bloke hasn't been paying you any money recently. We haven't anything else at the moment but I'll see that you're paid up to date and let us know if there's anything you'd like us to consider. We could do with a few more people like Lew Grade around.

Alan Lawson: Where did you go after then?

Sid Cole: I then had a brief flirtation with commercials. They're very strange because you mustn't try to be economical. I made this mistake on one commercial that involved as interesting a location as possible. I always thought it would be nice to shoot at a certain place I knew in Cornwall. I mentioned this to the agency producer who agreed to have a look and we travelled down first class, stayed at the best possible hotel and went off the next day to see this place which involved clambering down cliffs. The producer said yes this is great but of course we're still going to the South of France. Hell, I suppose he wanted to go to the South of France. It might cost three times as much but presumably the agency got paid on a cost plus basis they wanted the thing to cost as much as possible. So off they went with a full unit - I believe Desmond Dickinson was the cameraman - Joe Losey was the director. I thought why bother in future. I had a discussion with an agency producer, quite an intelligent young man, about the importance of commercials. And I finally

ventured to say “But in the long run doesn't the quality of the product have something to do with the way it sells rather than just the successful nature of the advertising”. And he thought for a moment and said “I suppose it might do”. At that time there was a famous cigarette commercial called Strand and the slogan they used was ‘you're never alone with a Strand’. They had a very atmospheric cold dark street with this chap coming in and looking up to camera then he takes out the Strand cigarette and lights it. Oddly enough psychologically this produced the opposite effect - because it gave you the feeling you had to be alone before you lit a Strand. That's about all I can say about commercials. ANyway, it was an interesting experience.

Then I went back into television with a famous series called *Danger Man* with Pat McGoohan. I quite admired Pat McGoohan who I'd seen at the Lyric Hammersmith where he'd played the leading role in an Ibsen play called Brand and in another play called Danton's Death. McGoohan played Robespierre against Patrick Wymark's Danton. I found him very interesting to work with on the series. The thing about Pat was that he was a very fervent Roman Catholic which meant he had a fervent sense of sin which is one of the distinguishing things among many Roman Catholics. He always refused - whoever was cast in the female character - to kiss a woman even in a scene which implied some intimacy between them. I once asked him why this was so and he said he didn't want his children asking his mother why was daddy kissing that strange woman. As a result of this I used to take certain amount of pleasure in casting attractive actresses opposite him. I cast Adrienne Corri in that episode and Pat had reacted when I said I was casting Adrienne, he disapproved. She had announced to the press she was the proud mother of two children although she was not married. Apparently the first morning she came out of her dressing room the same time McGoohan did and saw him and called down the corridor, “Hey McGoohan, I understand you disapprove of me. Well, fuck you for a start.” After which they became quite good friends. While I was on *Danger Man*, Monty Berman produced a number of television series out at ATV. The financial people had been onto me and said “You know you’ve gone somewhat over budget. Why can't you keep within budget like Monty Berman on *The Saint* series?” We were talking and Monty said to me “How do you manage to keep under budget, Sid?” The same bloke had been on to him and said “Monty you've gone over budget, why can't you be like Sid Cole, he always comes in under budget?” We realised the same ploy was being used both ways.

I then worked on *A Man in a Suitcase* with an American star called Richard Bradford who was a kind of poor man's Brando. He could be a good actor if he tried but he was very suspicious of everybody. He was one of the few actors in my career I didn't really get on with. (Stories about Bradford)

TAPE 2, SIDE 4

There was just a brief period in the early 70s when I did some tutoring at the London Film School which I found very interesting and almost harder working than making films because students are very demanding and have very little sense of time. Sometimes I'd get a telephone call at 11 o'clock at night from an anxious student saying that ‘I've completed my script for my diploma film, I'm not sure its right, can I come and see you now’. But it was very challenging and it made you think hard about processes which you'd used professionally in making films which you'd taken for granted and now you had to rationalise them to explain to young people why you'd used them. Then I got asked to produce T*he Adventures of Black Beauty* which was a children's series which was done in conjunction with LWT. We found a farm down at Rickmansworth which was the most admirable location - it was very easy to get through from London and only three miles from Denham Studios

where we were processing. The catering company we used were based at Rickmansworth. The small house we used was of the right period which we could use both as offices and to film in and we had a vast amount of countryside so we spent two years there making 52 *Adventures of Black Beauty* which were very successful internationally, in fact have been repeated on box recently. It was a very agreeable series to make - it was terribly naive and innocent but that was its attraction and it communicated itself to the people working on it.

Alan Lawson: You were a great cricketer.

Sid Cole: Great lover of cricket, great cricketer isn't exactly right but its a game I enjoy enormously. I can't say I was personally any great shakes at it. But I loved the game.

Alan Lawson: But you played in the studio teams.

Sid Cole: Yes, at Ealing. We had a very good team at Ealing. Those were in the days when there was still continuous production at studios. At Ealing, for instance, there was continuous production under Balcon for about 15 years. We had a very good team. I was president so more often than not the captain had to put me in the 11. I remember a very exciting game. The Kinematograph Weekly used to donate a cup to be put up for competition amongst studio and laboratory teams and the Ealing Studios team got into the final once and we were playing a team from Western Electric, the sound system company, and it was very dramatic because the game ended in an absolute tie - we each scored 165 runs. The other thing with cricket was that one aspect of Michael Balcon was that he liked to be the local squire. He lived down in Sussex near East Grinstead and he was president of the local village team. We would usually go down once a summer and play a game there. It was the way cricket should be played - on a field high up and you could look over the Sussex Weald and there was trees and grass and it was rather marvellous.

Alan Lawson: Has there any trade union tradition in the family?

Sid Cole: No, not at all. As far as any impetus in that direction was concerned, it certainly came from spending three years at the London School of Economics which was regarded as a very left wing place indeed in those days. So at the LSE one absorbed all sorts of things. During the day you would study Karl Marx in the college and in the evening you'd go round the corner to what was then a big Stoll cinema and watch the Marx Brothers. Certainly through studying economics and sociology and things like that one began to understand something about trade unionism and what it meant.

Alan Lawson: How and when did you first get fist involved with the ACTT.

Sid Cole: I think it was Thorold who was largely responsible for setting the thing up. When I was working for him as an assistant he called me in, and that must have been about - very early on - ‘32, ‘33. Yes, ’33.

Alan Lawson: What are your recollections of those early days?

Sid Cole: In the early days I was on the committee - you were on the committee weren't you - you were treasurer. Were you at the famous meeting when we forced Cope’s resignation?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Sid Cole: I'll come back to the resignation meeting. In those years - I'll come back to the resignation meeting - there was a time when there was an Annual meeting when we still had very little money and I was asked to be in the chair at that and I was reading out the typewritten annual report because we certainly did not have enough money to get it printed. The thing with Cope was that we'd found out in some way Captain Cope, who was quite an agreeable person, I don't think he was in the strict sense dishonest, and somehow had got his personal accounts and the Association's account a little bit mixed up which caused things to be a little bit suspect. And if you remember at the meeting this question was raised and Matthew Cope said in that case all I can do is offer you my resignation and immediately someone, I think Neal Brown, said "Move accepted" and somebody else said "Second" and whoever was in the chair said we better put it to the vote - those in favour (motion approved). And his poor wife, who was quite a nice lady… Through the post came to me, I don't know why, some bank statements which I didn't have anything to do with, and I don't know if this was somebody tipping somebody on the committee off, and I don't know what I did but I must have raised it at some point and that must have contributed to it, but it came anonymously which made one raise one's eyebrows a little but there was something peculiar about these statements. I should explain for the benefit of people who are not as knowledgeable as we are that Cope had started the Association about 18 months before, 1933, and it hadn't worked terribly well up to that point simply because it was trying to be very respectable and just a sort of chartered organisation, not strictly a union. And after the resignation meeting we looked around and said "what do we do now?" and Thorold, who must have been very instrumental in all this, said not to worry I have somebody who might be able to take over the job and as far as I remember Ken Gordon and I went with Thorold across the road, we were meeting in The Intrepid Fox, I think - and he went across the road to another pub where there was this very young man sitting with a pint of beer sitting in front of him, waiting for us and the rest is history in the sense we said the job is yours if you want it - it's all in the article by George in the Cine Technician - we can give you £3 a week salary which we will guarantee £2 a week salary, the other £1 you will have to get out of the subscriptions you collect. And that was the take off of the ACTT.

Alan Lawson: Did you find recruiting difficult? Or didn't you go in for it?

Sid Cole: I don't know if I personally did an enormous amount of recruiting. There was the thing I mentioned in the FTT recently remembering Bert Craik in those days - and that would have been Arthur when you were at BIP - recruiting in the laboratory there and Bert was always very keen and I addressed a meeting down in the boiler room standing on a pile of coke and it got hotter and hotter as the meeting went on as we were right next to the boiler itself and addressing the laboratory staff and most of those joined. I think people were a little averse to it but more and more people realised it was important to get things like overtime and regulated hours and so on. After all if I remember rightly in the days of BIP in the early '30s, if you worked overtime you got half a crown supper money, you didn't get any overtime at all, 1s.6d, even less. And when you were working 18 hours straight through, 1s.6d isn't a great deal of money. It's always people join unions because its to their economic interest which is right and proper because that's what unions are about. And I think more and more the concept of a bigger trade union instead of a polite organised association became more and more real to them.

Alan Lawson: Something which disappointed me in 50th year publication was that there was no mention at all of Reg Bartlett who was our first organiser or Bert Craik. Can you tell us something about them?

Sid Cole: They both made enormous contributions, full of enthusiasm, full of the basic trade union principle. And as I said in the article Bert had the concept that the trade union is something to which you give and not just take things from and that's the meaning of a union and they both made an enormous contribution in the early days when every penny had to be struggled for, every member had to be struggled for. And we put up some interesting bluffs in those days about what we could do and couldn't do. Was it the time of Royal Cavalcade? Yes I think it was, we'd sent in the general heads an impossible agreement to the FBI (Federation of British Industries) film section as it was and had no reply and this jubilee thing was coming up and George intimated to the FBI film people that it was unlikely there would be newsreel coverage of this important event unless they agreed to meet us. Within 24 hours we were sitting round a table somewhere near Admiralty Arch where the FDI had their offices and everybody was there and I was there with George and we sat there and nobody said anything. George said isn't anyone going to say anything - we sent you a document and we came here expecting you would say something. Somebody started to open his mouth and the Chairman obviously kicked him hard under the table and they said nothing. And there was the Honourable Richard Norton, who was a nice bloke but looked like Captain Fowlenup in the Daily Mirror if you remember that cartoon and he used to go around holding his trousers up with what looked like a piece of window sash cord knotted in the front so there was this complete silence at the meeting for several minutes until finally there was a noise as Norton stood up, pushed his chair back and said I've never seen any reason not to talk with the properly elected representatives of the work people, good afternoon, and he went out the door and slammed the door leaving the whole of his side with egg on their face. It was a marvellous moment which one wishes one had recorded. We didn't get anywhere. We finally had to say “Well OK”. But that was one of the little incidents which broke the ice because after that they could never really totally refuse to meet us, particularly in view of Norton's attitude.

Alan Lawson: What was your first official union position?

Sid Cole: I suppose it was being on the executive committee which preceded the general council But: fairly early on I became one of several vice-presidents. Didn't we have 2 vice-presidents for each of the 3 sections, film, documentary and laboratory? And for many years, sometimes on, sometimes off, I was a vice president and chairman of the executive committee.

Alan Lawson: What do you think was your most successful achievement for the ACT?

Sid Cole: I suppose one makes a contribution by devoting a very large proportion of one's time and effort to an institution in which you believe because that in itself must be one hopes an encouragement to other people, in fact I'm sure it is, and I'm obviously not alone in that, I mean the number of people who did contribute an enormous amount of time to building and consolidating the union. It's like throwing a pebble into a pond - the rings that go out reach more and more people by impressing an example. I think another important thing was in the early days when we had a magazine, the Cine-Technician, and that was largely done by George Elvin, Ken Gordon and myself. For many issues we wrote practically all of it - we made it in its day quite an important journal. But I think the most important thing is what I said when starting that by example, by expressing belief in something you encourage more and more people to come into the union and working at it and so on.

Alan Lawson: Were you on any of the negotiating committees?

Sid Cole: Yes, I was on quite a number of them and in those days one had quite a good principle - I don't know if it still holds - if you were negotiating about a studio agreement or a laboratory agreement or a documentary agreement you didn't just have representatives of those particular sections. You always had people from other sections there to establish of a real, one union - anything which affected one section was bound to affect and be the concern of all other members - and I remember a. famous occasion at one of the early laboratory meetings where we were faced with a really Dickensian character called Mr Cash who was speaking on behalf of the lab employers' federation and I remember making a report on this that Mr Cash gave the impression of instead of this being 1944 or whatever he thought it was 1844 and trade unions were still illegal. He was saying things like you work people can have exactly what you want but you're not going to get it which was incredible that people talked that way. I was on innumerable negotiating committees. Oddly enough we met some opposition to this fellow Cash on the film negotiations. I can't remember his name but there was a very straightforward, again in a way a Victorian character but admirable Victorian character who used to lead the discussion for the film employers and he was a man we found we could trust totally. In other words if he heard a good argue put up by us in discussion around the table he would just say "I think that is very reasonable and fair what Mr Elvin and his colleagues just said, any dissent around the table?" and he would just shut it up. Equally he would say if he didn't agree. So you felt you were dealing with a kind of civilised person.

Alan Lawson: You were on the first deputation to the Ministry of Labour about foreign technicians?

Sid Cole: That was very early on. I remember going with Desmond Dickinson. Desmond talked in his Cockney way to to the Ministry of Labour people. We had to explain that the fact that an American film was a very successful film was a very good film did not necessarily mean that in this instance the lighting cameraman on it was outstanding and in this instance we quoted *Ruggles of Redgap* and Dickie was patiently explaining what he meant in his Dickinsonian way the importance of disregarding how successful a film was and that a film did not do very well might be brilliantly photographed and vice versa. Perhaps these days it needs explaining we were not being ultra nationalistic. In those days the tendency of the studio was if they wanted to aim at the international market, which basically meant they wanted to get into the United States, they would be able to do that by employing American technicians so all the most expensive and important films made in this country tended to be lit by imported American cameramen. We were just saying this was unfair how were British cameramen ever going to develop if you had this situation so eventually we got them to adopt a system of consultation and giving people a fair crack of the whip. And I think historically that would be separate item in itself to correlate the influence of the union in making these kind of approaches with the rise of a number of quite important British cameramen.

Alan Lawson: Is there any particular thing the ACTT might remember you for?

Sid Cole: What a question. I would like them to remember that for a brief period after George Elvin I was president and that I was president not just because they decided to elect me but because it was a climatic thing to forty odd years membership and working for the union.

Alan Lawson: How would you say the ACTT's standing was before the War?

Sid Cole: It was getting to be recognised. The War consolidated the position of the union because we were being very astutely led by George Elvin who rarely put a foot wrong. In fact we even

organised through the forces during the War and made sure people were still looked after and members of the ACTT. Together with the general post-war feeling which was one of here we go into a new world and that new world included new legislation, included the power of the trade unions so that the ACT benefitted from that and after the war we were able to establish closed shop agreements and the five day working week, etc. Reverting to *Jamaica Inn* for a moment which I was asked to work on briefly. I was asked to go and see Eric Pommer, the producer, in his Mayfair office, and although the Union hadn't got any studio agreements most of the editors had got together and said we think we shouldn't work for under £20 a week which was the going rate. Pommer asked me to work three weeks on *Jamaica Inn*, he told me what was involved and when he would like me to start. Then he said "What about money how much?" and I said £20 and he said too much. But surely I said the production is quite an expensive production and 3 weeks at £20 isn't going to make that much difference to you and he said every penny counts. I said in any case I can't accept less because all the editors got together and we decided the real rate we should work for was not less than £20 and he said I can accept that and he pressed a button and said on an intercom I've just engaged Mr Cole for £20 a week starting on Monday. I think in a way that was a tribute to the union though there wasn't an official union. It was accepting the sort of power joint action can have. He would likely have got me for £15. It was a demonstration of the growing influence the union directly or indirectly had.

Alan Lawson: Let's talk about George Elvin.

Sid Cole: A great man. George was someone who had a very happy life because apart from this drive he had, for something he believed in, it was not just a career to him, it was a vocation being secretary, he enjoyed the prestige which went with it, the fact that he was the youngest general secretary. He came from a family that had a trade union and political background. But above all, he was a man of very decided principles which he never let down. Also his great quality was that he really enjoyed life - a lot of people can be left and very devoted but very miserable sods in their social life. George was great. He loved all sport. You know the famous story about him that wanted his ashes to be buried under the goalpost at Wembley in the year Southend United won the Cup. He liked to have a drink. He liked to play golf. He loved cricket. I used to see a lot of him because I was a member of Surrey and he was a member of Essex and I used to go down when Surrey was playing Essex to one of the very nice cricket grounds which Essex has, Colchester or Chelmsford, and he would come up to the Oval and we would have a nice meal and a few drinks and enjoy ourselves. So he was a pretty all round kind of human being. I'll tell a story which shows a little weakness in George about social life. George was driving me down to Southend to watch a game of cricket and he'd arranged to meet Peggy his wife on route. So we arrived and Peggy was already there and this pub had a bar skittles table and George said let's have a go at that and he said you'll play me and the winner will play Peggy, so I said OK by me. And George always liked to win. To my intense surprise and George's intense mortification I won. So then I had to play Peggy. So then what George found totally humiliating was that I played Peggy and Peggy beat me. The great disappointment in George' s life was that he was never on the TUC General Council and he should have been. That was because in George's day the TUC was very right wing and George was considered left wing as indeed the union was. And of course, the fact that there were Ivor Montagu and Ralph Bond and myself and a few other people like Alan Lawson and Arthur Graham around might have had something to do with the impression that the union was a little bit left. Certainly that got in the way of George getting onto the TUC.

Alan Lawson: Do you think the ACTT has played a useful role in shaping the industry since the War?

Sid Cole: Yes I think it has. It gets difficult to define - you start by asking what industry are we talking about? The feature film industry as such can hardly be said to exist in any rounded kind of way. It's mainly television and my impression is that a lot of people in television need to know more about the background of the union than they do at the moment because they've come into a different kind of world from that which we older people in the Union lived in and worked for the Union in. But I think it's done a great deal, particularly in television. The fact that we did eventually decide to organise television is very important because if we had not organised on television the Union as a union would have found it very difficult to go on existing in view of what has happened in the field of feature filmmaking in the last few years. It's historically interesting that when commercial television came in there was quite a debate as to whether we should try and organise in commercial television or not. There was a great deal of opposition to it including I remember Charlie Wheeler and people like that who were totally against our recruiting. They had a kind of logical position in a way which was that the Union originally had opposed the introduction of commercial television. But once it became an inescapable fact there didn't seem to be any practical reason for not organising in it. So that in itself was a very important decision which has exercised a large amount of control over television because it enabled us as a union to say again about quota, it put us in position to negotiate with the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the individual programme companies about the degree of non British programme material which was shown. They're always evading it now but at least it gave us a right to speak about this or any other issue. Whereas if we hadn't organised in commercial television we wouldn't have been anywhere. I suppose the ABS would have come in on it but in those days the ABS was hardly what you would call a trade union. In the BBC we never got anywhere. We had members there but the BBC would never really acknowledge this gave us any rights and I remember a famous meeting where was a letter from the Director General or the Assistant Director General saying that if we could show we had a majority in any department of members, then they could recognise us and we could prove this in the camera department and nothing happened and they refused to acknowledge this. And I remember going with George and Anthony to meet the deputy Director General and our complaining about this and Anthony who could be very aggressive in his effective upper-class way saying but you lied when you wrote the original letter didn't you, come on admit it. This was in the sacred precincts of Broadcasting House in an enormous big official room. It was great and that even didn't get us anywhere. Organisations like that are quite impervious.

Alan Lawson: Do you think at any trade union activities blighted your career?

Sid Cole: Strangely enough I don't think so. I've sometimes been tempted to think the opposite.. I hope I don't sound arrogant but a lot, not everything, depends on how good a technician you are. I pride myself on thinking I was a pretty good editor so that helps always if you're active as a union assistant. But take Ealing in a strange way I think Balcon was probably pleased at having on his staff somebody who was vice-president of the union. It was a connection and once or twice he did talk privately to me about things and he would ask me what are we going to do about this and what are we going to do about that. 'There's always been a lot of that sort of thing going on. No, I don't think it really did me any harm. Perhaps I was just lucky.

Alan Lawson: Over the years of your career you've played many roles both artistically and from the ACTT point of view. Which role do you enjoy most or are they inseparable?

Sid Cole: I think they are inseparable because after all I wouldn't have held office in the union if I hadn't been working in the industry. And again the two things were interconnected - probably when I got voted into office it was partly because of spending time and effort working for the union but also because of my standing as a technician. It's a mixture of things. I'm immensely proud of having been president of the union for a brief while and very proud of being an honorary member of the union. I 'm very proud of various films I worked on in some capacity or other when I feel I've done a good job on them, films like *Dead of Night*, *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Man in the White Suit* which I've hardly mentioned which in many ways is an amazingly interesting film. It's all a unity. One looks back and one's had a quite an adventurous, exciting, awful, penniless, interesting vocation to spend one's years on.

Alan Lawson: If you had the ability to start all over again would you change course?

Sid Cole: The only thing I might try to do a little differently. Like everybody when they came into the industry, practically everybody wanted to be a director. I've never directed a complete feature film. I did one section in a feature called *Train of Events*, a multi-part film which I enjoyed. I would like to have gone on. Balcon at the time said he quite liked it and it got quite good notices but you're more important as an associate director. And I suppose in that sense I settled for the money. I'd like to have done more directing. I've done a lot of second unit directing. But otherwise I wouldn't change. I love theatre. I love films. Oddly enough in a way I like going to theatre more than going to a film. But that might be because I've seen so many films and worked on so many films. At one time as a young man I wanted to become an actor. Thank god I never became an actor. I wouldn't have been a very good actor. You need to have an awful resilience and ability, sitting by the telephone and all that bit. I'd rather be the one at the other end of the telephone, ringing up the desperate actor. So the answer is in general I wouldn't want to change - I might want to change in detail e I might like to have worked on cameras which I never really did. It would have been nice to have gone round and worked on everything. But I enormously enjoyed editing - I still enjoy the editing process very much indeed on any film I work on in any capacity because in a way that is where the final magic is, the way that the thing goes together and the way you put things on it, that's great.