

Eric Cross (Lighting Cameraman – DOP) Career in film industry: 1926 to (circa) 1962

Credits include: Christmas Under Fire (1941) First Of the Few (1943) Chance Of a Lifetime (1950) The White Sheik (1952) The Kidnappers (1953) The One That Got Away (1957)

Biography: Born in 1902, had a fragmented education in various grammar schools, lived in Twickenham. Apprentice in engineering at George Kent from Luton. Then did a photography course at St Albans. Went to Twickenham Studios in 1926 and spoke with the Still Man Eric Grey and got a job as still camera assistant. Started on £2. 10d. This was a good living wage. The company moved to Elstree BRP Studios and he became HOD of still department. Moved to Clapham studios, then to ASFI, Associated Sound Film Industries at Wembley studios where he became a camera operator from 1928-1933 making quota quickies for Paramount. He worked as second unit lighting cameraman (cinematographer) and went freelance doing Second Unit work across the studios until 1939. Then worked with The Crown Film Unit during after the war at Pinewood. He was active in the ACT from the early days of Captain Cope who he would smuggle into Wembley Studios. Says there was opposition from management to trade union recruitment.

Summary: Eric Cross had a very interesting career, however the interview is lacking detail and it is unclear if the transcript is completed or if the recording just stopped abruptly. There is however some interesting information on various camera and sound technology in the early period of the Studio System and some information on some small production companies at studios like Twickenham and Wembley in the 1930s. [Will Atkinson]

BECTU History Project - Interview no. 1

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Interviewer: Arthur Graham

Date of Interview: 6 March 1987

Interview length (mins): 1.25

[WA note: There might be a second interview with Eric Cross]

Arthur Graham: Eric Cross, Lighting Cameraman. Eric where were you born and when?

Eric Cross: Finchley, 31 May 1902.

Arthur Graham: What kind of schooling did you receive?

Eric Cross: Pretty rough, I went to about three or four grammar schools. It was during the First World War so the teachers we had were all people who weren't at the front, you know and I was going from one school to the other because my father was moving around a lot and they were always doing something totally different when I got to the next school. So I had gaps in my education.

Arthur Graham: I see. When did you enter the industry?

Eric Cross: 1926.

Arthur Graham: What made you decide to go into the industry rather than anything else?

Eric Cross: Well, it was impossible to continue the job when the strike was on - the General Strike - so my Mother was living at Twickenham at the time and I wandered round looking at various things and I saw some people on location outside Twickenham Studios. It was Herbert Wilcox and an American cameraman called Roy Overbull, who I've never heard of since - a very nice fellow he was, and Eric Grey was the Still man and I got talking with him and he said would you come and help me do some developing and printing and take a few stills, so I said yes and that was it.

Arthur Graham: So you entered the industry as a Still man. Had you done any other work before you came into the industry?

Eric Cross: Yes, I started as an apprentice in engineering at George Kent from Luton but that strike closed down, then I went to do photography at St Albans and that's about it, I think.

Arthur Graham: So when you went into the industry you had already had some photographic experience?

Eric Cross: Oh yes.

Arthur Graham: What kind of reaction did you get from your parents on you going into the film industry?

Eric Cross: They didn't worry about it at all. My father by that time was in Canada anyway, so it was only my mother that was interested in it.

Arthur Graham: I see, your family didn't have any connection with the theatre or the cinema or anything like that?

Eric Cross: None whatever.

Arthur Graham: Where were you living at that time? How did you get to and from work?

Eric Cross: I was living with my mother at St Margaret's and I just walked up the road.

Arthur Graham: To the Twickenham Studios?

Eric Cross: Yes.

Arthur Graham: What wages did you get?

Eric Cross: Two pounds ten, I think it was to start with.

Arthur Graham: It wasn't too bad was it.

Eric Cross: Not too bad, no.

Arthur Graham: What was the working day and week at that time?

Eric Cross: Well we'd start at any time in the morning which the Director felt like, you know, and we'd go on to any hour at night.

Arthur Graham: When you say start at any time in the morning, what would that be, half past eight?

Eric Cross: About half past eight.

Arthur Graham: And the Director would then decide...

Eric Cross: We sometimes slept on the cameraman's bench. After we'd been working very late, we didn't go home.

Arthur Graham: I see, was there a sort of average time that you might of finished, say about seven o'clock?

Eric Cross: Yes, about half seven.

Arthur Graham: What exactly was your job and what were it's duties?

Eric Cross: Well, I started as assistant to Eric Grey and then we moved over to Elstree and he left and I was in charge of the Still Department.

Arthur Graham: When you say Elstree is that the..

Eric Cross: BRP

Arthur Graham: BRP Studios. What in general were working conditions like?

Eric Cross: Well, it was pretty much the same as at Twickenham really. We worked all hours, especially with a director called Dupont, who made the first Moulin Rouge and he wouldn't start directing until about eleven o'clock, you see, because he wasn't inspired by then and of course we had been there since half past eight and we'd work on all night almost.

Arthur Graham: Yes. Well now Eric, could you give us a run down of your career and your general progress in the industry, an outline. The positions you've held and the types of films you've made, just to give us a framework...

Eric Cross: I've been a jack of all trades, I'm afraid. When Frank Bright said he was going over to DeForest ... Films at Clapham, he said would I go with him as a Cameraman so I ditched the Still Dept and went with him. And everyone said sound films would never come to anything and I was mad. Anyway, we had a small studio at Clapham Common and a booth, with a flexible drive which used to get jammed and wound round your neck occasionally. And we did mainly variety turns, like Albert Wheelan and George Robey etc. And that's about that I think. Then, of course,...

Arthur Graham: Where did you go to from there?

Eric Cross: From there, I went to Wembley.

Arthur Graham: That was the Fox Studio?

Eric Cross: No, it was ASFI, Associated Sound Film Industries, which was largely had a lot of Dutch connections I think, with a chap called Van Doyn, who was a studio manager, and they didn't know whether to have Clang Film Togus or their own system, their own sound system.

Arthur Graham: You went there actually as a Cameraman?

Eric Cross: Yes, an operator, I did all the Paramount quickies and every time I thought I was going to get a film they'd import a German or a French cameraman, or an American Cameraman, we were never considered good enough to take on a real film! We had Kurt Korer and Gunther Granth and of course dear old George Perimount.

Arthur Graham: Just going back to the Clapham Common Studio, can you remember what happened to the studio, did it go on after you left, or did it...

Eric Cross: No, no it closed down.

Arthur Graham: You were at the Wembley Studios, and how long did you stay there?

Eric Cross: About four years.

Arthur Graham: And what dates was that?

Eric Cross: Oh, the end of 1928 to about '33 or '34.

Arthur Graham: And where did you go then?

Eric Cross: I freelanced and went everywhere, I worked in every studio in the country, I suppose. Ealing a lot. A lot of second unit stuff at Ealing.

Arthur Graham: By this time you were a Lighting Cameraman?

Eric Cross: Oh yes. I was lighting at Wembley.

Arthur Graham: Oh, from the way you spoke I thought perhaps you had not had the opportunity.

Eric Cross: I operated at Wembley when any big film came along, operated the second unit.

Arthur Graham: And you continued freelancing for how long?

Eric Cross: Years, I can't remember, until I went to Denham.

Arthur Graham: Which was when?

Eric Cross: The beginning of the war I suppose.

Arthur Graham: How did the war affect you. What kind of influence did it have on your career.

Eric Cross: Well before I went to Denham, I was in the Crown Film Unit. We did things like *Christmas Under Fire* with Humphrey Jennings and various things. We went up to Coventry in the middle of the blitz saying thank goodness to get out of London for a night and have a nice quiet night's rest. Terry Carrick and I were almost bombed out there.

Arthur Graham: And did you stay at Denham for the duration of the war once you'd got there?

Eric Cross: Pretty well yes.

Arthur Graham: And after the war was over, what happened?

Eric Cross: Well, I was still freelancing, mainly at Pinewood. I freelanced, let me see know, I joined This Modern Age for a while, Rank's *This Modern Age*, which was a sort of magazine programme.

Arthur Graham: During the war period and slightly towards the latter part of it some of the, er, this was one of the boom times for the British film industry, have you any recollections of any well-known films that you might have worked on or directors that you might have worked with?

Eric Cross: Well I did second unit on *First of the Few* and did all the flying and that. And I did about four films with Geoffrey Dell, *Don't take it to Heart*, *Flemish Farm* which was about the Belgian Airforce, two or three Rank religious films with Norman Walker,... I can't remember.

Arthur Graham: No well, we were just wondering. You worked with *This Modern Age*. That was quite a success for several years wasn't it?

Eric Cross: Was for a while yes.

Arthur Graham: How long were you with them?

Eric Cross: About two years I think, until Bernard Miles wanted me to do a film called *Tawny Pippet* and *Chance of a Lifetime*.

Arthur Graham: And you worked on those two films.

Eric Cross: I worked on those two yes.

Arthur Graham: And then were did you go after that? What other films did you work on after *Tawny Pippet*?

Eric Cross: *The Kidnappers* with Phil Leacock directing and that was submitted by Pinewood as, for the Academy Awards, but it didn't get it of course, because there were things like *On the Waterfront* which won it that year. I did *Hunted* at Pinewood with Dirk Bogarde.

Arthur Graham: How long did you stay at Pinewood?

Eric Cross: Oh on and off, for about three years. I can't really remember.

Arthur Graham: This was the period when the industry was doing quite well, wasn't it.

Eric Cross: Our memory at 85 isn't as good as...

Arthur Graham: You did some films up at Beaconsfield I believe. Is that right?

Eric Cross: Yes. *One That Got Away* was mainly Beaconsfield, I think.

Arthur Graham: Was that the one with John Mills' daughter?

Eric Cross: No, it was Hardy Kruger. No I've got it wrong - scrub that bit out! The one at Beaconsfield was with John Mills' daughter. Do you want to record that again?

Arthur Graham: No

Eric Cross: What was that called?

Arthur Graham: The name escapes me but I remember it was very well received.

Eric Cross: *Tiger Bay*. And the one with Hardy Kruger was made at Pinewood, which was *The One That Got Away* which was about the German aviator, Von Verer who escaped, a German POW we had that escaped. That was made at Pinewood and on location.

Arthur Graham: To go back again Eric, what were production techniques like in the early days and how did they change over a period of time?

Eric Cross: You're going back to the silent days now are you?

Arthur Graham: Well, as far as you can recollect.

Eric Cross: Well, we had a three piece orchestra on the set, of course, and mercury vapour banks lighting the.., they were the main philly light - enormous great cumbersome things they were too. And of course the dialogue was anything but what was going on in the action. And of course we were using Ortho film, then we had Panchromatic coming in, and then finally when we got to Wembley we had this awful grey back which we could hardly see through the super... when you were operating. The equipment changed considerably - I remember Gunther Kranth when he came to Wembley had all our lamps thrown out and said he was only going to use German lamps, we had to re-equip the studio because he said "this isn't going to work for me, I'm going sleeping"!

Arthur Graham: Why did he object to the lighting that was there?

Eric Cross: They had very black centres, and those that didn't have black centres had hard centres, you know, we used to make donuts in the lamps to compensate for that a bit. But his from Germany weren't much better and Weinharts they were, they weren't much better. And he was a great open arc man, we mostly suffered from arc eyes, because he used to love having open arcs on the backing. It wasn't very happy.

Arthur Graham: What were the studios, the actual buildings like, in which you worked and the sort of general layout of them.

Eric Cross: Well, when I went from Twickenham to Elstree it was wonderful. You walked down this muddy road which was Borehamwood, that the contractors lorries had churned up, but it was a beautiful studio, all the floors were snowy white and it smelt of new wood and it seemed vast, the stages seemed vast then to me, but it was very good there, the studio was very well built, very well designed.

Arthur Graham: This was still in the silent days?

Eric Cross: Oh yes.

Arthur Graham: What happened when sound came?

Eric Cross: Well at VIP we had some German technicians came over, and they all wanted us to wear white overalls and they proceeded to clap their hands and the electricians in the gallery would make an echo come back which rather confused the technicians.

Arthur Graham: In the early days, did you do much location work?

Eric Cross: A fair amount yes. I went with Jack Cox to Morocco on my first location on a thing called *The White Sheik* with Jameson Thomas and Julie Swader was the girl, one of the girls and who was the other one, the star, I forget, I can see her face but... And we had two cameramen, we had Rene Guissard and they used to rather be against each other, you know, there were two first cameramen and Rene Guissard had a very nice Bell and Howell and Jack Cox had a weird camera called a Willard which was an American sort of sewing machine with wooden boxes on top and I had been used to carrying Guissard's Bell and Howell about by the magazines, you

know, and I picked up Jack's camera and the screws immediately came out of the two wooden magazines and I was left holding the magazine with a big loop of film. But we managed to put that together in Morocco.

Arthur Graham: You're talking about cameras. How did the cameras develop over the years. They must have altered quite a bit with the coming of sound.

Eric Cross: Oh yes, I means Jack's Willard had a handle on the back and we used to judge its exposure through the film and when he went over to a Bell and Howell he used to have a special little viewer with a piece of film in it which judged the exposure. And then we went to the at Wembley and we had a lot of jamming troubles with that until Sid Howell invented what he would call the mechanical fuse which was a matchstick in the drive and that used to break occasionally too so we had to take the camera out of the blimp and fit the mechanical fuse back again.

Arthur Graham: Noise must have been a problem in the early days with the camera equipment?

Eric Cross: Oh it was, yes of course in the early days we were in a booth, shut inside and sometimes when we wanted to communicate with somebody outside you found the inside handles were missing and you were left fuming inside!

Arthur Graham: How long did this kind of thing last, the use of booths?

Eric Cross: Oh about two years I should think, about two years.

Arthur Graham: And you were talking about Jack Cox getting his exposure - can you remember when people started to use exposure meters?

Eric Cross: I think it was at Denham and you thought it was rather infra dig - I used to hide the exposure meter - you felt that someone might think you didn't know the light or how to light without it. I remember my meter which was the first meter I had was an industrial thing and the level on the stars face was where it said rough work and she saw it and said well that's fine! Rought work was just about the right density!

Arthur Graham: Prior to the use of meters how did cameramen estimate an exposure?

Eric Cross: Just by eye. I know one cameraman whose name I can't remember, I only saw him for one day, he got me to measure each lamp, the distance from each lamp with the tape. He lived at Bushey but he was the leading cameraman at that time, he only lasted one day with Hitchcock because Hitchcock wanted to pan a little and he started winding the camera round and this chap came along and took the handles off and said "you don't see the pictures on the wall moving around" (laughs), so he didn't last long but he was the leading cameraman at that time but I never knew him.

Arthur Graham: What Hitchcock film was that, can you remember?

Eric Cross: *The Ring* with Carl Britain and Lillian Hall Davies was the girl.

Arthur Graham: Was that made at Elstree?

Eric Cross: Yes. That was I think, about the first picture made there.

Arthur Graham: What changes would have taken place in lighting techniques since the early days?

Eric Cross: Well, apart from the mercury vapour which was the standard filler light, Moles of course made a big difference, Mole Richardson lamps were a big advance on anything we had had before and nowadays of course it seem to be all reflected light and highly diffused.

Arthur Graham: Do you think that the modern technique would have been suitable for black and white in the old days?

Eric Cross: Oh yes, except people expected a bit more contrast, I think, in the lighting then than we get now. Back lighting was very popular.

Arthur Graham: Can you remember when back projection techniques came in.

Eric Cross: Yes the first back projection was on a thing called *Wedding Rehearsal* that Korda did, that I remember, at Wembley. Kurt Korant had a small back projection screen and we had a exterior at sea and that was the first back projection I ever saw. That was about 1929 I suppose.

Arthur Graham: *Wedding Rehearsal* was one of Korda's early films.

Eric Cross: I'm not sure it wasn't his first in this country. Then he went to B&D.

Arthur Graham: What changes have taken place in crews over the years?

Eric Cross: Well the cameraman did his own operating of course in the early days and we just had one assistant who used to load and follow focus. There were only two of us, and then when sound came in we had an operator and a loader and clapper boy and all the rest of it.

Arthur Graham: Has that altered much over the years, the crew of that size?

Eric Cross: Not since then, I think its the same now, as far as I know. The camera assistant, follow focus and clapper boy. At one time they brought in a central loading system where one chap loaded for all of the productions that were on.

Arthur Graham: You have a member of the crew nowadays I suppose who is referred to as the grip.

Eric Cross: The grip. We never had anybody like that, we had to carry our own cameras in the early days. The assistant and the cameraman carried the camera even on location.

Arthur Graham: Now you refer to various films that you've worked on - did you work on any of the quota quickies?

Eric Cross: Oh yes. I worked a lot on the Paramount quota quickies. We made too numerous to mention. I don't think they were ever shown - they used to put them on in the early morning and nobody was in the cinema. By law they had to show them. One or two were quite successful - one or two of the Adrian Brunel were fairly successful.

Arthur Graham: What were the working conditions like on these particular films?

Eric Cross: Oh pretty well rush and tear. As we were making them for a pound a foot we couldn't spend much time on them. We enjoyed them, we enjoyed making them, it was work.

Arthur Graham: How did the quickies differ from the modern day TV series in the way they make them. Have you any idea?

Eric Cross: I've never worked on a series, I don't know. I made about four pictures for television in Germany, in Hamburg and Berlin but they were made under ordinary feature picture conditions.

Arthur Graham: What cameramen with whom you worked gave you the greatest assistance and help would you say?

Eric Cross: Well, I think Jack Cox really. Although he was an early cameraman he was very efficient, I learn't quite a lot from him. And George Perimount. Apart from that I can't think of anyone else.

END OF SIDE ONE

Arthur Graham: Earlier on you mentioned the Clapham studios and the DeForest Sound system, can you tell us how the sound systems worked in those days?

Eric Cross: Yes, it was early sound on film, variable density, and we had great trouble with the

wow on piano music. And we had a boffin who was named Crowther who invented a spin wheel as we called it which is a fly wheel the film went round and that evened out the transmission of the camera intermittent mechanism to the sound film and it was all taken on the one film and the sound was recorded in the camera in those days. Now of course its on a separate film, or tape. That's about all I think. The microphones, of course, were very inefficient. They were carbon mikes and every now and then they had to come out with a mallet and hit it to shake the carbon down and they were very big things and they wanted them within about a foot of the artists head, which created a bit of difficulty with mike shadows.

Arthur Graham: You've named various directors with whom you've worked. Were there any that had any particular great impression on you and if so what?

Eric Cross: Well, Tommy Bentley was the one I first remember who had a wonderful system that he called his eye - he had two eyes on a v-stick which the artists had to look at to... he also wore a yachting cap always. The all had their idiosyncrasies. Sinclair Hill I remember, who was at Wembley for some time always would wear a very old yellow pullover, he wouldn't direct without it.

Arthur Graham: Were there any whose brilliance or artistic style particularly impressed you.

Eric Cross: Well, J Lee Thompson I think was the most efficient director I worked with. He knew exactly what he wanted and could convey his ideas to you. Some of the early ones who directed quota quickies left a lot to be desired sometimes!

Arthur Graham: Have you ever worked on TV commercials or cinema advertisements?

Eric Cross: Yes in the very early days I was on three or four. One cat food I remember when the cats wouldn't look at their cat food so the propman went across to the pub and brought back some smoked salmon sandwiches and they took the smoked salmon out and hid it behind the cat food and the cats went for it which wouldn't be allowed these days of course. And on soap powder adverts we used to have a white shirt and a very dirty grey one and there was a contrast between what the powder would do and what the other, brand X would do.

Arthur Graham: Of course, TV commercials are very very elaborate and very expensive these days. How would you say they compare with those of the early days?

Eric Cross: Oh they were very cheaply done in the early days. We only spent about a morning on some of them whereas now I understand it goes on for days.

Arthur Graham: How did you first get involved with the ACTT and who recruited you?

Eric Cross: Oh I met a Captain Cope who started the thing I believe. Well I had never heard of anything before and I went home with him once or twice and he was not very healthy financially. I remember he always wanted a shilling or two for the gas. We just managed to...and I had to smuggle him through the back camera-room window at Wembley as he wasn't very welcome in the studio. We smuggled him out again. I remember early days of meetings in a pub in Whitcomb Street, I think it was called The Bat and Ball or Racquet and something, in Whitcomb Street in London. Anyway we went upstairs, to a little room upstairs. Do you remember that Alan?

Alan Lawson: Yes, I do.

Arthur Graham: What do you think the Association's standing was up until the War?

Eric Cross: Very good, I think. I think it was really useful for everybody.

Arthur Graham: Did you find recruiting for it difficult or didn't you go in for active recruiting of other people?

Eric Cross: In the early days it was difficult, yes, in the early days it was a bit tricky because most managers looked rather[??] at it.

Arthur Graham: Did you ever run into any trouble because of this?

Eric Cross: Not really, no. Not really real trouble.

Arthur Graham: Have you ever held any official positions in the Association?

Eric Cross: No. I made one film for the... in very dull period, made one film for the ACTT which I was very glad to have because it tided me over a rather poverty stricken time!

Arthur Graham: Which film was that?

Eric Cross: I can't remember, there was a court scene in it and that's all I can remember of it. It was made at Walton on Thames.

Arthur Graham: What do you think is the future of the Association and the film medium in general?

Eric Cross: Well, film seems to be very much in a decline at the moment but television will go on and that will be the main thing I suppose. It will all be tape.

Arthur Graham: And do you think the Association has got a future in this.

Eric Cross: Well I hope so, I'm really out of touch with it at the moment, out of touch with all film production and TV.

Arthur Graham: Do you think the Association played a useful role in the shaping of the industry in general?

Eric Cross: Oh yes, yes. I think we would have been a lot worse off without it.

Arthur Graham: Eric going back to the development of techniques and so on in the industry, how have the sort of artistic side of camerawork, how has that changed over the years, soft focus, gauze and so on.

Eric Cross: Well, I remember at Elstree we had Pan Tucker lenses which had a soft focus attachment you could unscrew the back combination and make a soft focus lens out of it, which was very tricky for the focus port and there were about 1.8 which was a very high, you know, very fast lens for those days. And also all cameramen, most cameramen, used gauzes and edged gauzes, they burnt them out with a cigarette and one of the chief exponents of this method was Kurt Korant. I remember working on a Gloria Swanson picture at Ealing when Sid Howell was my assistant, I was operating, and Kurt had a different size gauze for every lens, you know, and quite a combination of gauzes which he burnt out with a cigarette and on one occasion Kurt looked into the front of a camera after a shot and he saw that the wrong gauze was in and he said to Sid Howell "the Cache is in", of course he spoke French mostly and he called the gauzes a Chache and Sid Howell thought he was referring to the wages coming down so Sid said "Yes, right in, yes" (laughs) and he said "is right in?" "Yes" and he flew up in the air. It caused a great commotion. We had to retake everything.

Arthur Graham: You say gauzes, what were the gauzes made of?

Eric Cross: Almost anything, from chiffon to silk stockings, anything that the cameraman took a fancy to. And various colours too, sometimes blue, sometimes red, mostly black. And coarse and fine. Oh there were a great variety.

Arthur Graham: What were the film stocks like in those days?

Eric Cross: Very slow and a lot of chromatic was very hard on blue eyes, of course, they became very light.

Arthur Graham: Can you remember anything about the type of makeup the artists used to have

to put on?

Eric Cross: Yes it was pretty heavy and yellowish as far as I remember. I can't really remember now.

Arthur Graham: This was for the orthochromatic film?

Eric Cross: For Ortho yes.

Arthur Graham: And what about when Pan film came in.

Eric Cross: When Pan came it was much more natural. It was, pan makeup and fairly thin and natural. And they had various numbers which I forget now.

Arthur Graham: Did everyone have to wear makeup?

Eric Cross: Not everyone no. All the women wore makeup but men sometimes didn't.

Arthur Graham: Were there any special lenses that you used from time to time for any particular effects?

Eric Cross: Yes, some of the early lenses when Panchromatic came in were not red sensitive, the wavelength was not correct, they were not corrected for pan. So we had great trouble with the focus sometimes.

Arthur Graham: Nowadays and for many years, camera movement has been the great thing in film making. Can you remember when dollies were first used in the studios.

Eric Cross: The first I saw was at Wembley when the German cameramen came over and they had what they called UFA dolly, which had sort of bicycle wheels on which we wheeled all round, and we used to construct ramps for this thing to go down. It was a pretty cumbersome thing and of course the blimps in those days with the was a very awkward thing. And sometimes you almost broke your neck, keeping your eye to the eye piece and craning round the dolly.

Arthur Graham: And when was the first time you had any experience with crane sharks.

Eric Cross: At Wembley on the Korda picture, which was "Wedding Rehearsal". We had a crane wheeled in. That was the first time I remember one.

Arthur Graham: Of course, zoom lenses didn't come in until after the War. Did you have any experience with those?

Eric Cross: Oh yes. We had none until after the war. I can't remember anything very tricky about them. Except when you zoomed in you had to have the exposure on the close shot which might be very different from the long shot.

Arthur Graham: Eric, in the old days, a lot of exteriors were shot in the studio, under studio conditions. Did you get involved in any films being shot on location for any great extent?

Eric Cross: Yes, I think the earliest one that was shot on location even before Hollywood did, was a picture that Rank, Rank's first picture, which was a thing called "Three Fevers" which we made at Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay. We had I think it was Western Electric portable, it was supposed to be portable sound, but it weighed about three tons, and I forget the cameraman's name, a very nice fellow, but it got Hollywood quite worried, I remember, we got reports back that they were quite impressed with this film.

Arthur Graham: You called it the "Three Fevers".

Eric Cross: I think it was called "Three Fevers" yes. That was the original book anyway.

Arthur Graham: Ah. This based on an original script or book?

Eric Cross: Original book, yes, "Three Fevers" written by Ian Walmsley who lived in Robin Hood's Bay. It was all about lobster fishing and the dangers of fishing at that time.

Arthur Graham: Did it go out under that title?

Eric Cross: It went out on, oh what was the name of the thing, "Three Fevers" was the book and "Turn of the Tide" was the title of the film.

Arthur Graham: Talking of exterior films and so on, you said that you've made documentaries, what was the difference between shooting and documentary and shooting a feature film, would you say?

Eric Cross: I think apart from on the feature film you had more facilities and more equipment, oh in the early days with Crown Film Unit I was called down to their studio at Blackheath, I got the electricians to put the lights round the top of the set and there was a lot of muttering behind me and they called me over and said "Eric the light doesn't come from up there, we've never had lamps at the top of set like that". I said that's the way I always have them, but they wouldn't believe it until they saw the results (laughs), and they also said afterwards "How is it that you feature cameraman can work on documentaries because the technique is so different" and I said I don't see any difference at all.

Arthur Graham: What type of cameras did you tend to use on documentary?

Eric Cross: Oh mostly on exterior we had Newman Sinclair mostly. In the studio I think we had Vintens. Vinten was the most used with the Crown Film Unit.

Arthur Graham: What was the advantage of a Newman Sinclair?

Eric Cross: It was portable, didn't require batteries as it was spring driven. It was very good camera, very steady mechanism. It was quite handy.

Arthur Graham: Did you in the latter phases of your career get involved in any kind of 16mm production at any time?

Eric Cross: I can't remember, yes when I finished up with the Crown, not the Crown, the American golf thing for Shell, they went over from 35 to 16mm and we shot the last three years on 16mm.

Arthur Graham: Why wasn't it used earlier?

Eric Cross: They didn't think the quality was good enough for American television except on 35mm and eventually they owing to the portability of 16mm and the quality was quite good we had 16mm Arris, Arriflexes.