# BECTU History Project - Interview No. 13



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Interviewer: Roy Fowler

Interviewee: Peter Tanner, Editor

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

**Roy Fowler:** Peter when and where were you born.
**Peter Tanner:** I'm not going to tell you when, but I'll tell you where, it might be bad for my future job
**Roy Fowler:** It's the first time we've encountered such reticence.
**Peter Tanner:** Let's say it was in the very early 20s and it was in Tilford, Surrey.
**Roy Fowler:** You were in a family which had connections with the film or entertainment business.
**Peter Tanner:** None, my father died when I was very young and I was the only child and my mother had to bring me up which was quite a struggle and, as I answered in your questionnaire, I was able to go to public school where I had distinguished companions such as Peter Ustinov and Mr Benn although he was after me. My grandfather was a house master there and my father was also there and my uncle was a senior history master. So my mother being a widow was able to arrange a much reduced fee. Of course it was a sophisticated school and we had very interesting people to talk to us, I'm talking about the early 30s. We even had Gandhi himself who came to address the whole school which made a tremendous impression on me at the time.
**Roy Fowler:** In your subsequent career you did not opt for the academic, teaching life
**Peter Tanner:** It was, Westminster is a literary school and one for languages, Greek and Latin are essential subjects there but I did for a literary life, I always wanted to write as a matter of fact. When I left school I did submit articles to local papers, some of which were accepted, some of which were not.
**Roy Fowler:** What sort of subjects were you writing on.
**Peter Tanner:** Country subjects because we lived in Sussex, near Grinstead and they were to do with the country seasons. I did do one or two criticisms of local dramatic society's productions.
**Roy Fowler:** Is writing an interest which continued.
**Peter Tanner:** It continued, as well as being interested in film, I'm also interested in music, particularly jazz, and I've been writing on that subject for many many years. So I did keep up my writing. That's my hobby out of which I make a little money out of but obviously not very much. So I did continue the writing.
**Roy Fowler:** From Westminster after all the benefits of the English public school education, did you move on in educational terms or did you go into a job.

**Peter Tanner:** My mother couldn't afford to send me into university and she didn't want me hanging around doing nothing, just writing a few odd articles. My uncles and people said it's time you got a job and they were in business, family business enterprises, and one of them offered to put me in as office boy in a firm in the City. My mother jumped at that and I was pushed off into this job which I absolutely loathed. I sat there in the office not knowing what to do and I remember my first day, and I was sitting in this office and they said if the phone rings answer it. So after a few minutes the phone rang and a voice said here are todays prices, blah blah blah. He said got it all. I said got it all, I don't even know what you're talking about. So he said those are today's prices. I said will you please repeat them and I got out a pencil and he still read them out at a most fantastic speed. I said please go through them again and he got very annoyed. Eventually I got all these prices down into a piece of paper, I said what do I do with them. He said take them into the typing pool and somebody will type them up and put them on the bosses desk. That was all done and it was all quiet for about an hour when the boss came storming through and said what 1 s happened to today's prices, everything has gone haywire, and of course every single one of them was one, they were up, they were down. So I practically got fired on the spot then. They did give me another chance. Meanwhile I was getting very interested in films, I was a great film goer and I was wondering whether I could somehow combine my writing with films. I was ignorant of what one did but I thought in publicity or something. So I went round to everybody asking if they knew how to get into the film business. Eventually we found that a neighbour of where I lived in Sussex had been in the first world war with Michael Balcon's brother, Chan Balcon who was then in charge of production at Lime Grove or Shepherd's Bush Studios. And I managed to get from him an introduction from Chan Balcon, he agreed to see me. I went to London. I went to Lime Grove, a wonderful studio, a sort of Hollywood to me then, little page boys with page boy hats, commissionaire at the entrance, and I went in with tremendous trepidation and said I have an appointment with Mr Chan Balcon. This way, Sir and a little page boy took me down the passage and I went in the great man's office. He didn't want to see me particularly but he had to because of his friend. So he said to me alright, what sort of line are you interested in and I didn't know what to say. I said something to do with writing I thought. He said what have you done by way of writing and he said a few articles accepted in the Kent and Sussex Courier which I thought was important writing in those days. Right he said and pressed a buzzer on the phone and said is that you to somebody in an office, I've got a young fellow here who wants to get into the publicity department, perhaps you'd be good enough to see him and slammed the phone down. He said I' m sending you to the head of publicity, he gets rid of me, so another page boy was summoned. Incidentally Johnny Goodman could have been the pageboy because he won't mind my saying but he started as a page boy at Shepherd's Bush, but it would have been a bit later. But we went, I don't know if you've ever been to Lime Grove Studios, I think it was the only studio I've ever been to where, oh I think it was the same at Gainsborough, the stages were on top of each other. So when you went up in the lift the doors opened and you looked right into a set, it was fabulous, it was the first time I'd ever seen a set, people around and lights, the doors closed and up we went and the publicity department was right on the top floor and I saw a gentleman who's name I'm sure was High Finlay, he said how are you and everything, Mr Balcon tells me you're interested in publicity. I said Yes very interested. He said what have you done. I said I've written articles for the local paper. He said that's a good start. He said I'll tell you what, you just leave your name and address and I'll be writing to you, I'm sure I can find something for you. I was walking on air as you could imagine. The days went by, the weeks went by, more or less the months went by and I never had a letter from Mr Finlay. Meanwhile an uncle of mine who lived in London and knew a lot of people in the entertainment

industry knew a man called Mansfield Markham which is a name to conjure with and he was a film producer in those days. His wife was Beryl Markham who was like Amy Johnson one of the pioneers in flying and I think she flew from here to south Africa. Unfortunately she had an unfortunate liaison with the Duke of Gloucester and that rather spoilt things and she was separated from Mansfield Marksham. My uncle very kindly arranged a cocktail party at his house in which he invited Mansfield Markham in order that he could give me this job. So I went along to this cocktail party and an uncle pointed him out, but he was talking to this very pretty girl, sitting on the sofa with a long cigarette holder which they had in those days. This must have been the very end of 1933 or the beginning of 34 and my uncle said I don't think we can disturb him at the moment so we went away. He was still talking to this girl and finally my uncle said I think we'd better interrupt him and my uncle said this is my nephew Peter Tanner, I was like some mosquito buzzing around him while he was trying to make this girl so the last thing he wanted to do was talk to me, Oh yes he said, and my uncle walked away, so I was left standing there with Mansfield who wanted to get rid of me so he could go on talking to this girl. Eventually he said to me I understand you want to get into the film business. I said yes I do. He said what experience have you had. I said I really hadn't had any experience except that I'd written for the local paper. That didn't impress him at all. He said what are you doing now. I said I'm not really doing anything at the moment, he said well, tell you what be at the Rex, Stratford next Tuesday at 10 o'clock at night. I was rather literary in those days and when he said Stratford, I thought he meant Stratford on Avon, I said Oh yes Stratford on Avon, he said no Stratford le Bow in the East End. He said it's a cinema. At 11 o'clock the audience will be out and we're going to record the organ in the cinema. You be there. So I said fine. He said I'll pay you £1 a week. I said great. That was the end of that and he turned back to the girl. The days went by and I found out where the Rex Stratford was, and went down on the underground there and turned up at about 10 o'clock in the evening, you can imagine on my first job. And all the audience came out and the manager left and it was closed up and not a sound, not a sound. Suddenly a truck with Sound City Shepperton written on it appeared, RCA truck and out came people. Of course they started laying cables and I looked terribly intrigued. They said are you the film man and I said yes and I waited and waited and nothing happened and I wondered if I was going to recognise him having just seen him at this party. Eventually a taxi rolled up and this man with a big astrakhan fur collar, absolute idea of how you'd type cast a film producer and he still had this holder with a cigarette in it. As he walked in I said Mr Markham, he said yes, I said I'm Peter Tanner. Who he said, who hired me? I don't remember, Oh yes. What are my duties. We're going to record just the sound of the organ. Mr Jack Courteney is coming down from the Regal Cinema Marble Arch, he'll be pissed when he arrives. He'll have a bottle in a brown paper bag and a flask in his hip pocket and your job is to keep him sober. And he walked away. That was my first job in the film industry. I thought how the hell am I going to do this. So I rushed up to the projection box and luckily one of the projectionists was still there and I bought with my last shilling all the rest of his pot of Camp coffee, do you remember that it was a jar, a liquid, horrible stuff. I thought if I make him black coffee all the time I might be alright. After about another half hour Jack Courteney, an American organist, very good organist rolled in. He had a brown paper bag with a bottle of whisky in it and I could see the flask in his back pocket. I said Mr Courteney, he said who are you, I said Peter Tanner I've just started, would you like a nice cup of black coffee. He said that would be a very good idea. So I said why don't you let me have your bottle of whisky and we'll pour a little of it into the black coffee and it'll taste very, very nice. He said right. So I got that one away from him. And I started giving him this coffee and he began to sober up a bit. Eventually I was even able to get the flask away from him. And we finished this session at about 5 in the morning and we had

some singers as well. Mansfield Markham came up and said you didn't do too badly at all, I said when would you like to see me. Be in at 9 o'clock in the morning at our offices. I said where are they. My Leicester Sq cinema, just to the right, on the third floor. He provided a car to take me home at that time in the morning. That's how I started and the next day I was office boy. I became a great friend of Jack Courteney because I was interested in music, I'd played in the school dance band and was a semi pro drummer and we got on very well. And he used to send me round to all the music publishers to get their songs. Because what we were doing was a series of shorts called *Organ Interludes* and the company was called the Film Trading Co and we recorded these organs and we had film to go with them. I'll give you one example, one was pop songs of the time, a tune called Old Father Thames, a very dreary song about the Thames, so of course we had shots of pleasure boats going down the river. They were made into a 15 minute short and you had the soundtrack of the organ and the music score and if the theatre had an organist they cut off the sound and the organist played the score. And if they didn't have an organ then they played the soundtrack, it was a clever idea and it caught on at the time.

**Roy Fowler:** This was Markham's speciality was it?

**Peter Tanner:** No, he made films before that. He'd made a film called *Madame Guillotine* with madeleine Carrell, he always said he discovered Madeleine Carroll, whether he had or not I'm not sure, he always claimed he had, he had made one or two films before. He came from a rich family and spent. His brother was Sir Charles Markham who was a great gambler, he was always at Monte Carlo, but he'd spent everybody's money, he was always in debt, Mansfield Markham, and at this moment he was going on quite nicely. There I was up there and Jack Buchanan owned these offices and Jack Buchanan's mother lived in the top flat at Leicester Sq, he used to own the whole of that building at the time and he was always coming up and he was always very pleasant and friendly and coming up to see his mother. That went on for some time. The editor on that series was a girl called Peggy Hennessy who afterwards became in charge of post production at Pinewood and was Tom White's assistant for some time. She was quite young at this time, she was supposed to be one of the youngest editors, one day she comes into the office in a terrible temper and goes into Mansfield Markham's office because her assistant had left her to get a better job I suppose, had been offered a bit more money. So after a short while Mansfield Markham comes out into the office and says Peggy, pointing at me, there's your new assistant. She says, I don't want him, he doesn't know anything. Mansfield says it's your job to teach him. So with very bad grace she took me on as assistant and she really gave me hell, Peggy, she won't mind my saying so now, but she did. First of all we were at Worton Hall for a short time. Then we moved to Ealing with was ARP.

**Roy Fowler:** ATP

**Peter Tanner:** No even before it was ATP it was ARP which was to do with RKO. It was that transition between ARP and ATP and we had leased a cutting room there. She really threw the book at me. Of course I didn't know anything. On the very first day she took 1,000 ft of spacing and lets the centre out and she said now put it back. I hadn't a clue how to do it. I'd never heard, I was very naive, I was about 17, I'd never heard a woman swear, use 4 letter words before and she used to say you're a fucking idiot and all these kinds of things to me, and I was terrified of this woman. Many years later here at Pinewood I met her again after a long time and I threw my arms around her and I said you were such a bitch Peggy to me and she said yes I was but you're still in the industry aren't you. That was a very wise comment she said. I think in this business, I don't think, perhaps I shouldn't say this, I don't think it's much good going to film schools, I really think you have to learn from the bottom and learn your trade properly and the hard way. And when I have assistants now. I don't behave like that but there's a right and a wrong way of doing things. I try to make them do it

the right way, even if they argue and take shortcuts. In any craft there's a wrong and a right way of doing things, in any department of the film industry and they've got to learn with me the right way.
**Roy Fowler:** You make your beginnings sound very quixotic, would you say they were typical of the British film industry in the early, middle 30s.
**Peter Tanner:** I really don't know. I can only speak for myself.
**Roy Fowler:** Have you ever read Jeffery Dell's *Nobody Ordered Wolves*.
**Peter Tanner:** I have.
**Roy Fowler:** It sounds a bit like that.
**Peter Tanner:** I have an autographed copy from him because I worked much later with his then wife, Jill Craigie, who's now Michael Foots wife, I did a film about wartime painters for her and I met Jeffery at the time and he very kindly gave me a copy of the book, but that's going on.
**Roy Fowler:** You began at a £1 a week, did you get a raise when you went into the cutting room.
**Peter Tanner:** I don't think so. What happened was, I might have got 30 sh a week. I was living then in bed and breakfast in Pimlico and I think I got digs for £1 a week. The companies always paid fares in those days which was a very good idea, and I wish they would still do it today, it would be so helpful if you got all your fares free. My mother helped me. I think she paid £1 a week pocket money to me. Of course, I couldn't have a car or anything like that and I used to go by underground or bus or whatever. But food was cheap. We're talking about the days when you could have a good meal for 1/6d, the studio canteens were very cheap meals, Ealing canteen was quite good I remember.
**Roy Fowler:** Do you think your mother's acceptance of your going into the film industry fairly typical of the day or was it more common that parents would design their children's lives in those days.
**Peter Tanner:** She was wonderful because it was very much frowned on by my narrow minded relatives who thought the film business was just the end and it was rather like don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs Worthington. There was only one worse and that was a second hand car salesman or a bandleader maybe.
**Roy Fowler:** With some justice.
**Peter Tanner:** But once I got the job, I was really happy and once you were in, you got a job it was fine. So there I was at Ealing and soon afterwards the company went bust because of extravagances on the part of Mansfield Markham. And so the company was put into the hands of the receivers. And a man called who had been the financial man, a nice man, he was very good to me, he took over and we sort of finished the last ones of the series. Then Peggy got offered another job, so I hadn't got a job. Then I got taken on by Ealing, that was when Geoff Foot and I were together for a short while. I was taken on as a numbering boy, they were making a Gracie Fields picture with Basil Dean, I think it was called *Sing as We Go*, I can't remember what it was. Then an editor, by the way I must say a word about a man who helped me so much in my early days and that was Berisford Sellingham who was a very nice man and film salesman at that time. He's died quite recently. He and his wife befriended me and looked after me and I very much appreciated it and I'd like it to be put on record and taught me the ways when I was very naive at the beginning. These *Organ Interludes* had to be sold individually and Berisford was in charge of a bunch of salesman who used to go out on the road and sell the films to individual cinemas. And they used to come back with the contracts, a week at the Rex, Portsmouth, a week at the Bijou, Southend, he was very good to me. Then a man called Lister Lawrence asked me if I'd do a picture which was at the old Gate Studio down at Borehamwood Station and it was run by a man called Joe Bamberger, a name to conjure with. A crook if ever there was one but a nice crook though, a very charming one, and I

worked on some picture with nerve and Knox called *Skylarks* I think, my assistant was Vera Campbell, a very pretty girl with lovely boobs in those days, she used to wear tight sweaters and look very attractive. All the boys had their eyes on her. Lister Lawrence was very, very strict and he wouldn't allow you to sync up the rushes using a synchroniser because he said it was inaccurate, don't ask me why, you always had to sync them by hand. Anything more inaccurate that pulling through the sound picture and trying to get them in sync you can't imagine. In those days the synchronisers, four tracks run on the synchroniser and you got, you're using two, one for the picture and one for the sound, going through the wheels and things, in those days there was an arm and the arm came up, there was just one arm, not an arm for each one of the reels, so you could get out of sync, but as soon as he walked out of the room we would go back and push it through. And one day we were very pressed on a picture and I took one half of the rushes and Vera took the other half and I joined them up and the rushes were to be at 7 o'clock in the evening then, and there was an American cameraman, American producer and everyone sat round in theatre, and it all started off well and suddenly it came upside down because I joined the other half not realising she hadn't rewound them, so cut. So I stupidly said it's quite alright, all you've got to do is rewind the rushes to the end and put them on again and they'll be alright again and when they come upside down again you'll have seen all the rushes. You're fired said the producer. That was it. He was producer. he wouldn't do that. We had to take them away and break them down and do them properly. The next day I was called into the office and I was in tears almost and he said don't you ever do that again, I'll give you one more chance. I was still earning about 30 bob a week, not more. The thing was when it came to the end of time the money stopped, of course the ACT didn't have much power and you couldn't go to anybody, I wasn't a member. Three weeks went by and I never got paid and that was it, bumpf. So I never got my 3 30 bobs of the last week. Many, many years later, I have a friend called Fergus MacDonald, another editor in the business and his wife was a friend of Walter Forde's and Waiter Forde was a friend of Joe Bamberger and it all happened in the South of France one day, and we were all sitting round and he said by the way do you know Joe Bamberger, this was about the 50s, I said yes, hi Joe, I said I worked for you once, he said I bet I owe you money. I said yes you do. I said you owe me 3 weeks at 30s. a week. He said I'd better buy you a drink, he had a house there and he married one of C.B. Cochrane's young ladies, a chorus girl, and she was a delightful lady. That's how things were in those days.

**Roy Fowler:** You were at Ealing. Who were some of the people you remember at the studio?

**Peter Tanner:** Otto Ludwig was the supervising editor who was American. Under him were Thorold Dickinson and Jack Kitchen who was Canadian, he became a major in the film services during the war. Thorold Dickinson, after I'd been there, he was very friendly and said I think it would be a good idea if you joined the union, we haven't got too many members but it will one day be very important for you. Would you like to, I'm not going to push you or anything, would you like to come to a meeting and see how you like it. He was very fair and friendly, and so I did and it was a very small and friendly in those days. And of course there '111as George Elvin who was then in charge and we all sat round and it was very friendly, I think it was in a room in a pub and we had drinks and I joined and that's how I've got such a very low number which is 708. This is still 1934 or it might be the beginning of 1939. Suddenly I get a call, would I like to go and work for Fox Films at Wembley for Reggie Beck, Reggie Beck wanted a junior, second assistant. Fine. That was marvellous, one of my happiest times.

**Roy Fowler:** Before we go onto Wembley can we just talk about Thorold Dickinson for a moment because he was rather a great man, father of the union, it would be interesting to hear you give your memories.

**Peter Tanner:** A wonderful man, very very fond of him and many years later he gave me the opportunity to cut his picture *Secret People*. We had a very happy relationship on the film. The film at the time was very unsuccessful here. Poor Sid Cole got into trouble because the Communist Party said it was Fascist and it wasn't likely to be with Sid and Thorold and everybody on it. The film was withdrawn from the circuit at the time but it was an excellent film and now the British Film Institute show it and always showing it and use it for lectures. I liked Thorold very much but I never saw that much of him. I then saw him again I think at one time I was on a committee at BAFTA and he was also on it. And that was very nice. But I knew a lot of early ACT people who I was very fond of, Sid Cole and of course the Bonds, Ralph and Bessie Bond were great friends of mine. And Reg Grove, he and his wife, we had a common music interest, in fact with all of those people, during the war Ralph and Bessie Bond used to come with Dan and Louise Bert, we used to go up and play jazz sessions during the Blitz because it was the one time when you could you play your records and it didn't matter how loud you played them but the Blitz was louder so it was the one time the neighbours didn't say would you mind putting the sound down a bit. We used to have great sessions with them, also with Reg and his wife. But he was a great Western, Hillbilly authority, cowboy music.
**Roy Fowler:** Before his time.
**Peter Tanner:** I had some of those records. But he also like jazz a lot. And Ivor Montagu was a dear friend of mine.
**Roy Fowler:** Were you an active recruiter for ACT.
**Peter Tanner:** I wouldn't say I was but I've always been a supporter of the union.
**Roy Fowler:** During the war you participated in union activities.
**Peter Tanner:** During the war I was shop steward for a short time at Merton Park. I know people have a lot of criticism and some of it's justified but on the whole it's done a marvellous job for the industry, since I've been in it because we never got any overtime. When I was working at Fox we were expected to work all day and all night for a pittance and you didn't have anything. You really couldn't do much about it. Of course the bosses used to vary, if you had a good boss in those days they'd look after you very well and were dropping you a bottle of whisky and even sending you off on paid holidays. Once the union there was no need for that and we used to get double money at Christmas time. When I was working at Fox at Wembley as well as getting our double money we also got some extra money from Shirley Temple personally. In my case I was then earning about £5 or £6 a week and it was something like £2.50 which was an enormous sum to me in those days, it was all proportional. This was her way of getting out of her tax demands in America, but it looked wonderful, Shirley Temple wishes you the best for Christmas.
**Roy Fowler:** Still at Ealing, Basil Dean?
**Peter Tanner:** I never really knew him, he was a big man, and what was the name of his tiresome wife, Hopper, Victoria Hopper. I was there such a short time, probably a month to six weeks, a very short time. Of course Carol Reed was there as a first assistant, Basil Dearden was there as a second assistant. Oh I must just tell you, Gracie Fields was a wonderful person, she was charming and so nice and I sat down one day having my cup of tea in the canteen and she walks in and sits down, mind if I join you, luv, she says Oh it looks disgusting that tea, I'll take it away and make one myself, she always used to go into the back of the canteen and make her own tea. Typical Gracie, She came out with a personally made cup of tea which was very nice, she was very friendly to someone who was the very junior assistant at the time.
**Roy Fowler:** Was Monte Banks there?
**Peter Tanner:** No I don't remember Monte Banks at all.

**Roy Fowler:** Who was the one before that?
**Peter Tanner:** Archie Pitt, maybe. John Loder was the big star then at Ealing, they were doing Lorna Doone. He was known as Our John. And who were the other people. Barbara Lott, her father then was studio manager. There was a picture called *The Silent Passenger* which was another John Loder picture at the time I was there. During the summer holiday they were doing a picture, Laurence Olivier and Gloria Swanson on a picture called *Perfect Understanding*, this was earlier, before I was in the film business, this was one of the reasons I got so film struck. My mother sent me when I left Westminster to learn French, I was 2 or 3 months with a French family in the south of France. One day I was on the beach and they were making this film and there was all the unit out and somebody came up to me and said you can speak French can't you, they want some volunteers to go out on the raft and there was a scene where they went by on speedboats and you're supposed to stand there and hand them a cocktail as they go by. So I'm on this raft and Gloria Swanson is on this big cruiser thing, huge, great sunshade, in dark glasses watching all this, doubles were doing this actual motor boat thing, so I handed these glasses out, eventually I went to, it came on at the Empire Leicester Square and I'm taking my mother and now you're going to see me in a film and of course, I'm gone, I think there were just 2 6-frame cuts of me. That's what started me to be film struck.
**Roy Fowler:** You never wanted to be an actor?
**Peter Tanner:** No.
**Roy Fowler:** Then to Wembley.
**Peter Tanner:** Wembley was wonderful in those days. Ernie Garside was in charge of the studios and it was a very happy family, anyone who was at Wembley in those days hug each other today, people like Ossie Morris, Ronnie Neame, Carmen Dillon and John Cox was head of sound there, Roy Kellino, cameraman, the directors were Al Parker who afterwards became an agent and Alex Bryce, a Scotch director. I was still in my digs but we used to be able to have wonderful breakfasts there. We used to get in, the usual thing of start at 8.30, and we'd get in at 8 and go to the canteen and they'd give you wonderful breakfast for very little. And Fergie MacDonald and I were Reggie Beck's assistants, he was great to work for, he looks the same today as he did, I think he was an old man then in 1935 and he doesn't change, he did all those Losey pictures, he even did *Steaming* at Pinewood fairly recently, that's where I really started to learn the craft of editing from Reggie because he was a very good, you just stood behind and watched him. He used to be in a dream world. And in those days, not like some of the young assistants today who look at their watches about 5 o'clock and begin fidgeting and they're off, you used to have to stay till he went and it didn't matter what time it was, and you stayed behind him for whatever he wanted. Perhaps eventually you'd shuffle a bit, about 8 in the evening you'd start shuffling and he'd look round and say are you still here, you'd better go home and we'd be gone.
**Roy Fowler:** Tell me about ways of working in those days, was it instinctive, creative, intuitive or was it a factory line. At Wembley what were you doing, one picture a month?
**Peter Tanner:** They were B pictures, the kind that went in at 10 o'clock in the morning at Fox theatres and never seen again to fulfil the quota, they were three week shoots at the most and 6 weeks post production if that. And we were doing them continually. They were very factory line pictures but we were experimenting with young actors, all those pictures went to Fox in America to look at the artists. I remember jack Hawkins was in one, I worked on a very early picture of his as an assistant, and one or two others, Richard Green, and James Mason, Jimmy Hanley, some of the pictures weren't too bad but we had wonderful technicians, they were junior then, we had Ossie and his brother and Ronnie were the cameramen, and Roy Kellino.

**Roy Fowler:** Was this their breaking ground as well.
**Peter Tanner:** I would say it was. You've spoken to Ossie I know, I'm sure he must have talked about his days at Wembley. I don't think he was a cameraman while he was there, they were both operators, Ray Kellino was the cameraman. He came back after the war as an operator. I once went to France with Ronnie Neame, as a junior assistant I was sent off to take some plates, back projection plates with the cameraman to Calais, and the weather was atrocious, and it was day for night so what we were having to do was put filters in so it would look like night. The first day we couldn't do anything, it was dull sky and every time these expresses came in, the trains came in we were waiting at Calais station to take it, after about 3 days the police got so suspicious they arrested us and the camera was opened because some important person was supposed to be coming in and they thought we were a bomb or something. Anyway we got out of that. Finally came to the weekend and they were getting quite annoyed at Fox that they were spending money and we were sitting there having quite a good time, at least we were in the evenings and by this time we'd picked up 2 rather nice girls and we said why don't we go off on a nice trip on Sunday and perhaps we'll go into Belgium to one of the resorts there. Somebody had a car and we all went on Sunday morning. It started off very dull but after about 50 minutes, the clouds were going away and it was the most perfect day. Of course we didn't go back and in the evening people at the hotel said they I'd been calling you all day because obviously you're going back tomorrow because they said it's been a beautiful day in England, I'm sure it's been a beautiful day in Calais. Oh no we said, it's not been very good there, it was cloudy and we had to stay an extra day. But I had a still camera supplied by the studio to take some stills and of course I'd taken some pictures of these girls on the Sunday as well. When we got back to the studio these had to be very carefully removed. We did have some fun like that.
**Roy Fowler:** Do you think you were then adequately being recompensed?
**Peter Tanner:** I think, for my knowledge.
**Roy Fowler:** You were up to what?
**Peter Tanner:** I finished at Fox in 1938 and I was being paid £7 10s. I even had a car then and I was what they used to call assembly editor.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1
**Peter Tanner:** You were saying did one have much life outside the studios, not really because we were very dedicated then and the film was everything, it didn't matter how long we stayed, we didn't feel it a chore but we were quite pleased to get home a It suppose it's the usual sort of times we have now. We did a 6 day week of course as a matter of course but I don't remember working a lot of Sundays but we often worked late in the evenings. I was living in my digs so I had to catch the train to Baker St and I used to have some snack to eat and then I went to my digs and I used to play my jazz gramophone records and go to bed. If we had any length at the weekend I used to go down and stay with my mother who was on her own and spend a weekend down there. Oh I used to go out with friends, I used to have girlfriends and go out, in fact I had a girlfriend who was an assistant stage manager at the Old Vic at the time so I did go to the old Vic quite often because she used to get me free tickets and so I used to meet her and go out and have a snack and go out on Sundays. We had a certain amount of private life. I did get a chance at Ealing, Reggie gave me a chance to assembly cut some films and the first one I did was *Strange Experiment* which a girl called Ann was in it and the boy who was a young man at the time, I can't remember his name but he had his arm blown off during the war, he was a very young juvenile, something Wood. When Al Parker saw my cut of the film he went raving mad and he said it's awful, he said every cut is like a

spear in my womb, his actual words, and I was very distressed, and he got onto Reggie and Reggie had to recut the picture, that was my start, I became a very good friend of Al's later on but at that time he didn't like me very much. Then I had much more chance, on almost the last picture I did at Fox which was called Murder in the family which was quite a good film a mystery film. I saw it again, Roddy McDowell and Glynis Johns played the children in it which shows you how long ago it was. I worked many years later in the remake of *The Thief of Baghdad* and Roddy McDowell was in that and one day I brought a still from the film. I said do you remember this, he said I certainly do and what's more I've got a 16mm print of it in Hollywood. I said you haven't have you, I'd love to see it. He said I have, and the next time you come to Los Angeles you call it up and I'll run it and it stood up quite well because it was beautifully lit by Ronnie Neame who was then a cameraman, black and white of course, and Carmen Dillon had done a very good job with the sets and the sound was good, John Cox did the sound, and Baron Mason was the sound recordist on the picture and Reggie Beck supervising editor, Peter Tanner, editor. Then we did a picture with Sir Harry Lauder who was a real pain in the neck, a difficult man, rather like George Formby had his Beryl, Harry Lauder had his sister who was a real bitch. I remember a memo going round saying Sir Harry Lauder likes to be addressed as Sir Harry at all times and things like that. On that picture I was assistant on, that was another picture we worked through the day and then we had a night shoot on the lot. And Reggie said to me well you know what it is with these night shoots with several cameras, they never get the boards right, you better be out there seeing what's going on so that when you come to synch it in the morning you know what's going on. So I said thanks very much, I stayed all night, had an hours sleep in the theatre and started to sync up the rushes. Because Fox had it's own labs in those days, the rushes were processed at Wembley and only the release prints were made by one of the big labs like Humphries. So we got the labs very early in the morning.

**Roy Fowler:** How did Fox rate in terms of the British film industry in those days, for those of you working there did you consider it a friendly place?

**Peter Tanner:** Not as far as the big studios were concerned, they only made B pictures, it wasn't like being at Denham or Korda or Gainsborough but it was very good training ground and all the people who worked there have done pretty well since.

**Roy Fowler:** So the ambition was to move on.

**Peter Tanner:** Yes. And I got my chance. 20th Century Fox in Hollywood wanted to expand, this was 1938, they wanted to expand in a big way in England and they wanted to buy the land around Lee Studios, as it now it and make a big studio, they'd already been making quite a number of pictures in England. They wanted to expand. So they had this idea if they took one or two people from Fox Wembley, young people, train them in the manor of working in Hollywood, they could bring them back and use them again. So they went to the union, the ACT, and asked if they could do an exchange and they said yes. And this was the only time that I went to America on an exchange. It was a very unfair exchange in a sense because in return of me who was a very untrained assistant, they got an editor over and they also got a very trained first assistant in the place of a second assistant, but the idea was that they were going to train them up. They got James Clark who was a very top editor at Fox in those days and I think the picture he came over to do was *Wings of the Morning* but I'm not sure of that.

**Roy Fowler:** It made sense both ways.

**Peter Tanner:** And it was for a limited period, 6 months I think. It was a wonderful experience for me. I was paid, they wouldn't pay me very much in Fox at America, they paid me very low and I didn't have much money and I stayed with, Fergus MacDonald had a brother called Gordon

MacDonald who was a well known writer, he wrote a successful novel of the time called Jump for Glory which afterwards was made into a film. I stayed at Santa Monica, I had a room in his apartment. And I worked for a very top American editor of the time called Robert Simpson who recently died who afterwards cut pictures like *Grapes of Wrath* and a whole lot of big pictures. And at that time he was just starting on a picture called Always Goodbye, the director was Sidney Lanfield and the star was Barbara Stanwyck and Herbert Marshall and it was tremendously interesting to work through that film with Fox. I was very lucky, in the Summer of 1938 pictures were booming, Fox was making 17 major A films in the studio at once, and a number of B pictures. The lot stretched from Pica to Santa Monica, all the area which is now Century Plaza, Century City, was the Fox lot. I used to live at Santa Monica and take the streetcar up Santa Monica and it was a cent a mile, it cost 10 or 12 cents or something, and it was very fast, much faster that you could drive in a car today. You'd get out at the back lot, walk across the lot and over the bridge over Olympic to the cutting room and the same cutting rooms are still there today, the cutting rooms I worked in~ The funny thing is that when I went back there not so long ago there's one guy left there who's in charge of all the post production for 20th century TV, and I went to see him and he said I remember you, you were a whiz at chequers which is what they call draughts. He didn't remember anything else, you and Bob won the intercutting room chequers competition, we used to do this in the evenings there. The set up there was very much the same as I'd been working at Fox and my job was to replace takes which had build ups in them. Because in those days if you wanted to recut you had to lose a whole frame and put in a black frame, you don't have to do that now but you had to do that then because of the different system of joining and so every day I used to order reprints and I had have a car which would go down to Foxal Western, their labs downtown, in Hollywood and I'd pick up all these reprints and cut them in, that was my job, and then I did some work on some tests for Alan Dwan on a picture called *Suez* with Tyrone Power and Annbella, it was a very interesting period.

**Roy Fowler:** When I was working in the States in the 50s an American friend of mine came over to work in England and in due course returned and I said how was it, he said how shall I put it, here it's a rat race, there it's a mouse race. Do you think that's a fair comment on the two industries in the 30s, Hollywood and England?

**Peter Tanner:** I wouldn't say so because I learned so much there, I view that time with a lot of respect for my own craft of film. I was working for a top editor and I knew it and I was trying to observe what he was doing all the time and therefore I didn't have all that much outside interest or knowledge of what was going on on outside productions or whether it was so or not.

**Roy Fowler:** But Reggie Beck was a very creative editor, what was it that you learnt there that you could not have learned in England.

**Peter Tanner:** Just a different totally different. Not that the picture was all that great. Also the sound. I remember the dubbing was much more sophisticated and advanced than it was certainly at Fox.

**Roy Fowler:** Was the difference in equipment in personnel?

**Peter Tanner:** There wasn't that much difference in equipment, perhaps a bit more modern than English equipment. But certainly in the dubbing department, it was advanced as what I'd been working with at Wembley Park

**Roy Fowler:** In the way the equipment was used?

**Peter Tanner:** And they had many more sound heads, that sort of thing. It was an interesting period. At the time I was madly in love with Alice Faye who I thought was my dream girl so I managed to tackle her one day and managed to get her to autograph a picture which I got out of the

stills department. Another thing was that Barbara Stanwyck was a great Anglophile. She was having a big affair which Robert Taylor and although she wasn't in it she'd been over to England and everything was English for her. One day I was in the cutting room and the third assistant came up or a runner came up from the floor and said Miss Stanwyck understands that you're from England, I said yes. She would very much like it if you would partake of a cup of tea with her this afternoon in her caravan. I thought that's terrific. So I duly went down and went into her trailer, caravan, and she had this English Silver tea set, of course I don't like tea, I didn't dare tell her, I never drink tea, it's one thing I don't particularly like. She'd laid it all out with sandwiches, the old fashioned English vicars tea party. She was absolutely charming and started talking about England and then this is even more unbelievable. The door opened and another absolutely gorgeous lady walks in and she said do you mind if Miss Loretta Young joins us. Can you imagine this young boy having these two top glamorous ladies having tea with him.

**Roy Fowler:** This was the heyday of the Raj.

**Peter Tanner:** Yes the cricket team. It was a great interest, and I had this jazz interest so I was able to hear all the bands. I was probably one of the first persons to listen to and talk to Nat Cole who was playing at a little cafe just outside the studio called the Fox Hills Cafe, and in the evening when we finished work we used to go in to have a drink in this sort of a bar with piano and things and he had the Nat King Cole trio. And I got to talk to him because he wasn't singing then, he was a very good pianist, and when I got back to England I wrote up an article for the Melody Maker and they wouldn't take it, they'd never heard of him. I didn't get that article published till 1941.

**Roy Fowler:** How long were you at Pica Boulevard?

**Peter Tanner:** I was there about 6 months. Of course I went by boat which was very nice, no thought of air then.

**Roy Fowler:** Do you remember what you sailed on.

**Peter Tanner:** An American line freighter, it took 10 days from London docks to New York by Boston, it was very rough, the sea. I came back and of course there was one of those slumps on.

**Roy Fowler:** Did you have any desire to stay in Hollywood?

**Peter Tanner:** In a way, but nobody offered me anything and I knew I was on an exchange and I had to go back as part of the terms of the exchange. By the time I got back there was all this thing of Chamberlain waving his umbrella and peace in our time and the Germans already knew war was imminent, the American, the Fox people did so they pulled out and they never went on with their plans to extend the studio so I was out of a job when I got back. So then I went, 38,

**Roy Fowler:** Would you mind if I interrupt your flow, you mentioned one of those extraordinary people Al Parker, a few memories of Al Parker.

**Peter Tanner:** When we were at Fox nobody really believed that Al Parker had directed *The Black Pirate* and had been a great director in the silent days unit Douglas Fairbanks Sr. came down to the studio one day and I remember seeing them hug each other and then people believed him. He was a terrific character, Al. He used to reduce timid girls to tears and he was very bullying, and also he would never give verbal cues, because he came from the early days of sound where you couldn't shout out now you come in over the track because it would spoil it, I think it's a good idea, probably back to the days of disk. So he used to have a series of cue lights for people's entrances and every where there was a blue light there for you to come in and a green light there and he would sit in front of all these buttons pressing them for actors, and he would act the whole scene himself, he would laugh when it was funny and cry and jump around. People were rather nervous of him. He hated me when he saw that first cut. But when I went to America in 1938, when I came back to New York, he was in New York, he told me to look him up and he was staying in the Algonquin

Hotel of course where all the literary people stayed in those days, kind of now the Mayflower but then it was the Algonquin. He invited me out and took me to see a very youthful Orson Welles and a Mercury production of *Julius Caesar* which was quite fantastic, I've never forgotten that. He also took me all around town and the shops, he was very, very kind to me. When he came back he became an agent and he married Margaret Johnson and when I was at Ealing many years later she was in a film called *Touch and Go* and she was the star, or one of the stars of the films. Al came down one day and he absolutely charming and he said to her you're alright my dear because I trained Peter, I taught him all he knows so it's all going to be very good.
**Roy Fowler:** So you're back from the States and without a job.
**Peter Tanner:** It was a slump, one of those awful times. And eventually I got a job, I think with Religious Films, my mother wrote this down here, some of the films for Fox were *Find the Lady*, *The Black Tulip*, *The End of the Road*, that was the one with Harry Lauder, *Strange Experiment*, *Double Alibi*, *Passenger to London*, *There was a Young Man*, *Macushla*, *Who Goes Next*, *Second Thoughts*, *Murder in the Family*, they were all Fox B pictures. I've got down, or she's got down, Avenue Productions, Riverside, shorts, and if I might go back to Fox days, I was lent out for a short period to go to the old Southall Studios for a picture called *Murder in the Cabaret* on which Reggie Fogwell was producer and director. He was Roy Fogwell's brother. I was an assistant on it. I did everything on it, can you imagine it nowadays, I banged the clapperboards, I was assistant on the floor, I was assistant in the cutting room. I can't tell you the name of the editor. It was a very disastrous film, one of the stars of the films was Phyllis Robbins, who was a singer, she was Henry Hall's vocalist at the time and was a very entertaining lady. Part of the shooting was over Easter and the canteen staff refused to work, so we had to work all over Easter and there was no one to do the food so Phyllis Robbins went into the kitchen and cooked the whole unit their lunch time meal, she was a real trooper, she was great. That was the time of the fire. We had a fire in the studio in the projection room, Reggie Fogwell and I and some backers were seeing a rough cut of the film in the evening, 8 o'clock in the evening, of course it was flam film in those days, and suddenly it went up in flames and we rushed up to the projection room and it was like this one but not very high and the projectionist jumped out of the window. He just left the film going and the projector turning and jumped out of the window and we couldn't get into the projection box because the door of the projection box used to fly open so the projectionist used to lock it from the other side. So there were black curtains on the windows, Reggie Fogwell pulled down the curtains and screamed at the projectionist bloody well get back into the projectionist box and open the door and so he climbed back in and open the door. We got the film out and put the flames out. As it was going out the film was burning up and it was particularly unfortunate because it was on of Phyllis Robbins' song and it had taken forever to sync the song because she wasn't very good at playback. I'd personally had been taking out one frame out here and another frame out there and doing all this-business, so of course we had to reprint everything. The projectionist was fired. The projector was a right off and it was very dangerous in the flam days and the last thing you did was to run.
**Roy Fowler:** Was it a frequent occurrence?
**Peter Tanner:** I wouldn't say frequent but…
**Roy Fowler:** Enough to make people wary.
**Peter Tanner:** Yes I had one or two. But that was the worse one. But to go back, when I came back from Hollywood I worked on a film called *I Met a Murderer* with Fergus MacDougall which was a little picture made by Roy Kellino, James Mason and Pamela Ostrer and they were living then in a menage a trois as they said, and you never knew which one was in Pamela's favour. And they lived in a flat in Baker St with a mass of Siamese cats. We used to work all day and all night on this

picture, at the Bush, because they said it had to be got out in a hurry, so we used to take it in turns to sleep at the theatre and every once in a while whichever one was not in favour used to come down and work with us. But occasionally we were invited up there, eventually James Mason, first of all Ray married her, and then she did marry James Mason. It was quite a good little film. Originally it was called *Deadwater* and then I met a Murderer. It had quite a lot of fame at the time. That soon came to an end and then I went to not Rank but some religious film, a man called something Simpson at Riverside Studios and we made, it was for the Rank Organisation, the film was called *Try What Love Will Do* and it was based on some Bible stories. I actually cut, edited this picture and Tilly Day was the continuity girl and the cameraman was Wilkie Cooper and when it came to the so called premiere of this picture it was held in a chapel, a Methodist Chapel in Lambeth. And Rank, J. Arthur attended and we all had to go and sit there and kneel next to him and have this service and then the film was shown.

**Roy Fowler:** Rank had financed it?

**Peter Tanner:** Yes. That took me to 1939, then I went back to America in 1939. By then I had a contract with the Melody Maker to do a series of interviews with bandleaders and various people. And I went all over the place, New York and Chicago and Los Angeles, went back to Fox and didn't really work for them because the slump was still going on, somehow I'd collected enough money, saving up to go. It was very cheap, my boat fare was £20 each way and I had a 16mm camera at that time and I made a film of the voyage out and the company bought it and gave me back my fair for the film so it didn't cost me anything. I stayed with friends in New York and I went by Greyhound bus across America which was a great experience and that cost me $49.50, can you imagine doing the trip today for that. And it was the time of the World Fairs and there was a cheap rate, you could go to the New York World Fair and the Chicago World Fair and I had friends again in Los Angeles I stayed with and I did it quite cheaply and got a lot of good jazz articles out of the trip. And when I came back it was very ominous because I came back about August 1939 and I remember thinking, steaming out of New York Harbour, and their was this French cruiser just sitting out there and I don't know what made me think but I thought this is it, I'm sure there's going to be a war within a short time and everyone was very distressed. It was the first time, just another little aside, going out on the freighter there were a lot of refugees from Germany, Jewish refugees on the boat, and really we didn't, I didn't have any idea much of the suffering which was going on under the Nazis then of the Jewish people of the time. And one thought probably it was exaggerated until on this boat, these people were really frightened, they didn't want to talk to you they were so scared, they thought anyone could be listening to their stories and then rearresting them or doing something and it had made a big impression on me at the time which was resolved at a later date which I'll come to. But I came back and did another of these religious films, this one was called the *Prodigal Son* and what happened, God knows what happened after that.

**Roy Fowler:** Do you have any memories of J.Arthur?

**Peter Tanner:** No that was the only time I met him on those occasions. Then I went to Rock Studios it was then, afterwards British National, to work with an editor called Jarvis, Jarvie, and I worked with him on picture called *Gentleman Adventurer* which was Hanbury's, one of the Hanbury brothers was producer on that. And if I could remember the name of the producer who unfortunately got sozzled, he wasn't Robert Newton but he was like Robert Newton, he was one of those actor's who you could could never use after lunch.

**Roy Fowler:** Wilfrid Lawson

**Peter Tanner:** You're right. It was after lunch and I'd just happened to come onto the set for some something or other and he was supposed to slap this girl who was one of these Mitteleuropean

ladies who was also the girlfriend of whichever Hanbury it was who was producing the film, but of course he was so drunk that instead of missing her he hit her slam in the jaw and knocked her out. Paul Stein was the director and all hell broke loose, I kept back, I'd gone to collect some continuity notes or something, and shooting stopped. Paul Stein said I take my cost, I leave, so he got up and that was the end of the day's shooting. It took 3 or 4 days before the bruise healed on this lady and that was my experience of that. I just did some numbering for Jarvie, by then it was war time. Then I was in great danger of being called up and I had already gone and registered and joined at that time at Boreham Wood. Then Sidney Box wanted an editor, he had started making some war films, training films and that sort of thing. And someone, I don't know who recommended me but I started at Verity Films with Sidney Box at Riverside studios and we made a long series of service documentaries, some good, some bad, some indifferent. Sidney managed to get my deferment which was every 3 months, mostly by taking, there was this lady in the employment office at Hammersmith who was a Ministry of Labour lady who was in charge of deferments, by taking her to the most expensive restaurant in London, I don't know this is really true, he used to say it was, he got me these 3 monthly deferments. I stayed with him and eventually we had to move because the Riverside got bombed, we had to move to Merton Park and did more of these. There were some quite interesting films. He insisted as an editor I had to know the technical side of these things, so we made a film called UXB which was about unexploded bombs so they sent me down while they were actually defusing a very large land mine in London while we were shooting it which was quite hair raising.

**Roy Fowler:** I wonder what the union would say about that these days.

**Peter Tanner:** This was the time I was shop steward. I don't think in war time, people were having a much more dangerous job than doing that. There's a story about that, we had a RE Sapper officer who was the technical officer in charge and he'd gone through all these thing both abroad and here and during the making of this film on the roof of the house in West St where we were, on the flat roof, we had to show some incendiary thing, and we were using some tiny little firework for it, tiny little firework and it went off unexpectedly and it finished him, bumpf that was it. He had to be demobilised, in hospital for month, it was such a shock to him. I stayed on doing these things.

**Roy Fowler:** Nuts and bolts fare.

**Peter Tanner:** Some of them were very good.

**Roy Fowler:** Who was directing.

**Peter Tanner:** John Paddy Carstairs was one and later Carol Reed, Henry Cass and a number of distinguished documentary directors of the time. I've always been very friendly with the documentary crowd, I've a lot of time for. They used to come in a picture at a time. Some of the films were training films as such, for instance I went down to Lalworth Cove on a tank course for a 70mm gun, I had to know how to take that gun to pieces and put it together again before I could cut it otherwise you wouldn't know how to do it. I also went to see on a ship from somewhere, I can't remember where now but it was quite interesting. But the Carol Reed picture which nobody seems able to find was not called In Which we Serve but We Serve and it was all about the work of the ATS and they had every well know film star and actress working for about £5 a week as part of this film and I'd really like to see that film again. I tried through the Imperial War Museum and they haven't got a copy of it.

**Roy Fowler:** It was only for a service audience.

**Peter Tanner:** Yes. It was very well directed by Carol Reed. Sidney Box arranged for me, I was getting fed up at not being able to do anything on features, so surreptitiously on the side he arranged for me to do 2 Warners features, one was at Riverside and the other was at Teddington.

**Roy Fowler:** Had he done features.
**Peter Tanner:** I don't think so, he was also doing an Uncle Sidney column for some paper at the time. Some of the films of this time were called Canteen on Wheels, Home Guard, Camouflage, We Serve, Jigsaw, that was a good one, Shunter Blacks Night off, Power of the Land, Teeth of Steel, I don't seem to have those pictures down but they were directed by Leslie Hiscott both of them, these two films I did, they were very corny. But I wasn't allowed to do feature films during the war, I would be instantly called up if I was found not to be working on service films. So we kept very quite about it and Sidney said to me I'll get you these jobs. I was being paid about £20 a week which was enormous to me then, I was a sort of supervising editor for him. He said I'll tell you what I'll do Peter, I'll make the arrangements, I'll still pay you the £20 a week and we'll split the difference on the money you're going to get on the feature film which will be about £40 a week so you'll get another £20 and I'll get £20. That seemed reasonable to me at the time. I don't think ACT would have liked it but the thing to me was to keep my hand in at feature production. This again, are you listening ACT, I had one crew had Riverside doing my documentary and another crew at Teddington doing this feature.
**Roy Fowler:** They'll be after you for moonlighting.
**Peter Tanner:** I'm afraid they would. That's the only time I ever did it. I don't approve of moonlighting anyway, in all honesty but it was slightly different during the war when we were very short of people.
**Roy Fowler:** Is this the time to talk about Sidney Box.
**Peter Tanner:** Yes if you wish so. He was always very nice, he was sometimes on the edge of, how shall I put it, he was an honest crook. One thing he taught me was to be able to read letter upside down on anybody's desk when you went into anyone's office in the Ministry of Information or the War Office. If you were loyal to him, he looked after you. He was of that school. He used to say to me Peter, right I want this picture cut by the 24th January, I don't care if you go to the South of France, but I have to see it by that date.
**Roy Fowler:** How would you describe his flair. He did have one.
**Peter Tanner:** Yes. He was artistic. Like Julian Wintle in a way. He did have a flair for seeing a film and judging it, he could pick out the salient points and what was wrong. He might not know how to put them right but he would instinctively know that something had to be done in those areas, that was very much later when I worked for Julian, that was his way of working. In fact Julian was a disciple of Sidney Box, that was when I first met Julian Wintle who was an editor at Merton Park. Eventually the Ministry of Information called me up for war service and I joined what they called the Liberated Territories of the Ministry of Information and Sidney Bernstein was in charge of that, and quite a lot of well known names, Arthur Calder-Marshall were in that section.
**Roy Fowler:** Had we gone into Europe by this time,
**Peter Tanner:** No this was preparation. This was about the time, when did we go 44, this was the beginning of 43, it was when the 8th army was being very successful in the Middle East. So I started to work for them and we did a series of films. In order to work for them I had to sign the official secrets act. After a while they transferred me to the psychological warfare department at , I'm going forward too fast. First of all they wanted to make a picture, it was getting near invasion time, they wanted to make a picture showing the war from the fall of France up till D Day with no holes barred, showing exactly what happened, if the Allies were at fault then they showed it, not propaganda, Time style but very authentic, so they got David Lean to direct it, this was when I worked with David. He was working for Cineguild at the time, his team, he was doing one of the Dickens films at the time for, was it Brief Encounter or Blithe Spirit, one of the Noel Cowards

**Roy Fowler:** Are you sure it wasn't Two Cities.
**Peter Tanner:** No it was Cineguild because I used to take, it was Ronnie Neame and David Lean and that lot.
**Roy Fowler:** Anthony Havelock-Allan?
**Peter Tanner:** Anthony Havelock-Allan. I had a car, it was quite exceptional then, I had a car, not a ministry car but a MOI car which they lent me, a great big car. And it used to have a loud speaker on top and a microphone inside and I always wanted to use this and shout out, I did this once on New Years Eve and I went all the way back from Denham to Bourne End, I'd been bombed out twice by then, merry Christmas everybody I was saying through this loud speaker. Originally I was up at Marble Arch and I got bombed out of there so I moved to Putney and then I got bombed out of Putney and stayed with some friends of mine at Bourne End. But I was in the Putney Home Guard because you had to join the Home Guard, and this is another side of Sidney. You could get out of Home Guard Parade if you had a good excuse, if you were working late on a film and one time I was so I had to get a chit from Sidney Box saying to the officer that I'd been working there. So Sidney said to me why don't you just make out half a dozen of these and if you don't want to go, typical Sidney. The next time, I was genuinely working, the officer said you don't have to bother with chits, I trust you, so there was no question after that, I couldn't never not turn up, in fact I tried to get out of work. So the people in, by the KLG factory in Putney and a place called Manrisa which doesn't exist anymore were safe, they were protected by the Putney Home Guard with no live ammunition and the admonition you needed kneel down to do the exercises or crawl if the ground was wet.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2
**Peter Tanner:** When I was working for the MOI I was leant out to David Lean and Cineguild to make a film about what happened since the fall of France to the invasion which we knew was going to take place within a month or so, or roughly. This largely had to be done with newsreel material gathered from all sources, incidentally I used to see the German and Italian newsreels two days after they were issued either in Germany or Italy because there was a double agent in Lisbon who used to dup the Italian and German newsreels and send them to England and dup the British newsreels and send them to Germany. So nobody could really object because they everybody was happy and we got the latest German newsreels and they got ours. So that was very useful material and a a great deal of past material shot all over the world during the war. David was a joy to work with, as you probably know probably the most skilful editor the country has ever had in his early days and he has a fabulous memory for shot and a wonderful dramatic sense and he used to go through 1,000s and l,000 of feet of newsreel and he would pick out in his mind, he already knew what he wanted, how he would used that material. I learnt a lot in the month I worked with him. We then had Noel Coward to write the script, I think he had already written the outline of the script and he also did, the film was never going to be made in English, it was to be made in French and it was to go in on D Day plus one. As soon as a village or town was captured in France the film was to go in to show the people. So as we got on with the film, and the people at the Ministry of Information got more and more panicky we realised how close we were to D-Day. So Noel Coward for cutting purposes did a rough narration through the whole film which was brilliant and which I had the sense to keep in which he imitated all kinds of different people's voices, Churchill's etc. One or two things were restaged with dialogue, we had to do that, but it was a very authentic film, and eventually it was all done in French, luckily I could speak some French, and music and everything, and we just about got it through in time. I knew within two days when D-Day was

going to be. Of course I'd already been screened then by MI5 and there was a lot of secrecy about making this film as there was about the subsequent film which I'm going to speak about and which we had a naval sentry, it's old hat now, posted in the projection box at all times when we ran the film. This is a little later, having done another two films with David in French, I did another one called *The Battle for Oil* which was the same kind of thing showing the point of the desert campaign. I then went to the psychological warfare department of Shaf which was an Anglo-American unit, and which was all largely secret films. By this time the war in Europe had just ended and we were making a film, a lot of these films were just sound, one of these was they went to Salisbury Plain and they got a whole battalion of troops and everything and and went through the entire operation of using camp, everybody, the whole thing took about two, three hours. Then I had to edit this film down, with a staff officer, then the film was transferred to minuscule tape and placed in what I can only describe as large ping pong balls, I hope this isn't still secret, with speakers and everything and floated down down a river somewhere in Malaya, meanwhile the troops didn't move up and there was an ambush against the Japanese and apparently it was very successful. Apparently that technique was used on several occasions, not always using I suppose they were the size of tennis balls but made of the same material as ping pong balls and a film of that sort of nature we did using sound quite a lot. Then I did, which I was talking about earlier, a concentration camp film, Allies through all Europe kept finding these terrible camps and we wanted to make a film about that to show the German prisoners of war and it was very hair raising. We had a lot of Cit-MPS material censored here that you didn't see on the newsreel and it was coming through and it was just awful. I couldn't sleep or eat anything for days. And a lot of the units were very sophisticated American units who had sound and a tight little unit and shot one scene where a tank crashes through the gate of this place and all the prisoners are there and one prisoner comes up and stabs the guard. That was taken out but we still had one or two things which were censored. Another was a British guard kicking a guard all the way along and they took these things out rightly or wrongly. We had a musical score done by Constant Lambert for it and it was done in German and Alfred Hitchcock was the advisor, he was brought over from America because he was the personal friend of Sidney Bernstein, not because he was the master of horror, but because he had made a film called *Rope* and *Under Capricorn* where he used the technique of long takes where he went on till the camera ran out. They wanted a lot of extra shots to prove there was nothing fake and have these shots with no cuts, for instance they had a line of clergymen of different denominations and pan from there to track into all the bodies.

**Roy Fowler:** Whose idea was that?

**Peter Tanner:** Hitchcock. I had a number of meetings with Hitchcock and we discussed this and he went back and made another film. And as you know quite recently it's all come up, they press and things all picked it up because it was an unknown Hitchcock and I had to tell them that Hitchcock did not do it in a macabre way, he just used his technical knowledge to do this. We did this film and I thought the last of it and went onto another film and it wasn't until a few years later that this happened that I realised that the film has never even been shown, the policy changed in Europe and the American and British Governments and the Foreign Office abandoned it, it never even got dubbed.

**Roy Fowler:** Does the material survive.

**Peter Tanner:** 4 reels out of 6 but there's no soundtrack.

**Roy Fowler:** It's you cutting copy

**Peter Tanner:** Yes. When Granada, because Sidney Bernstein is still in charge of Granada, he asked me if I'd talk about it and he asked me look at the film which was rather harrowing, it

brought back old memories. But of all the war work I thought that was the most worth while but it wasn't in the end because it was never shown but it would have been worthwhile if it had been shown. But I remember in those days when I was on the boat train to America and these Jewish refugees. Then I got demobbed and I was put back to Verity Films which was then Film Producers Guild, Merton Park and I worked then on a picture with Jill Craigie called *Out of Chaos* which was about wartime artists cutback and something called *Five Towns* about the potteries which was quite good. I came out of the war '46 and the end of '47 Michael Balcon wanted an editor for Ealing Studios and I knew an editor, Michael Truman who had been a friend of mine, and he wanted someone who had feature and documentary experience to work on *Scott of the Antarctic* and I got the job.

**Roy Fowler:** Before we move onto Ealing, can we look at your wartime experiences, were you involved in the wartime bureaucracy or were you just involved in making films.

**Peter Tanner:** What do you mean about wartime bureaucracy?

**Roy Fowler:** The stories are legion about the MOI and the way it was operated.

**Peter Tanner:** In the cutting room you don't see much of that. But they were little grand people, the more people they had under them, knitting most of the time because they didn't have anything else to do the better but people I worked with Sidney Bernstein were very dedicated people.

**Roy Fowler:** Jack Bedington

**Peter Tanner:** Yes, there's another one. But they were intellectual people. There was bureaucracy. I had to go to Germany and before I was taken out I was working on a film about bridge building, and then sent me to Germany at the end of 1945 and I was always a civilian, I didn't have battledress, I wasn't even a war correspondent. I had to go on a troop train from Harwich to Hook of Holland and as soon as I got to Hook of Holland they said to me name number and rank and I had to say I've got a name but I don't have a number or rank. And they said you better invent one or you won't get in here. I made myself a lieutenant as I thought I might be more comfortable and I had to go on a troop train and as a civilian nobody wanted to know and it was pouring with rain and I was in some army camp there. I then went to Hamburg and it was an absolute shambles. Hamburg, it smelt to high heaven as they hadn't got the bodies out, bodies were all over the wreckage, and I was in the Atlantic Hotel, Hamburg, and the unit didn't turn up and I hadn't any money for anything, I was just sitting there signing for everything hoping they'd come and feeling very distressed for the American behaviour in that hotel, because the German people for better or worse were starving and one cigarette would buy you anything at that time. They were all peering through the window looking at the dining room. I couldn't stand it, eventually they came, we showed the film, did some technical stuff and went back again.

**Roy Fowler:** You didn't even get a demob suit then.

**Peter Tanner:** No.

**Roy Fowler:** Onto Mr Balcon's Academy forYoung Gentlemen

**Peter Tanner:** That was quite an enjoyable 10 years, I think it got too much into a mutual admiration society in the end, I don't think it's a good idea to stay with one company, it's inclined to make you complacent. But I had a very good trio to start with. I had *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *The Blue Lamp*. That's when I should have left, and Carol Reed offered me a job, but it was a safe job, I was getting £40 a week and after ten years I got £50, I got £1 a year raise, they didn't pay very well.

**Roy Fowler:** How did those rates compare.

**Peter Tanner:** Badly to if I'd been freelance, I'd have got double, £100 a week.In those days a camera man was earning about £100 a week.

**Roy Fowler:** Which of that trio of films would you like to talk about first.
**Peter Tanner:** We'll talk about *Scott* first which had Jack Cardiff and Geoff Unsworth working on it. It was a long job, it took 11 months which in whose days it was a long stint. I don't think it quite came off because Charles Frend whom I, how shall I put it, he was rather a cold director, he always sees it through his temple all the time which wasn't very good. I used to be very frightened of him but I got to know him quite well when I'd done about four pictures for him.
**Roy Fowler:** It always seems to me that Ealing films were very successful when they thank small, but the moment they tried to encompass epic themes they went astray.
**Peter Tanner:** I think the exception was *The Cruel Sea*. That was an epic theme and was successful, but I agree with you they were better on the small canvas.
**Roy Fowler:** *Saraband?*
**Peter Tanner:** No *Saraband* didn't come off and it should have because it was such a beautifully mounted film and lovely photography by Dougie Slocombe and quite good performances.
**Roy Fowler:** It seems better now than it did at the time.
**Peter Tanner:** *Scott* was an interesting film to work on. We had a great musical score.
**Roy Fowler:** It seemed a very studio bound movie.
**Peter Tanner:** A lot of it was on location, they even had an Antarctic location, and in Switzerland, and in Norway, but a lot of the blizzard stuff was done in the studio true. There is a story there. There's a famous scene where Oates gives up his life in suicide and he says I'm just going outside for a minute and he walks away into the blizzard and is never seen again. When I was cutting that I held on quite a long time and every time the director, Charlie Frend would see a cut of it he would say add on a bit, add on a bit more, alright. In the end we got right down to the end of the shot and I'm told, I've never seen it, in certain theatres if they had a very light print of the film you could see him turn round and come nonchalantly wandering back again, I don't know if that's true. Then we come to *Kind Hearts and Coronets* which must be one of my all time favourites, wonderful to work with Robert Hamer, wonderful man, he wasn't then in such an alcoholic state he was later. Sir Michael Balcon always denied that *Kind Hearts and Coronets* was made at Pinewood but most of it was, and Seth Holt who was my assistant was here with me. There were two reasons for it, because at the same time we were making *Whisky Galore* and *Passport to Pimlico*, and it was a very bad summer as usual, it rained continually and so they were very worried about location stuff and they brought *Passport to Pimlico* into the studio and a lot of the stuff they were intending to do outside did actually in and that filled up the studio. More so in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, there were some very big sets, and some big sets with miniatures which they couldn't really fit into Ealing, so they built them at Pinewood. Even that scene where Alec Guinness dressed as a lady goes up in the bloomers, but it was a most enjoyable picture and a brilliant script and it started off a technique now used all the time but then was novel and daring of using virtually no dissolve, using sound very often to cut across, to make the cut, jumping from one, again which I used a lot in *The Blue Lamp*.
**Roy Fowler:** It's a very literary film as well as being literate, was that something which was in the original script.
**Peter Tanner:** The book which had the unfortunate name of Israel Rank but the script by John Dighton's script was brilliant. And of course Hamer was a very cultured man and very literary himself. He really enjoyed a turn of phrase and I suppose Dennis Price gave the best performance he ever gave in a film.
**Roy Fowler:** What was Hamer's magic.

**Peter Tanner:** He was good with artists and he was very artistic and he knew where to put a camera and his films always turned out very well.
**Roy Fowler:** It is said at the time that Balcon hated it.
**Peter Tanner:** He did. Not only Balcon hated it but a lot of the critics hated it. If you read back the same critics who now say that masterpiece, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, they all liked *Passport to Pimlico* much better. As for *Whisky Galore*, Balcon, it was going to be a disaster, Balcon said we're never going to put it out, when they saw the first cut of *Whisky Galore*, and we all had to have a go, I did a sequence, Cole did a lot of it, Charles Crighton worked on it, because there was an editor on it who didn't really know what he was doing and it was virtually Sandy McKendrick's first film and you had to work on the material, it wasn't obvious how it was going to go together but it turned out quite successful.
**Roy Fowler:** In traditional English term, *Kind Hearts* is a very subversive movie, it's sexually an attack on the establishment, probably one of the reasons Balcon took against the movie.
**Peter Tanner:** Undoubtedly. He didn't like anything like that, you couldn't have any bad language and he hated the slight of blood, he would close his eyes and say tell me when it's over, tell me when it's over. oh course, there wasn't much blood in films then. The other thing he hated was rain, he didn't like any scenes with rain in it because he always said it looked unreal, he'd even look out of a window when it was actually raining and say that has to be reshot, terrible rain.
**Roy Fowler:** How did he run the studio.
**Peter Tanner:** Very well.
**Roy Fowler:** Attention to detail?
**Peter Tanner:** I didn't really see; the people who were important at Ealing were the director producer team, and the writer, those three. But he did run the studio well, Hal Mason really ran the studio and he ran it really well, you had to be fairly tidy. He used to say some of the directors were the scruffiest lot he'd every seen. But we had to wear a tie every day there, and if you had screenings you had to wear a suit. I suppose that was how we got the image of Sir Michael's young gentlemen. But again it was very good training, I learned a lot there, all those people who were there, not in the cutting rooms but in other departments, have done well because you had to do the job properly there and it was well run from that point of view.
**Roy Fowler:** It did require a certain background. Do you think the fact you went to Westminster.
**Peter Tanner:** Nothing. I don't think he had the slightest idea that I'd been there. The only thing is he like people who had a bit of a literary background, they read books and knew what they were talking about. But we had people from all walks of life.
**Roy Fowler:** But somebody you mentioned a moment ago, Michael Truman, who I think is one of the kindest, sweetest.
**Peter Tanner:** Lovely man Of the people I'd ever met in my life, Michael epitomises Ealing to me, that quiet wit, tone of voice. But again Michael had been at Gainsborough before the war, that's where I knew him and doing documentary things, I know that's been levelled against them but I think it just happened
**Roy Fowler:** Not unkindly, it was just a dissection of the place and the times and their success too.
**Peter Tanner:** Of course the films were very middle class, upper middle class type of film, the lower deck people wouldn't be, it was always the officers type of thing but that wasn't so much in the comedies, great comedies.
**Roy Fowler:** I wonder if you read Charles Barr's book. What do you think
**Peter Tanner:** I didn't feel it was very fair, some of the things I read I was so astonished, on a film I'd actually edited and he was reading things into it things which he'd made up in his imagination,

simply not intended that way or even thought about, I was fascinated to read it, so that's that I was doing.
**Roy Fowler:** It's a school of criticism which has largely been surpassed.
**Peter Tanner:** Kind Heart was my favourite but The Cruel Sea was also a great picture. But I'll tell that story about the backward flying seagulls. The famous sequence is the survivors in the water sequence where Jack Hawkins is captain on this corvette and he has to rnake this terrible decision, they're rescuing some men from a torpedoed ship and they're coming towards them when the Asdic officer tells him the U-boat is directly underneath where the men are in the water and he has to make the decision whether to save the men and let the U-boat go or bomb the men and get the U-boat. It was a very dramatic sequence, in fact so dramatic they sent me on an Asdic course, I was the only civilian, a 3 day crash course at Weymouth Harbour on a Corvette to see exactly how it worked which I thought was very enterprising of them. But the point I was going to make was that at the end of the sequence they do, Hawkins makes a decision and they bomb, the depth charge the u boat and the very last shot of the sequence where someone calls out you bloody murder to Hawkins, cut to Hawkins, terribly depressed because the u boat doesn't come up, all there is is a pile of wreckage, the shot of the pile of wreckage was shot by the second unit who got the wrong information and instead of shooting it going away from the stern of the ship which they should have done, they shot it going towards the wreck which was totally wrong. We didn't know what to do, we couldn't reshoot it, so I said we'll have to reverse it. But flying above the wreckage was a whole lot of seagulls and in reversing the sequence the seagulls were all flying backwards.
**Roy Fowler:** Did you get any letters.
**Peter Tanner:** No, not until I did that programme on TV and now everybody knows.
**Roy Fowler:** I've seen the film several times and I've never noticed. Just an aside comment you've probably seen a commercial on the air with a sequence, present day vandalism, it's cleverly done.
**Peter Tanner:** It's a beer.
**Roy Fowler:** There's a trend to vandalise films.
**Peter Tanner:** I don't approve of that.
**Roy Fowler:** I don't either.
**Peter Tanner:** Taking it out of context is totally wrong. I don't like vandalising songs either.
**Roy Fowler:** But it is that scene on the bridge. Other films at Ealing. *Scott of the Antarctic*, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *The Blue Lamp*, *Cage of Gold*. *The Blue Lamp* is worth discussing.
**Peter Tanner:** Sandy MacKendrick did the second unit on that. That's quite an innovation at the time, because a film hadn't been made about the police and some quite good performances and one of Dirk Bogarde's earliest film, again it was tried to make it, although it doesn't look that fast to me today, fast through no opticals, and no music score at all in that picture other than a couple of source music, pop music at the time. We were going to have music but when Balcon saw the first cut he said I don't think there's any room for music.
**Roy Fowler:** How about dropping the opticals.
**Peter Tanner:** That was something I started but it was something I'd done to a certain extent on a David Lean picture, I started doing that on *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Of course you can't do it on every film, doesn't lend itself to it, then *Cage of Gold*, a Jean Simmons picture, then *Pool of London*, also a Basil picture, *Secret People*, Thorold Dickinson, *I Believe in You* which was Joan Collin's first picture with Lawrence Harvey as the juveniles and Celia Johnson taking the lead, that was about probation officers, and the first assistant director got so taken by the probation service that he resigned from pictures and went into it. Then I did the *Gentle Gunman*, that was a story about the IRA with Dirk Bogarde and John Mills shot in Ireland, they don't like showing it too

much today, *The Cruel Sea*, *The Maggie*, which I enjoyed very much, with Sandy MacKendrick shot in Scotland, *The Night My Number Came Up*, Leslie Norman's first film, that was a true wartime story, *Touch and Go*, Michael Truman directed, *Who Done It*, Basil Dearden, a Benny Hill picture, *The Narrow Sky*, Jack Hawkins, *Davy*, that was Michael Ralph, that was big screen, that was my last film. We've now got to 1957, '58 and I started to freelance.
**Roy Fowler:** Were you in your turn training up editors.
**Peter Tanner:** I did have one or two, my assistants were Jimmy Jympson one and John Victor Smith another, Harry Alders who's at Anglia Television a high up editor there, Seth Holt, there were quite a few who have always done quite well. But we didn't move people up much there. For instance they brought Jack Harris in who was a very established director then to do the *Ladykillers* and one other picture I think. We used to do them in turn. it wasn't a question of somebody really asking for you, it was just the luck of the drawer. You finished one and you went on to the next one.
**Roy Fowler:** One gathers you weren't unduly pressured in terms of time.
**Peter Tanner:** No we weren't, compared to today. Looking back on it we had a very easy, I thought we were but looking back on it we weren't.
**Roy Fowler:** Well serviced with equipment.
**Peter Tanner:** No it was all rather antiquated. One of the most dangerous things, when you got to the final cut stage Balcon used to call all the other producers and directors in and have them look at the film and write their comments. That was highly dangerous because they all wrote things and the producer of your picture was getting into a terrible state, this is why I say a mutual admiration society, though they were slapping them on their backs to their face they were saying a terrible picture behind their backs very often.
**Roy Fowler:** Balcon was the final arbitrator.
**Peter Tanner:** Yes he was. One final story, on The Cruel Sea, Ealing pictures then were handled by Universal in the State, though they didn't get very good releases, and a big shot came over from the New York office of Universal to see the film, it was at the final cut stage, and we sat down and ran the film, and the lights came up and the big shot was sitting next to me on one side and Balcon on the other and he turned to me and Balcon couldn't hear what he said, what he actually said was can you show me the way to the nearest toilet and then he got up, I got up and he got up, Balcon wondering what!s going on, I walked down to the door and showed him where it was, and he said to me, I will say one thing the picture's got balls. So I came back in and Balcon said what did he say. I said the picture's got balls. Of course to Balcon that was terrible, the puritan he was but I thought it was a very good comment.
**Roy Fowler:** Did you stay with Ealing to the end.
**Peter Tanner:** No I didn't get my golden handshake because I could see the end was nigh, I was at MGM, I did two pictures at MGM and then I got an offer to do a picture with Robert Aldrich called the *Angry Hills* with Robert Mitchum for MGM, that's how I got the offer because we were working at MGM studios. So that's when I started freelancing, that was 1958. I have to start thinking very carefully what I did after that, all sorts of things happened. So I did that in Greece and then I had a trip to America on that one. Then an *American Beauty* for Tay Garnett which will ring a bell, a famous oldtimer, he did *China Sea*, he was Jean Harlow's director, he was an alcoholic unfortunately, although he was supposed to have been dried out, this was a picture also for Raymond Stross, he was producer on this *American Beauty*, and Robert Mitchum and Richard Harris were the two principles so you can imagine there were a certain amount of problems on the picture. They were thrown out of nearly all the hotels around Dublin. Also it was on this picture tht Raymond Stross announced his engagement to Miss Anne Heywood without informing his wife to

whom he was still legally married. It wasn't a very good picture, it was called *The Night Fighters* in America. Then I went to Lewis Gilbert, which was nice, for a picture called *Light up the Sky*, with Benny Hill and Tommy Steele, a comedy, that was good fun. Then I went to Disney when they were at Shepperton for *Greyfriars Bobby* which was a delightful picture which Don Chaffey directed, I did second unit director, because Don Chaffey the director took an avowed dislike to the dog and of course the dog was a leading character in this film and he couldn't bear the dogs. So he left out all the dog close-ups and he said go on Peter take a couple of extras and doubles and shoot all the dog stuff. But Walt Disney himself was very enamoured of the dog stuff and he'd sit in the kennel with it. I found him a very charming man, Walt Disney, he was very efficient. We'd run a cut of the film through, and he'd say we'll run the first three reels again please and he'd make his comments which were very precise and then he'd say right, you take those away now and tomorrow I want to see those three reels recut and then we'll go on with the next three and so on and in under a week he'd done the whole picture and nobody else had a look in, no matter what the director thought, that was it, finished.

**Roy Fowler:** What sort of changes were they.

**Peter Tanner:** They were story changes and rearrangements, for instance in *Greyfriars Bobby* we had a scene with a rat in it where this dog lives on his master's grave and keeps the churchyard clear of rats. And he chases this rat and you see this dead rat, Disney said no, take the rat out because a lot of children will see this film and I know it's a rat but they'll be upset, whatever animal if it's a child, it's unpleasant, that's a simple example. A funny story about the rats, I was doing second unit, I also had to do the rat shots and I was waiting and I was doing this thing with the dog and cats and a liveried chauffeur arrived and he said the rats are here sir and he brought in this case of rats, it was the time when we had the slogan we've never had it so good, and so we said we've never had it so good, even the rats get chauffeured driven cars. I did two pictures for Disney. I did another one *Dr. Syn*, I also did second unit on that.

**Roy Fowler:** In those days, we're well into the 60s, was one contracted or was it picture by picture.

**Peter Tanner:** Picture by picture. Going back to the notes there's a question about technical changes. There was a change as far as the cutting room was concerned the change from optical to magnetic track. That was a very big change for us. In the days of optical film of course you had joins all the way through, and the cutting copy sound had to be sent to the labs and have the negative cut like the picture was cut and it had to be blooped so the the joins wouldn't be heard and then for dubbing you had to have special prints and you used to have two kind of stocks, you used to rehearse on what was known as Harris stock and then you'd dub on Rochester stock which came from America and you often printed front and end so you didn't have to rewind. you'd start on the beginning of reel one and when you got to the end of it there'd be another one printed on the other side so you simply went back on the reel. But the prints had to be examined. John Cox for instance was a very hard taskmaster. When I was his assistant, an little spot or anything had to be looped out. That was a big change to magnetic stock. The fist time I thought I can't read the track because you got quite good quite good at reading it, you could always tell where the clapper is and you could even read certain words. That took place when I was at Ealing. The other big change was the joiner, before what was known as the Italian splicer we used to have what was called the hot splicer, a rather cumbersome thing like this table here, made by Bell and Howell, it made a very good join mind you and you used to cement and scrape the film, it was an overlap join. When the new joiner came in which was not an overlap joiner but a butted joiner and you used just a kind of Scotch tape, a kind of cellulose tape for it, that it immediately did away with having to put in black frames. When we had the so called hot splicer you had to lose two, there were four sprocket holes

to a frame, and you had to use two sprockets either side of a frame so you lost a frame, so if a director said at any time he wanted to add to a scene you couldn't, you'd lost a frame, so you had to put a black frame in to make up for the lost frame, otherwise you'd be in trouble when you got to the neg cutting stage. Also, before the new splicer, cellulose tape splicer, usually the assistant did all the joining, in fact they even had a numbering department, you just put clips in the film and you went away and a girl or boy in the back joined it up and you showed it in the theatre. Nowadays of course the editors all do their own joining as they go. You run it on the Movieola and see it. Also the use of the Steenbeck, young editors seen to prefer the use of a Steenbeck or a Kemp but I've never personally liked it, I don't think you get accurate work on it, but I do use one for a later stage, once you get the film cut or want to show it to the director or producer it's extremely useful, so we always have that. Even use video now to some extent. On the last two films I worked on we had all the rushes on video. If the director wants to go back and see anything on the film he can fast forward and fast back and look at it.

**Roy Fowler:** Are these tapes from the shoot or are the rushes transferred to tape.

**Peter Tanner:** No we tape them on the Steenbeck, the Steenbeck has tape facilities, as soon as we've synched up the rushes, we tape them. They're not done on the shoot. For instance on the battle sequences on *Hamburger Hill*, we put on separate tapes all the shots with helicopters and all the shots with certain types or guns or explosions so if the editor wanted to see what we had we could instantly run them. So a limited use of video. Those are the kind of innovations we have.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

**Roy Fowler:** When you first went into the cutting room you had an Editola, a Movieola.

**Peter Tanner:** A Movieola when I first went in, a very primitive example, very clumsy, we used to call it the battleship in those days, all the equipment was very primitive, I was telling you earlier how we used to synchronise rushes by hand because the synchronisers, he didn't think the synchronisers were very good. You couldn't run through a synchroniser and hear the sound, that was an innovation when magnetic came in. The rooms were very poor and because it was flam film you couldn’t have direct sunlight because it could catch the film on fire, through glass, so usually the windows were all painted green, it was horrible. The American studios were just the same, the old Columbia Studios in Hollywood, Weston and Gowers they were, they were awful, they were just little hellholes. One of the worse was Walton Studios, their cutting rooms were like prison cells.

**Roy Fowler:** Yes, concrete floors or whatever it was.

**Peter Tanner:** After all you spend so much of your life in a cutting room you might as well have it comfortable and have a big room. In fact it was Jack Harris, when Ealing move to MGM Studios, Elstree, Jack Harris designed a block of cutting rooms and they were quite the best, they're not there now.

**Roy Fowler:** Curious about that first day you went into a cutting room, you were pressed into your new career, do you remember your feelings, were you totally bewildered.

**Peter Tanner:** Yes, absolutely bemused, I had no idea, I try to think of that today when, for instance a young girl started, she must be on her second picture, I try to think what she must think when she sees the editor doing apparently a terribly complicated thing, movie the film here, and switching it all round, I had no idea what she was doing.

**Roy Fowler:** The interesting question then the instant to which editing is an instinctively creative craft or to some extent it is acquired. Because here are you one of our ranking editors but you started out never intending to be an editor.

**Peter Tanner:** I don't know. Technical side, but poor editor, or you technician provided you. I think, obviously you have to know about the you can be a very good technician and a very can be a very good editor and not a very good you have people to do some of the work for.
**Roy Fowler:** What is it that you look for when you start to assemble a picture and shape it?
**Peter Tanner:** First of all I don't like to go on the floor more than I can possibly help it, you get the wrong impression, I like to get all my work from what I see on the screen. So it's no good looking on the floor and seeing their problems because my problems begin when I see the rushes, I find that helpful because some directors will say to you you can't make a cut like that, the geography, I'll say that I don't know that, it looks perfectly alright to me. That's just one small instance. But I think it's a great mistake to get too close to the floor work, and then the director says it took us all day to get that shot and you only put in 5 ft of it, surely it's worth a bit more than that. I say no. That kind of thing. I can't really explain it, it's a dramatic sense and being a jazz enthusiast, having played drums in a band in the early days gives you a sense of rhythm and rhythm is very important in editing.
**Roy Fowler:** Do you consciously seek for a musical structure?
**Peter Tanner:** No I don't but it's there. It's a basis. What I have to do is work the material. There's no point just sitting down. You have to look at that material and try to see what you can get out of it. Not just cut to a close up here, cut to a close up there, maybe use something from a totally different sequence, another piece, often you use bits before the director says action or after he says cut. There's a famous story about Ealing, there was a prisoner of war film, I can't remember what it was called which Basil Dearden directed and there is a scene in it, the end of the scene where the prisoners come home and all the wives are waiting and this particular wife wasn't a very good actress and the husband, she's waiting at the front door and he comes through the garden gate and sees him, she hasn't seen him for 4 years and naturally the director says you've got to look at him with all the love and yearning in your face, your man's back to you, and take after take she couldn't do it, Hello Reg sort of thing, so he finally printed something but didn't like it, I wasn't cutting it, I think it was Michael Trimmer, and the director, Basil Dearden, said print up all the outtakes and see if we have anything better and right at the end of one of the outtakes Basil said cut and a voice says, Tea's up! and then her face went exactly into the right expression.
**Roy Fowler:** I wish we could remember the name of the actress.
**Peter Tanner:** Was it *The Captive Heart*.
**Roy Fowler:** That narrows the field. Perhaps the final word on ACTT.
**Peter Tanner:** Perhaps being a rather early member I've always felt they helped me and other people in the industry and did a very good job, I do not like extremes, political extremes, either extreme left or extreme right and I think there was a time when politics were interfering too much in the union but now it's eased off a lot and I think they've done good things for people. I don't like to see people slammed. They've done bad things, the ACTT aren't always right, the employers aren't always right but you have to be fair and generally speaking they're pretty fair now and if you make a good case about anything you get a very fair deal. They've been exceptionally good to this young assistant to me, this girl who is the daughter of Ken Baker, the first assistant, Natalie Baker, she started as a trainee, not in the union, with me as a trainee about two and a half years ago, and the day she started she was told she had cancer. She had this type of cancer which is fairly curable if you take it in time, and she was off the picture for a long time, she had to be in hospital. First of all the company was extremely good to her, they kept her on on the payroll and my crew was very good because they worked around her and gave her a lot of hope and she's perfectly cured, but towards the end of the time I said to the shop steward do you think it would be possible to get this young girl a ticket, at least as a trainee, I know she hasn't been at work a lot but I explained the case

to him and said she was a very willing worker and very nice, she was just 19 or something, and he said he would see what he could do and the organiser came down and you know they were so kind, they gave her a full ticket, it was so appreciated by her she would do anything in return, it was an exceptional case, it shows that they aren't just union bosses who don't give a damn about people but are only thinking of their own interests, there's a good example, I thought it was very nice.
**Roy Fowler:** I say too things to that, the union has an enormous heart, there's no denying that, also the union is the members, it's not the officials, it's up to us to instruct the officials and they do it willingly.
**Peter Tanner:** The problem is that we're all to blame by not going to meetings, I'm one of the worst offenders because I live out in Buckinghamshire and after a day's work one doesn't feel like going up to town and attending a meeting but you've only got yourself to blame if a decision goes against what you want if you're not there to give your opinion.
**Roy Fowler:** Your section was not quorate at the AGM this year, the director one was barely because we blackmailed in
**Peter Tanner:** I like to feel I have the union behind me and they will help me and they settle things on location occasionally. I have a lot of time for the union.
**Roy Fowler:** I'll just go through a few titles, if I may, to finish it off, I went onto *The Avengers* for two and a half years with Julian Wintle as supervisor, the whole time that Pat McNee and Diana Rigg was not it, as soon as Diana Rigg left I left. That was the first series.
**Peter Tanner:** The first film series. I did I don't know how many episodes, it went on for ages, I had people under me and used to cut one in three. Then I did a picture with Christopher Morahan called *Diamonds for Breakfast* for Paramount, and then *The Best House in London* for Philip Saville, who was Diana Rigg's boyfriend at the time. Then I went to America and did a picture for John Cassavetes called *Husbands*, partly done in New York, partly here and then we went and finished it in Hollywood. then I did a second picture in Hollywood for John Cassavetes called *Woman Under the Influence* and I did a picture which was shown on the Late Late Movie last week called The House which Dripped Blood and a lot of horror pictures, this was another bad time in the industry and I was very lucky and got pictures for people like Roy Ward Baker and Paul Annett and those people. And then I did my first picture with Christopher Miles. Then I did five pictures with Glenda Jackson, *The Maids*, which Christopher Miles directed, we're now in 1974, *Hedda Gabbler*, with Trevor Nunn, then *Nasty Habits*, then I went back and did two big documentaries in Africa for MetroMedia, American television which was very enjoyable.
**Roy Fowler:** You were working in Africa.
**Peter Tanner:** And Hollywood. I was under canvas in the wilds and the cutting room was attached to a safari hut and I had this Movieola in there and everytime you pressed the Movieola the lights went down in the safari hut because they couldn’t take the electricity, I can't remember where I went from there. *Stevie* and then some television things like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Thief of Baghdad*, *Christmas Carol* with George C. Scott, and *Turtle Diary*, with Glenda again and Ben Kingsley with my present director John Irvin, and then *Gun Busters* which was a bit of a disaster, should have been much better than it was. And straight from that I left the *Gun Busters* on the Friday and Monday was in Los Angeles on my way to the Phillipines for the one I'm still working on now called *Hamburger Hill*. That pretty well exhausts 50 glorious years.
**Roy Fowler:** Do you have a favourite.
**Peter Tanner:** *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *Stevie* which is a lovely film with Glenda and I like this one very much, *Hamburger Hill*, like isn't the work because it's a pretty tough film, but it's so well made, it's been really interesting working on this film and working with a nice director like John

Irvin and a nice producer like Larry de and I had a great crew on this picture, both my dubbing crew and my personal assistants, we all got on with a very difficult picture from the dubbing point of view.
**Roy Fowler:** You dubbed it here.
**Peter Tanner:** No we dubbed it at Twickenham.
**Roy Fowler:** This is going back slightly, you mentioned two Cassavetes pictues, I would have thought they'd be quite problematical for an editor.
**Peter Tanner:** Very because you can't persuade him to cut anything. But I got on very well with him, but I couldn't persuade him to cut them down to what I considered the correct length. He used to stand, I used to be working on the movie, and he used to stand behind me and he would say Peter, I can tell by the back of your neck that you don't like what I'm doing. But it was very difficult. I said you're really going to make them suffer having it so long. He'd say I want the audience to suffer. I said they won't suffer for long, they'll walk out, eventually they won't come in at all. But it was quite interesting and it was interesting working in America. I had standbys of course. When I worked in New York I was working with a Hollywood editor and he had standbys as well, because they're different unions in New York and it's just like being in a foreign country, you couldn't work in New York without a standby. The standby's used to sit around playing poker all day, we used to get a bit annoyed.
**Roy Fowler:** Have you ever been nominated.
**Peter Tanner:** I've been nominated to the British Guild of Film Editors, but that was for work over a period of years. I was made a member of the American Academy through Bill Hornbeck who was working for John, and he said it's time you were a member, and that's quite tough because they go through your background just as thoroughly as you've been doing today.
**Roy Fowler:** Equally benevolently I hope.
**Peter Tanner:** You had to write everything out, what you'd been assistant on, everything. But that was quite nice. But I haven't won any Oscars or anything.
**Roy Fowler:** Looking back over these 50 glorious years, would you do it all again
**Peter Tanner:** It gets a hold of you, though as Peggy Hennessy said to me long ago, at least you're still in the business, I was very near quitting in the first few months, but once I got through that, it's a great life in our business, we have a lot of bad moments but we have a lot of good too. And I like the comradeship of it too, you get a crew together and we're all totally different guys but we get on R.F: Common purpose.
**Peter Tanner:** But also having a drink in the bar, I think that's a lot of it. And in our business, years ago we were never race conscious or class conscious. Right back, in other businesses they'd be ostracised but not in our business. You're either nice guy or a nasty guy, you might be a nice black guy or a nasty one, or a nasty white, or a nasty yellow one. And of course I had that in the music business, it's exactly the same there. I'll tell you George Shearing the English pianist who's blind, he went to America and had his own band out there and it was a mixed band, white and black and when he played in the South, in those days they were still very prejudiced, somebody came up to him and said why do you have a black man in you band and he said what's black, he said I'm blind I don't understand what black is. That was perfect, there was no reply to it. I think we're like that.
**Roy Fowler:** What's your least favourite picture.
**Peter Tanner:** I'm tempted to say *Gun Bust*, I wasn't very happy on a picture called *I Monster* which Stephen Weeks directed, most I've been happy on. I wasn't very happy on the second Robert Aldrich picture I did called *The Last Days of Sodom and Gomorrah* in Rome. I was happy in

Rome, I won't go into my private life, but it cost me a divorce. On the whole I've liked most of the films I worked on and liked the people I worked with.
**Roy Fowler:** Your favourite director.
**Peter Tanner:** John Irvin.
**Roy Fowler:** Your least favourite.
**Peter Tanner:** No I'm not going to say. If you listen to what I said were the worse pictures you can draw your own conclusions.
**Roy Fowler:** Peter Tanner, thank you very much indeed.