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Copyright ACTT History Project, **Bill Mason**, film director, film producer, recorded on 4th October 1987, interviewer Alan Lawson

AL: Where were you born.

BM: I was born in ^{Edgbaston.} Edgevaston, which is the snob part of Birmingham on 9th November 1915.

AL: What kind of schooling did you receive.

BM: I went to one of the classy Birmingham prep schools called West House and then I went to Gresham's in Norfolk which was a peculiar public school. I think it had been very progressive in the 1900s and it had quite an intellectual a group of boys, we came from intellectual families mainly. W. H. Auden had been there just before and at that point he hadn't been regarded as respectable. His early poems came up to the school library, I remember someone saying I couldn't teach him much, I couldn't see that he could teach me anything, he produced a book of poems called the Orators part of which was about the school. Benjamin Britten was there, we were contemporaries, who also did film work. I went on from Gresham's to Cambridge and at that point which was mid 30s I decided I wanted to make films, while I was still at school, I had written to Grierson who said come and see me during the holidays, this was wonderful really, at school I'd started a film society and was buying Close up and had Paul Rotha's Film till Now which I thought was absolutely wonderful and I used to look at the pictures and wish they could move, and we started the film society and wrote to Grierson who was really quite a hero and he said come to Oxford St which is where the Empire Marketing Film Unit was. And I went there and it was really very Griersonish, he sat me in a chair next to him and gave me tea and chocolate biscuits and he said you might like to see that we've got some rushes and there was some rushes of Arthur Elton's Aero Engine which I thought was quite marvellous. We sat there with Arthur, who was a very peculiar sort of person, and Grierson said to me what did you think of them, and Grierson also said, he was giving pen pictures, Arthur Elton's really an engineer but he's a young man with a future and he said the next chap coming in is Basil Wright and he's really a poet. And there was Arthur looking all scruffy, and very much more like a poet to a schoolboy, and Basil Wright looking as if he'd just come from the City who I was told was a poet. I was mad on films from that point. I went up to Cambridge, oh I said what should I do in between school and Cambridge, i want to spend a year between school and Cambridge. Grierson said I think it would be a good idea to spend some time in the City. And it was on Grierson's advice I spent 6 months in the City working at a stockbrokers before going up which I thought was fascinating and interesting. I went up to Cambridge, Christ's in 1935 and I was going to Oxford, I was going to read, I knew I wanted to do films, I was going to read modern greats, i thought that would be reasonable. I went up to Oxford, I did a college entrance exam at Merton, I was accepted and then the college said they thought it was wrong for someone to spend a year between school and university, it gave them wrong ideas. By that time I decided I didn't like Oxford anyhow, why on earth was I going to Oxford, Cambridge was much more modern and more liberal. So I changed and Christs, I decided I wanted to read English, took me without any exam or any trouble, I got straight into there. I think also because I was interested in left wing politics and there was a thing called the Federation of Student Societies, Public School Section which produced a magazine called Out of Bounds. And had a section of this at Gresham's which also involved Borris Ford who became quite well known as a critic, and we were in touch with Stow, when I went up to Cambridge I was already in touch with John Cornfield who you may

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have heard of. I went up to Cambridge in 35 reading English. While I was at Cambridge, wanted to do films, there was Cambridge University Film Society which was broke, they'd made a film of Bolero, they'd finished the film but they couldn't get the music right, so that was a horrible warming. We started up when I was there Cambridge University Film Production Unit and we made a film which was called Psychology Today. The camera had been left there, it was a hand cranked, I think Stuart Legart had it earlier, then the other units had it, it was in a room at Cambridge, we made Psychology Today which wasn't very good, it had one good sequence with, I think Robert Duncan, running down stairs and every time he ran down stairs and looked through the window he was up another flight. And that was shown at the Arts Theatre which brought in about £15 but we then had legal proceedings against us and the unit, was very difficult and very embarrassing, I was on the committee and we all had to pay about £30 which seemed to be an absolute fortune, I had to borrow from my grandmother.

AL: Why were you sued.

BM: The film had more or less paid for itself, people had short ends, but we recorded the commentary and we couldn't afford getting a print anyway and that finished it off. We had various film projects but nothing much came of any of them. We filmed Guy Fawkes night with Shaw Jones, that was some kind of joint venture. We weren't involved financially with it but we joined with him and we had

I went down from Cambridge and wanted to get into films and everyone said the film industry was in crisis, this was 1938, and i was involved in a small family business making keyrings, it's still going and I'm still involved with it, and I had worked for a time there during my year between school and Cambridge, I worked in the shops there, and I agreed to work there, none of the family had much of a background, I had certain amount of engineering background but in an amateur way, but I had spent some time in the tool room there, three or four months earlier, and I was working there trying to get into the film business when the war started. And the war actually started when I was in France. There were three of us from Cambridge, we were down in the South and we really hadn't much money, and we were thinking about joining the French Army because the cooking might be better. We weren't sure life would be, but we weren't much interested in that. We hadn't tickets to get back, or one of us hadn't, we hadn't got enough to get it so we went to the station and they'd called up the ticket collector so you didn't need tickets anyway. And we came back to England. I assumed it would be the old sort of war. One of the first posters I saw was a bayonet charge on the Western Front. I was trying to avoid being in the army whatever happened so I went to try and join the navy, the airforce. Nobody was interested by then, the war had been on a bit. Then i found I was in a reserved occupation and had a quite interesting early part of the war. We were bombed and rebuilt. Then I was really quite keen to be involved in the war and I tried again for the airforce at one particular point and I was asmatic and they wouldn't take me with that. I thought I'd try again for films and I got in touch with Arthur Elton and various people who seemed quite keen on me coming in. As I was asmatic and shortsighted I thought there was a chance I could get a release from my present job. I saw Rotha who said you're exactly the sort of person we want and wonderful. I found he was offering £1 a week under the ACT minimum in fact. I'm sure the minimum was £3 and he was offering me about £2. He hadn't got a job in any case. And quite suddenly, Geoffrey Bell, we'd

both been on psychology Today, I saw Geoffrey and he introduced me to Edgar and he saw Basil Wright, I went to see Basil at Soho Sq and he said tell me why you want to make films and everything else, how would you describe documentary, and I said something like the creative interpretation of reality, Basil said, you know dup negatives and lavenders, I didn't know what a lavender was but I said of course. He said come back after lunch, I've got to go to lunch, and I went into Foyles trying to find a book which said what a lavender was. I came back and saw Basil, who was very helpful, everybody was very nice. I said I know how to deal with lavenders and cutting and so on and Basil said fine we'll ring you. Then I saw Geoffrey and Edgar and he said fine but we've nothing going at the moment. Then about a week or two after that I got a letter from Edgar saying could I start work straight away. I went to, I got a release, I went to the people and said I'm asmatic and I've been told Birmingham is bad for me, my short sight was telling me against me. They said what can you do. I said I'm been offered a job immediately working on a film for the army. They said take it. So I arrived in, I went to London and I got there on Saturday and Geoffrey said can you come out, we're doing research, we're doing an investigation for a film on Sunday. So I joined him on Sunday, and my first day in the film industry I was never paid for, and I started work officially being paid at £3 a week on the Monday for Shell.

AL: Where were you based.

BM: Shellmex House.

AL: Strand.

BM: The Shell Film Unit was really part of Shell International and should have been with Shell in the City but they couldn't have a cinema there or cutting rooms with nitrate rooms. So they had a little place at the side of Shellmex House. Shellmex House had in fact been taken over by the Ministry of Supplies, so we were a little outpost of Shell there. And Shell were making films without Shell on them but a little SFU monogram on it which I thought must be the Strand film Unit when I saw it and I didn't realise until I was there that I was Shell. So I joined Shell. The first day I went to Geoffrey and he said War Office selection, doing a film on War Office selection boards. There were several films which had been made for the states, one had been made more or less on psychology and the army, and had the thing of the matrix test and the other various tests they gave people when they went into the army. They had a psychologist called Raven who's invented the matrix test and they had somebody talking about the matrix test and Raven's head came round and he always brought the house down because he looked completely mad. And they decided they must have a psychiatrist who didn't look completely mad. And we went to Watford and the psychiatrist there was Adrian Stevens who was quite a famous one and one couldn't possibly say he didn't look mad so it was a fairly fruitless period. We eventually made the film with John Rickman who was clearly mad but looked rather homespun, he looked rather like J. S. Haldane.

AL: What actually was your job.

BM: I was taken on as an assistant director and I went to Geoffrey, he was doing two films simultaneously, one was War Office Selection Boards and one was Personnel Selection. I went with him and I think he'd done the investigation on the one. I became involved with war office selection, after a week, we had two or three days driving around there places, and went into the office where I only had a bit of Geoffrey's

office, I said what'll I do. He said we've got two films, will you write the script of one of them, as a treatment, it doesn't matter very much, we probably won't use it but we've got to have a script so will you write the script. I into a script, and we had two locations, we had a unit of about 14 because we had generators and sparks and an enormous sound truck, was it from Riverside, Leo Wilkins,

AL: No Shepperton.

BM: We had this enormous unit and I had to find accomodation for them, we were shooting near Dorking, I had all this to do, and the cheapest electrician was getting twice as much as I was getting. The only thing which was rather nice was that I had to organise it all. We only had two hotel rooms, the camera man Sidney Beadle said the director doesn't need one, we do all the work so we'll have the two rooms. So we were in the hotel and it was quite a piece of organisation, every evening we used to take the quarter master sergeant and the sergeant major out to drink. We used to have parties. A large country house had been taken over and we had our beer supplies which were difficult to get at the time but we had barrels there which we arranged with the quarter master sergeant and we had a great party there which went over very well, except some of the officers who came said tin peaches, we haven't seen these for year, we couldn't say they came from your supply. Just a side light on documentary of the time. We were shooting this film which had various problems, we came back with the film. Geoffrey, do you know Geoffrey Bell, he's now in Bangkok. He was fairly nutty then, he's now completely, we got back and he thought it would upset people to have a slate on the front. So we had a pingpong bat with a light which flashed and buzzed which was held at the front. It often didn't work. So not only did we not have any slates, we hadn't even a very good sync mark. I'd never been involved with a sound film before, I played with my 16mm and we shot at Cambridge, we came back with this mass of film. I said what do we do now. Geoffrey said you better start editing it. I said how do you edit. Playing it a bit simple, he wasn't to know I'd played with 9.5, I realised later I'd probably done more editing than he probably had, and he said it's quite easy, you want to get the sound and pictures synched, one tin you label overs and the other tin you label cuts, and you start putting it together. I started putting it together, and there was one ridiculous thing, I said what about the sound, he said you have spacing you put inbetween. I put all this together and I'd been given something i've never seen since, I'd been given a tin of clear spacing, so there was a terrible noise, and I had to remake all this. We had, it was clearly simple, we had a very prissy psychiatrist who was scrubbed, Rickman was alright, in the other ranks we had a very difficult silly little man and he was doing a long talk to camera and we were cutting away from it, he was saying, explaining how the place was organised. And the commanding officer was one of the sort of gentry they put in, in wasn't regular army but he'd been made a colonel and he was in charge, I think he was a brewer in the North but he was very much gentry, and he was fairly idiotic, and we had this psychiatrist interviewing a man going into the pioneer corps, he was a Durham miner and he looked like a large ape and the psychiatrist said this is a man of obviously low intelligence and I got this cut so it came onto the commanding officer. It was so obviously true I remember it bringing the house down when we had our first showing to the assembled war office. Shell had no, at that point there was no specific editors, we were all expected to edit our own films. At one point when we had rather a lot to do Arthur Elton said the camera department should do some editing so they sent in Sidney Beadle and Stanley Rodwell, you'd try and avoid getting him involved. The only book really on editing was Pudovkin on editing and the first edition was

alright because it didn't have any pictures. But the second edition had pictures of Pudovkin with film around him and I think people thought that was the way to edit and both Geoffrey and Arthur would come in, and I'd be struggling in the cutting room, and they'd say I think you want some of this and they'd pull out film and put it in the bin, and you'd try and sort it out afterwards when they'd left. Geoffrey in the cutting room was always very worrying.

War time Shell was very nice, we weren't paid very much but we were very well looked after, we had no, there was no great problems with expenses, and the chap who had responsibility for the Shell Film Unit, Edgar Anstey had been there from the beginning and then Arthur Elton had taken over, and I think Arthur had done a lot of setting it up, then Arthur went to the Ministry of Information and Edgar came back and I came in. The man behind them on the Shell side was Alex Fo who had a lot of responsibility for all the very sophisticated Shell advertising before the war and afterwards, the film unit was very much his baby, and in the evening, when we'd finished about 6 o'clock, he'd almost always come into the bar at the Cecil and buy us drinks and would love to, it was very much, he enjoyed the unit very much, he'd come and see rushes and rough cuts. He retired from Shell in the 60s or something like that and when he died in the 70s Shell just didn't want to know one felt, there was no one from the Shell company.

AL: Did he intervene at all in production.

BM: Very mildly. The first film I ever made at the end of the war, I made a film called Approach to Science, it was for the War Office and Eric Ambler was in charge of it and the idea was the war was coming to an end and they wanted soldiers to have an idea that science wasn't totally occupied with producing weapons. The opening had bombs and things and then we had someone sitting at a desk and when he pressed a button for beer it filled up and he pressed another for cigarettes and it came out saying empty, but I've just found the budget, the budget was one and a half thousand.

AL: How long were they.

BM: Half an hour.

AL: Colour

BM: Black and white.

AL: You were saying didn't he intervene on that.

BM: Oh yes, we had one of the sequences on TB and we had Midhurst and where it said the incidence of TB on people earning above £5 a week was very low and Alex said because you're on less than £5 a week you can't put propaganda in your own film and we altered that to higher income or lower income. I think that's the only time he interfered on that. He usually came along and he might make suggestions but he was, but what he did do, in 1952 I did a film at Le Mans and he brought Dilys Powell along to see it who gave it a little write up in the Sunday Times.

AL: You did specialise in racing films.

BM: Later. Shell were a bit uncertain about it. At the end of the war, first of all I was involved with John Sherman, we were involved in a series how an Aeroplane Flies and there was a cavalcade of motoring in

which John Sherman's father was taking part and it was also the big motoring event at and we got an agreement we could have a small amount of money and do a cinemag and Geoffrey Hughes did something on bus training at Chiswick and we made a one reeler but this was regarded really as a concession to us. wanted us to do the British Grand Prix but it was rather we're doing it for you more than you're doing it for us and slightly that with Le Mans except a Finnish company was keen on doing that as well. And Owen Vorcox was very keen, he became a great friend of Ferrari's and the Shell Ferrari contract in Italy which a number of people really disapproved of but I think was probably very good from Shell's point of view, it was very much indirectly a film unit.

AL: About technique of making documentaries in those early days, was there a technique.

BM: The theory was the film you made was only part of it, it was the raw material of which you made a film and the script wasn't all that relevance or need not have any relevance or you if you used it. But Arthur had a great sense of saying what was the picture, what have you got in the picture, what is the picture doing. But there wasn't, we had sound which was a great problem on the wartime films, there was always trouble because people would forget the sound recordist and Leo had a girlfriend with him sitting outside in their van, they would forget it while people were having dirty jokes about them. If, which happened at one point, a bubble exploded, that was the end of sound recording for the day, we all went home. When, we didn't have any sound when I did my first film, no natural sound at all, we had some effects, I was lucky because it was army and we had Bill Alwyn, William Alwyn had been doing films and he came in and did the music for it which was very nice. He was in the suburb in those days and he became a great friend, I saw him last on his 80th birthday just before he died. When we recorded, we did our Cinemag, for that we obviously needed sound and we had Levers Rich and we recorded on disk, you had this enormous van and we were able to take it up the hill and get one or two tracks during the practice and on the day itself it was down to get some shots of the start because the thing I always remember, Stanley Rodwell, Stanley was the cameraman and he was very condescending, he always took quite a time to do anything, he could do very well really but I said the important thing is to get number one, the first car leaving the lines, the first motoring event in this country after the war. The first car we had was out of focus which was No9, Stanley had gone into the beer tent, and the day before we'd, we went up the evening before, we only had a half day on the budget, we did lots of shots of spinning wheels and hands and so on to try and cover everything and it poured with rain because it had been a bit difficult to match and we got about four rolls of film I think we were allowed for the whole thing and we'd used one reel on this, we didn't have any spare and the camera assistant opened the tin by mistake, our first day was a disaster, and we lost the actual start, Stanley, but we, that went over very well and Shell agreed we could film the Grand Prix at Silverstone, and there again we had disk, and I have an idea Levers Rich had a wire recorder which had come from a German submarine and finally we were using the disk there, when we finally went to Le Mans in 52 then Levers Rich came and we actually had tape for the first time and this was wonderful, because we had quite a lot of sound to play with.

AL: But you never had your own proper recording equipment.

BM: No. I think for a long time we used Leo and then in 53 we went to Italy and I don't think we had a sound recordist then, we hired some portable equipment which we got, and the same person who opened the tin

dripped the microphone and we couldn't get a spare microphone in Milan even, we finally got one sent up from Rome.

AL: It sounds at that particular time it was a bunch of amateurs.

BM: There was an element of amateurism. But in fact the sound recordist was professional, but when tape got going it really made a tremendous difference.

AL: How many were in your crews after the war.

BM: It was normally four. Director and assistant and camera and camera assistant.

AL: Were you away alot.

BM: No, we had a time in Cornwall, on a film Cornish Engine but has we had to write our own scripts and edit it, and editing was fairly slow I think being fairly amateur, nothing was well logged or anything, we hadn't got that worked out, so I think editing took a long time and a lot of time was wasted on it. It was Alan Gurley who first established at Shell there should be an editor.

AL: When you went to write your scripts did you go away without your crew, and do your own research and come back and write.

BM: I think always.

AL: You didn't write it overnight.

BM: No. With Le Mans I went the previous year, there wouldn't have been any point of a script for that but I had a treatment. We did a film at the same time on atomization which required scripting, that was a technical film and it had a script worked out with Shell technical people but we didn't know who was going to be cameraman until the last moment. And Shell in the 50s, late 40s and 50s were setting up other units, and Sidney Beadle who was an odd end cameraman, he went out to Venezuela for a time so we were almost without a cameraman at one point, we had Charlie Marlbone, he was, we did a Farnborough film with Charlie which I always remember because we had a Lancaster or Lincoln and we took the rear gun turret out to film from there and it was fairly drafty inside and Charlie managed at one point to pull the ripcord of his parachute. I always remember we came back, try we'd been doing some shooting, and we always came back when we heard and aircraft coming in and try and meet them and get some shots and Charlie with this parashoot walking across the aerodrome to get it packed again, anyone else would have got his assistant to do this, it was rather sweet. And Charlie was involved when we did the Grand Prix and he was on one of the corners, and it was full of problems because there was very little safety regulations, one was very rightly nervous because the only spectator protection was a bit of rope, and they were making us have our cameras someway back, there was no sandbags or anything to keep behind them, they gave me a few straw bails, Charlie was on one of the corners and Bero who had been almost leading crashed there and I thought hope to god he's got shots of Bera and we went round and there was Charlie with his camera loading and it had happened tow or three minutes before, they were still trying to dig the car out and Charlie hadn't even seen it. His assistant was Johnny Jordan who got so fed up with poor old Charlie that he picked up the camera and took it away from the camera and started more or less standing in the middle of the circuit taking pictures, got us some very good shots and survived.

AL: What kind of camera equipment were they using.

BM: We, basically we almost always used Newman Sinclairs. The great thing I suppose in the late 40s it was decided we would have a new camera and Newman Sinclair built us a new camera and when it came it didn't work. And I remember going round with it, and in fact they'd been using such old film that the film had shrunk. I went there and they had this old bit of film and they said it fits perfectly alright, and we got some new film and the film they were using had literally shrunk 5% or something. We did have a Debrie, an old handcranked Debrie

AL: You didn't use it with a hand crank

BM: You could use it with a handcrank. I was very keen, we did a film called How a Motorcar works and I was keen to do some dissolves on the camera because we were quite short of money for opticals quite often on film and we did, we had a car and we dissolved away, we got the chassis and saw the engine. We did these and we were very pleased with how it worked but they said the camera weaves throughout, we thought what on earth can this be, they said it's quite usable but the camera weaves, in fact with the Debrie was perfect although it was weaving right the way through, lovely camera.

AL: Did you eventually get onto Ariflexes.

BM: Yes. I'm not sure if the unit had got an Ariflex even when I left, I left in 55, I think we were still basically Newman Sinclair.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

AL: How long did Edgar stay in charge.

BM: He stayed in charge really until Film Center was formed when he remained in charge and then he was Film Centre and then Arthur became involved as well, I suppose really when he was British Transport Films, the end of the war, Arthur came back and they must have formed Film Centre then because this Approach to Science film I was making, Edgar was in charge of that till right to the end, and we were shooting it in the summer of 45 and almost our last location was in Birmingham, Sarah my daughter was being born at the same town, I managed to work there, Sally was in a nursing home there, Sally had just been born, I got home and heard about the bomb being dropped. They hadn't consulted us so we had to alter the end of the film.

AL: How long did Arthur stay at Shell.

BM: Arthur remained at Film Centre pretty much until he died, he was quite often having trouble with people, Arthur didn't always respect people as much as they felt.

AL: Was Ronnie Tritten there.

BM: No Ronnie was BP. Ronnie Tritten was in New York at one point when they went there with BP. There was always this slight confusion with Shellmex and BP in that England every regarded Shellmex and BP very much as a provincial company which it was in many ways. One of the motor racing films we had a premiere at Shellmex House, which gave very good parties, and Shellmex and BP put on a commercial show of their own for

some new petrol and Arthur was furious, he thought we were lowering the whole tone of the film unit.

AL: When you left Shell what were you going to do.

BM: I was working with Shell, I'd been working on some flying films, then I got a certain amount of political smearing, John Armstrong took over that, I was then working on a Shell series called Look at Your World which was the world of Shell. I think they worked out the idea that they would have these films which they would show round the world which would show the activities of Shell, but nobody had worked out how they would show them because there were no facilities for showing them, really maddening. One of the things I did in Holland, the Dutch flower queen was sponsored by Shell and it was quite a nice item in that it was funny and pouring rain and I had a shot of head office of Shell in the Hague which we shot at about 2 frames a second, they didn't think any of this was funny. We shot a carnival in Trinidad, I went out to Trinidad to film the carnival and they had a Shell Steel Band and I remember getting a notice carnival fine but essential film oildrilling. I sent a telex back delighted film oildrilling, please send drill earliest, I hadn't realised these cables went all round the Caribbean and I was almost received like royalty because people had been longing to send a cable like that to London, I'd got fed up with this and I said to Arthur I really think this is a waste of time, Arthur said I think it's time, you've been with Shell long enough, I don't think you should be any longer, but take, this was in August, take your own time, you don't want to say you're leaving, get something else lined up, it would be ridiculous to leave now, no one is setting anything up at this point, you'll just be kicking around. I said fine, thank you very much. Next day Charles Sylvester said Arthur's told me you're leaving. Arthur could never resist saying anything, he said a week's notice. I went to Edgar and was working for Edgar for a time and then Shell, I got a message from Shell would you like to go to Australia and work on the Olympic Games. I said how long, he said you'll be away about three weeks but you've got to go next week, I said fine. He said Terry Trench is going with you, do you know him, and I'd never met Terry, anyhow meet at the airport. I met at the airport. I don't know how we knew, we might not have known who we were until we were on the airplane, we were booked next to each other. We got on this flight and they said welcome on this Quantas flight to Australia, you captain is Captain Snodgrass, we stopped at Singapore on the way and there were two friends of mine, Peter Whitehead and Reg Parnell who were famous racing drivers and going out for almost certainly the first Australian Grand Prix and there was also someone from BOAC, one of their contact people going out as well. We were talking and he said to Reg and Peter Whitehead, you should be alright, BOAC have given a list of VIPs and you're on the list. We got to Singapore and they said Mr Mason, I said yes, they said there's a special car for you, and I was taken through customs and given champagne. I never knew, possibly I was the only person not on the BOAC VIP list, there were various units there, also at the end when they all got on the bus they said oh no there's a car for you, and I was taken there and champagne at the airport, and somebody said you are from MGM aren't you. We went out to Melbourne and we had a night in Singapore and we'd, Arthur said you're going out, you've done these motor racing films, and I'd done 2 or 3 by then, and Terry was an expert editor, you'll be able to help them. We got there and said how are you organising it. The chap says it's quite difficult, we've got 14 cameramen and each cameraman had a card and on the back of the card they had numbers 1 to 50 and on the front they put what the shots were and they were shooting on 16mm Kodachrome or Eastmancolor and the cameraman had this sheet on which he was meant to put all the shots down, he didn't

have an assistant, I think there was a dozen cameraman, I said you can't expect a cameraman to do ending up like that, there's a simple way of doing it that I did at Le Man, I gave them a clock and they just put on each row what it was and hopefully they put the clock at the beginning or the end and you can then then your thing roughly sorted, all you want is some idea where the rolls come. They said oh no, they've all got this, it's all been worked out, we didn't expect some pommy bastards to come and tell us how to run film. They got on the opening day, I said what's happening, they said we're expecting you to edit the film, the film is coming through, the first film will be through at about 10 in the evening and the last film about 4 o'clock and there was going to be something like 7 hours of film coming through. They got two 16mm projectors to project it on and they said we need a cut copy to go out at 6 o'clock in the morning. I said this is not a way to make films. They said you've been sent out to work here. I said we're professionals, we're not going to work under these circumstances. We had quite a row. Arthur supported us. They said it's quite right they shouldn't work on such a project.

AL: Was it going out on Australian television.

BM: Stanley Horton, we'd both been in the Birmingham Film Society and gone into films, I'd been running it during the war sometime and he'd been running it before he came into films. Stanley Horton approached Menzies and said this is a tremendous chance to sell themselves to the world and they should get the cameramen and directors from all over the world. Menzies hated film people I think, oh no, we'll do it all ourselves, and he'd got in touch with a cheapjack American who was also involved in it, they would do everything for them for rights and it would cost them nothing. They were paying very little, there were some good cameramen, but none of those would work on it, it was almost all schoolmasters who'd bought up 16mm some time ago, it was an absolute cheapjack shambles. The various newsreels who were going to be involved with it refused to have anything to do with it, the only people who were willing were Japanese newsreels and they were supposed to be sending out a copy to Japan and to this American, each day, American company. So in fact we were there and Terry and I had film passes and didn't do anything at all except swan around and see what an absolute cockup they were making. The second day they had a tremendous march, a great parade went by and they also had countermarching by troops and one of the cameramen left his tripod in the middle and it had been throwing the whole thing out, an additional failure I remember.

AL: So your journey wasn't necessary.

BM: We were there and saw Stanley Hawton and having a wonderful time, Terry said I don't want to go back, and Stanley said you should make a film for me while you're here. I put forward an idea how to feel at home in Australia, a film for new arrivals, because do you remember Margaret Carden, we met her and she said how wonderful to meet civilised people, I had to talk to somebody civilised, they're terrible here, they don't seem to realise I was someone in England, when I tell them I had servants they say the most rude things. She would ring us up at night sometimes and she'd say I've just had someone round for supper and they finished off with the most rude language, so I thought a friendly film about what Australia's like would be a good thing. Stanley agreed and then Shell said we paid for you to go out, do a film for us, it's a good idea but we don't have a budget for that and it's very difficult to get a new budget but we can upgrade an old budget, the touring service have a budget for a film called In the Footsteps of the Tourists, John Edward Ayre and we can up the budget of that. Would you like to that, I said fine. It involves

going from Adelaide to Perth, the journey he did was the first crossing of Australia. We suggest you go to Adelaide, pick up a car there, someone from the tourist service and someone from the film unit called Roland Becket, then you'll be able to get the basis of a script, pick up a cameraman, John Meek who we'll send to you in Perth and come back, it should take about 3 or 4 days and a couple of days in Perth to get ready, it should be less than three weeks to do it. In fact it took nearly 6 months I think, it wasn't quite as long as that. We set off from Perth and two people from Sidney and they gave us the most clapped out car they had. It was entirely dirt roads to cross and it sat down in the middle of the board and the springs having gone and a week or two later we arrived in Perth, having a wonderful time in the outback, people were so pleased to see anyone we were feted. We got there and they said you can have £50 to put the car right so you can come back, they sent the £50 and it was quite impossible and they said it's all you can have, so I sent a director to managing director or chairman of Shell would he be responsible for my crew if I had to take my crew in an unsafe car and this created a terrible, I said I would take no responsibility of my crew, they said you must have another car, you must have a jeep, there was a new Humber Super Snipe and we put the ger on that and it wouldn't move so then they said we'll have to get the dodge made serviceable, so I had 3 weeks in Perth with very little to do, we did a film for WHO, we did one on Argentine ants. Perth is still delightful, we used to go out with the WHO in the car, they had a plague of ants which they had to deal with and we would come back in the evening, coming into Perth on a lovely summer evening during the rush hour, and there was a policeman leaning against the side of the wall doing this sort of thing, I said what's he doing, they said that's Bert, he doesn't believe there's any future standing in the middle of the road. It was like that, idyllic, we had a wonderful time, then we struggled back and we just got back for Christmas, to Sidney for Christmas.

AL: Then you came back to England.

BM: I stayed on for editing. I hadn't really got a script and it needed a bit of sorting out to do it. Then I came back in March and Terry said you might ring my wife when you get back and say I'm alright. And I rang her and his wife said I don't want to know about the bastard. Terry turned up a year later to find his home had disappeared.

AL: What did you do after this.

BM: I think after this I became involved with the history of motor racing for Shell which was a Film Centre project and I did some films with Edgar, I did a civil engineering project for Edgar, and then I did the history of motor racing which went on for several years, it was a Film Centre film, it went out as a Shell film. They're talking about doing some more but if they don't I might have some rights, I wrote and directed it all and it's now a best seller on video. That took several years because collecting film from all over the place, from all over Europe, and in fact collecting film which had been almost lost, and I'm glad did because there was quite a lot of film from the Automobile Club of France. Somebody told me they thought there was film at the Automobile Club of France, they used to have films before the war, and we wrote to all the Shell companies and we wrote specifically to the man in charge of motor racing, who was quite pleasant but a useless aristocrat and he said oh yes dear boy I'll see about it. He said I've been around to the Automobile Club of France and it was all destroyed in the war, nothing left at all. Then it's the innocence one has, he'd never moved out of the office. I went round to the office and they said right up in the roof in

a little attic, he might know if anybody does, and there was a chap who looked as if he'd come out of a Rene Clair film and he said there might be, we had some film and it might be in the country, I'll find out. He collected this film up and I went down the the Cinematheque, because I'd been there, Mary Merson I always found helpful, also i was on the general selection committee of the National Film Archive for a time, I think Edgar got me on it and I always found Ernest Lindgren a pain in the neck, he did a lot setting it up, but he only wanted to collect film, he hated people seeing it it seemed to me, there's always been a bit of this about the NFA, we never seemed to like each other. I remember at the Cinematheque saying to Mary I'm involved in the NFA but I don't get on very well with Lindgren, and she said for us Ernest Lindgren existe pas. They were very helpful, we did all our projecting with the Cinematheque and we brought in various M Eiffel, who was the Eiffel Tower grandson. And we found this stuff and a lot of it was in a pretty poor state but we were able to make fine grains and I've now got fine grain index of a lot of that. We returned it and I assume it's all been junked. Some of the French film libraries charge the earth for old material. They weren't preserving anything then. I remember someone produced a box called Paris Vien 1903, the Paris-Vien was 1902 so it was obviously not that, but it was 1902 Paris Vienna and it was just an uncatlogged box, they said we've got an odd box somewhere. The outside had completely disintegrated but there was some lovely stuff in the middle which we copies and would have gone otherwise. When a later film, when i was involved in Thorn EMI, they were still using the nitrate original which was almost unusable now it had gone so solid, trying to sell it for howmany hundred dollars a foot.

AL: After the history of motor racing, what next.

BM: I was involved quite a time with United Steel, there was a chap called Charles Harvey who was the public relations officer there who was very good. The thing I liked most, we did a fairly shoestring film called steeltown which was about Stockbridge and it was just a very nice piece of organisation, Sue was the cameraman, we had colour 35mm, and a 3 to 1 shooting ratio so we were very tight on that but partly with Charles we went down, I stayed locally with a woman who had a house nearby and spent sometime going into the works and finding out about it and when I met the shop stewards and organisers, I discussed the whole project with them, the steel industry was very well organised and the works convenor knew who we were and it worked very well and it was showed at the TUC conference, it was showed one year and they asked to see it a later year.

AL: After that what.

BM: I then did a film for them, they were doing conversion to electric arc from coal fire furnaces and they wanted a film on this. It was a very interesting piece of labour relations because they were having a lot of discussions before it started with the steel unions on redundancy and it was extremely well worked out, and then I was off that and they spent 1000s on filming a girder being moved because it was the biggest girder they'd ever moved and at the end we went back and we made a film with a greater emphasis on labour relations. They had a good personnel manager at United Steel, an ex blacksmith who looked like and all in wrestler. Then I spent several years, a series for BP on the history of the motor car, the history of motorracing had been made almost entirely from contemporary film, the history of the motorcar had very little film really. It worked very well really. Then I did a film for the post office which I found very depressing, Gerry Borro, we didn't really get on. They wanted, it was one of those stamp films, and a chap who was

just a qualifying student did the design and it was the centenary of the test match and the centenary the cricket association and the centenary of the amateur athletic association and they wanted the three centenaries designing the stamp and putting it on one film and it became a bit of a mess, if it had been one thing it would have been alright. I'd been involved lately in non events, Thorn EMI wanted a history of the motor car but when that came up I said can you give me any idea of budget, are you thinking of £1,000, £10,000, £100,000. They said we haven't gone into it yet. This was one of those video disks and they were keen and took some time setting it up and they then found they had no budget for any of it, so that disappeared. Then recently I had a message from in Stuttgart would I be interested in doing a one hour video for their centenary, I said very much so, could we meet to discuss it, could I go to Heathrow, there was someone from Mercedes Benz here and they gave me a splendid lunch at the Sheraton Heathrow and I said what do you want me to do, I'm not a charity, there's always this thing when you worked for Shell, you'll come and give them advice on where to get film for nothing. They said no we want to involve you, I said how much do you want to involve me, they said as much as possible, I said I could easily handle the whole production, we could set it up here and I think we can do it very competitively. They said it's not as simple as that, there's a committee involved and this was in September, they said it's wanted for 1st April, do you think you can do it, I said certainly if we get going now. They said fine, delighted you're going to do it and I wrote I'm delighted to work with them, usual deafening silence. The day before Christmas Eve I get a telephone call here could I come over to Stuttgart immediately, I said it's Christmas, well after Christmas, I said what about the day after Boxing day, they said we're closed to 3rd of January, can you come over on 4th. So I went over there and I was by someone from Davey Film and Television Studios, Pete Burgen, I said do they know what they want, he said no they haven't any idea. I met a very nice chap who runs the museum and knows my films and we met the German TV/video company, I was very impressed, very efficient, very young, and said what material do you have, they had everything, practically everything was on 1 inch and VHS so we could run anything on VHS with coded copies, this seemed fine, I said surely the best thing would be to make a racing story. They said we don't want that really, I said it could be part of it, you can see it's a 100 years, the first 25 years will practically finish in 1914, they're inventing the motor car and they finish by winning the french Grand Prix, then we're up to 1939 which is really another period, the Nazi period cars are winning everything, then 1956 and Sterling Moss is winning and give up motorracing and the last period and you're leading in research and safety and if you want a shape like that it's fine. Everything was very nice but they had no film, they had an enormous number of films of theirs which are awful as only German films can be, they shot lots of films with Herr Daimler and Herr Benz with hired costumes and false whiskers stuck on and we were watching it with the German TV people who were saying there are hardly any good film which exists of their cars virtually is on my BP films, they've got no decent colour footage, they've got a few bits but practically not a foot of it which is any good. I said I'm sure I can arrange to let BP have

but you must right

I then found the chap who is in charge of the museum, he doesn't run it but is in charge, he's an ex car salesman called Von Pain and I met him and he said ah I don't want too much motorracing, I think we should make a 20 minute one using entirely our own material and I'll advertise that. I said making a 20 minute advertiser out of pure crap makes the mind boggle, this didn't go very well. He said what ever happens it's got to

be done by 1st April and this was the beginning of March. I said all along I'm going skiing in March, they said you can't, I said I am, I'll arrange to come back on 2nd April but nothing is ordered and we can't do anything, it's for them to ask Shell for material, not me, I found back on 3rd April and found my flight had been cancelled, it was £70 a week, they paid me several thousand pounds. Several people at Stuttgart said I'm sorry about this, we think your ideas are fine but they insist on doing it themselves and there was a headline in the Autocar Benz Spectacular Flop, they did it themselves and they put the film together and they had various State Ministers and they walked out when it was going out live, it was so awful and overrunning so the subject is unmentionable. At the moment various people have various projects they want me to do

Do you know Ted Eggs who runs British Transport Video, we shot a video using their pneumatic camera and Ted gave me a VHS time coded copy and we worked out a short film and we just put it together in their editing suite at British Transport.

AL: How do you find working with video.

BM: Now I'm not editing so much, wonderful. I was hoping if we can get together with people, you can run the stuff and really examine it instead of having to go into a cutting room and run it backwards and forwards and it's so easy to label it.

AL: You defined at the start what you thought documentary was, how do you define it now.

BM: It's really non fictional film, no more than that. A lot of it is a form of journalism, nearer to journalism than other things and at it's best, good journalism. I enjoyed all these motoring histories really because it's involved quite a bit of actual research I think it was Christopher Hill who said history has to be re written for every generation. The facts don't change but our view of them changes, a thing like the history of the motorcar, I like social history and I'm particularly interested in engineering social history so I find it interesting to find out what really happened. The history like motor history there's an enormous amount of rubbish and myth and I find it interesting finding out just what did happen and also.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

BM: I enjoyed history because history I enjoy anyway - I like it. In my Cambridge days another member of the Granta was Eric Hobsbaum - have you read his books or come across him.

AL: Yes.

BM: I'm glad to see he's still involved with history in a more prestigious way.

AL: John Grierson has been called the founder of British documentary, would you agree with that.

BM: He obviously did so much part of it, documentary's early flowering was probably due very much to the curious combination of Grierson and Arthur and Edgar and Harry Watt, and no doubt some others. Grierson was not, the others did as much to establish it, or its particular form as Grierson. Grierson I always have a soft spot because he was so nice to me so early on, with all of them, and I'm part of the thing, Grierson I thought was fun. I remember showing him the film I did at Le Mans in 1952, a film I've always liked, we had a wonderful crew on it. Maurice Ford who was very good on that and it worked. We arrived at le Mans, ERic Ford arrived at Le Mans saying he was going back on the next train I remember because they'd had a row on the journey down, in fact we had a wonderful French crew which included Sascha Vierny and several of them who became distinguished French cameramen afterwards. What was I going to say, I've forgotten.

AL: You were talking about Grierson.

BM: Arthur was a great supporter on that I remember and putting it together and Arthur saying we got a shot of the man who nearly won it and his car broke down an hour before the end and he was pretty shattered and I got a shot of his walking through the crowd which Maurice Ford had taken and Arthur saying that's the shot you've got to build the end around and it was very true and I hadn't really thought of that before and Arthur seemed to me to be one of the very rare producers who gave you a film idea, who said that's the way to do it, or how right it was, or who also said, he'd come with enthusiasm, he'd say how wonderful. I remember, which was also Arthur and part of documentary, in 1949 we were filming in Farnborough and we heard the Comet, which was only a name, it was on the secret list, was coming in and the Comet, we were up at and suddenly the Comet came into view and we had shots of that, wonderful shots and the rushes went in and we'd get a telegram of the rushes report at Farnborough in the morning and Arthur sent the rushes report on a greeting telegram which was one of those things, it always helped because everybody was delighted, so often when you had rushes reports the producer in those circumstances would say rushes OK but camera weave, something out of focus.

AL: Were you influenced by Grierson at all in your work.

BM: No I wouldn't say, I would say I was influenced by Arthur.

AL: What about Flaherty.

BM: I always thought he was an overblown up myth. I remember we did a film called Cornish Engines, black and white, and he'd use a spotlight and the shadow of the valve gear would be going on the white wall in the

background and the film then had, I did the shooting and Phil Armitage put it together with the most boring commentary, it was one of those commentaries which put together, and Arthur brought Flaherty to see it, and quite natural immediately it started Flaherty went to sleep. At the end Arthur said well Bob what did you think of it, Flaherty said wonderful Arthur but I'd have to see it again before I gave a full, considered opinion. The story you may know, Stuart MacAllister, we worked together at Transport, I enjoyed it very much, Mac could be very good, I said to Mac how did you come to be acknowledged as a great editor, and he said it's really Arthur, I forget who it was but one of the Crown Film Units had done a film on, a flying film, and he said he's one of these people who when you see his name on the credits you can't keep awake. We had lunch with Arthur and we ran this film and I woke up at the end and Arthur said well Mac what do you think, don't you think so and so and so and so, and I said I'm sure you're right Arthur. A week later, this was when he was at the Ministry of Information so Crown came under him, and ran the film again, and Mac said I couldn't help it I went to sleep again. At the end Mac said you're a wonderful editor, the best editor I've ever seen. The trouble was that it was no good trying to see the film, because if I tried to see it I'd only to to sleep before it started so I never know what film created my reputation.

AL: What about Cavalcanti

BM: I never had any, Mac was a friend of Cavalcanti. When I went to see Grierson, the only complete film by him I saw was Industrial Britain which I thought was wonderful, I was stary eyed about the whole business.

AL: Do you rate Cavalcanti.

BM: Yes, because of that. It's so difficult. I think the Society people said he was strictly limited in his idea of shots, you would see umpteen versions of the same shot, it would have been much easier if he had one or two different shots. But I don't know how much it was Cavalcanti, he had some very good camera men didn't he. I suspect quite often a number of documentaries have been made by cameramen, and a number of cameramen who said they made the film and they didn't.

AL: That was Drifters, wasn't it. How do you react to the Empire Marketing Board.

BM: That was where I went to see Grierson, so I was quite stary eyed about the films.

AL: What about the GPO Film Unit.

BM: To some extent the same. A mystique. Night Mail stands up very well.

AL: What about the Crown.

BM: Crown the same. I remember talking, there used to be a spark, Bob Ridart, he used to talk about Crown and Mr Jennings's University Academy, he used to say, they were in the tradition where they could shoot so much, they used it in many ways but they had a lot more diplomas than we had at Shell in those days.

AL: Did you know Jennings.

BM: We always did our dubbing later on with Ken Cameron, he had just left Jennings.

AL: What about the point about Film Centre.

BM: That was very much of it. The person we haven't mentioned who I always liked working with was Raymond Spottiswood.

AL: He's often forgotten.

BM: He didn't film that much but he was tremendously helpful and tremendously loyal. He was really the producer on the History of Motor racing and he was very good ally, one felt one had got a very good ally there.

AL: What was the function of Film Centre.

BM: As far as Shell was concerned they were the producers, they did sometimes they were producing on films at Shell. When we did the History of Motor racing that was set up as a Film Centre production and they acted as the producing company and did everything, the entire financing.

AL: Was that Shell money.

BM: Yes.

AL: So really Film Centre was part of Shell.

BM: No it was acting for Shell.

BM: I think Shell paid Film Centre a general sort of retainer and then Film Centre put in the budget for this film and they were paid by Shell and I must have been paid, I think I was paid entirely by film Centre but a certain amount of expenses and everything else Shell did but basically everything else, all the finances were Shell, and Shell arranged the cutting rooms and Shell chose the editor, Pat Holmes on the early one, and Dick Marden, Richard Marden, he now does features, he'd been working via Film Centre for Shell in the Far East Unit and he came onto me via Shell.

AL: What about the National Coal Board.

BM: I never had anything to do with them. I knew people of course because everybody tended to meet at the Highlander at one point.

AL: Did you have any dealings yourself with the MOI during the war.

BM: No, the films I was involved with were directly War Office. And we went direct to the War Office, Ministry of Information were hovering in the background. But even the budget if I remember it was direct to the war office.

AL: The COI.

BM: The COI I became involved with in a fairly horrific business. We did some films on air traffic control with Skilbeck and there's really, it was the guild and the COI at their worse, we had a limited budget for this film. Having worked for Shell, and done quite a lot of flying films one could have set it up and done it for a fraction of the price they were doing for a bit of old boy and everyone else. At Farnborough we

filmed for years and we took, after I was involved he started having a party at the Savoy before or after Farnborough, we used to entertain well and we had free use of aircraft and everything else, we had an enormous return on it. With the air traffic control film the COI and Guild had decided it would be better, it would save money if they filmed on flight simulators, whereas flight simulators are enormously much more expensive to use. But they decided this, so we had to dismantle part of a flight simulator to film on it. We always had, we were trying to film some equipment which was meant to be high security risk and wasn't working and put the names of the aircraft on the screen, this we had to have everybody, it all had to be fixed some days in advance and the machine was always on the blink so we paid for all the unit, because they wouldn't pay overtime, if we'd gone there once and been able to do it on overtime, we'd have got it off, as it was we had to go there 5 or 6 times. The flight simulators too, we could only film on them about between 4 and 6 in the morning, and so much of the whole business, this is air traffic for air pilots is communication, and they wouldn't pay for sync sound, so we had no sync sound when the sound is an essential part of it. We could have gone out in an aero plane with sync sound and had sync sound and things which took several weeks do do while we messed about we could have done in 24 hours, it really was most, it was private enterprise and the COI at its worse. Skilbeck, my first day of shooting on it, we had this great business of getting onto the end of the runway at Heathrow and we were set up and it needed an enormous amount of organisation and everything else and we found the camera didn't work, Skilbeck said we couldn't have the camera the day before because it would have meant another day's hire. And we only had the camera at the last moment, it was early morning, and when we got onto the end of the runway it didn't work, and the airtraffic control said do film units always work like this. That was my experience with the COI.

AL: What about Realist, did you ever work with Realist.

BM: Do you have any idea of their rating.

BM: Not really. The company I worked with was Wallace Prods where Max Anderson worked, we made the steel film for Wallace.

AL: Did you ever work for Worldwide.

BM: No.

AL: You talked about the Film Producers Guild did you ever made any films for them

BM: Just the air traffic control film. No later the History of, John Wiles was producer of History of the Motor Car with BP.

AL: That was done through the Guild.

BM: Yes that was fine, that was Films of Today, do you know John Wiles

AL: I know of him.

BM: He was a producer and a reasonable one.

AL: In Documentary Film News it's stated that the World War II produced a unique fusion of feature and documentary schools in the work of the Navy and Army and Airforce Film Units. What do you think about that.

BM: I think that's reasonable'

AL: Do you think that Britain played a large part in the spread of the documentary movement.

BM: I'm sure it did.

AL: Do you think it was the original home of the documentary.

BM: What was very nice was showing my History of the Motor Car in the United States. We ran some shows when I was investigating, I took some over and ran them in Los Angeles and we had a number of people from Hollywood there and they said we've never seen films like this practically.

AL: Did you ever have any studio reconstructions in the films you made.

BM: About the only time I ever did anything in the studio was that very first approach to science film at Carlton Hill.

AL: Would you rather have done it on a natural location.

BM: Oh I like actors and would have liked to have various ideas at various points, I would have liked to have made a feature, I just never had to money to do it. I tried to get one set up in the days of Group 3 once.

AL: Do you think actuality location work is better than studio simulated.

BM: On the whole yes, because I love bad films, I love the old Hollywood London Sherlock Holmes, I think all the same as it happened during the war, going on location does add a certain sense to a film.

AL: Do you think sync sound was a blessing or a curse for documentaries.

BM: I just wish it had been easier to have it.

AL: What about the use of colour.

BM: Colour too, really. When we were doing Seal Town, it was really difficult for us, we got onto a tight budget on stock again for that, one got back to what it had been in war time, one didn't dare to have another shot.

AL: Let's get onto ACTT. When did you first get involved with ACTT.

BM: I'd known of ACTT. When I joined Shell, I think I probably asked to join or Kay Ongar who was shop steward said we all belong to ACTT so I said fine. ACTT was very good and very helpful. I was shop steward for a time, we used to swop around being shop steward and at one point we used to have an annual lunch at Simpsons where we had George and Bessie Bond and the unit manager Charles Sylvester and we would talk of any problems we had. We had things like the flying film where we were filming with BOAC where we could only do it with two people, the cameraman and myself, and we'd put the case to George and everybody agreed with this and George agreed and we were doing very well. I was shop steward when we did become involved in arbitration and Geoffrey who'd done a film and I can't remember what happened and we had a day, two days of discussion

with an arbitrator, Hoar was it from the Guild. I think the Guild which was not very pro ACTT had persuaded Shell to stick about paying extra for a film which was going out on commercial release and I 'm not sure what happened at the end but we felt Shell was being used. But Shell were curious because the basic organisation we were concerned with was fine, but there was a feeling it Shell that it was wrong that people should be in unions, a company like Shell, and there was a certain amount of sniping went on about this. A very unpleasant thing, maybe when I was shop steward. ACTT were negotiating at that point with the ASFP and Shell had right roundt he board increase, everybody in the Shell organisation, and Alan Dell who was running the unit had us all in and said you needn't worry we're not doing it immediately because negotiations are going on, and you're not being included in this because you may be getting more but I can assure you that you won't lose out on it. When ACT had some kind of arrangement that people earning less than £3 a week had 5% extra which didn't affect us at all and we said what about this and they said oh no your union' been negotiating and you're not getting anything, and we said but you told us. We went above Alan Dell and they said if Alan Dell, the unit manager told you that he had no right to. I thought this was really dirty work in a way but on the whole Shell paid reasonably but at that point it was quite difficult for people, John Armstrong and others had spent a lot of the money. They could play dirty.

AL: Did you do any recruiting.

BM: We expected everybody to join the ACTT automatically. We wouldn't have it otherwise. Nobody ever objected and we also were quite keen when we had good people to get them into the union.

AL: What other positions did you hold beside shop steward.

BM: I was librarian at one point. I catalogued the books and tried to get some books together.

AL: You were on the general council weren't you.

BM: I only came to it as shop steward. I was shop steward about a year.

AL: Do you think there's a future for ACTT.

BM: I hope so I think it's essential, I'm not sure at all - there have always been restrictive practices in the past, in the old days we got over them, in those days usually with full agreement.

AL: Do you think ACTT has played a useful role.

BM: Yes. I don't think anyone who's been in ACTT could question it because there were terrible things used to happen. People were stranded in foreign locations with no money, and working with the Guild I would bring ACT in to get paid sometimes, because with the Guild sometimes you had to wait months to get paid. And, which was very embarassing, plus it would go into a preview theatre and they wouldn't show it unless you'd tell them you'd got the money. This was with John Wyles, not John Wyles, before John Wyles, he was embarassed by it, it happened several times, certainly to say to bring in ACTT worried people, I have a collection of letters when they finally paid, sorry the accountant's been ill or somebody's been away, so I gave them a whole photocopied bunch of these and said I hope this will be met a little earlier.

AL: Which of the many documentaries you've done had given you the most enjoyment.

BM: The most satisfactory was the History of Motor Racing really because that was finding new film, the most fun was History of the Motor Car.

AL: Which was the one you least enjoyed.

BM: I think the post office one really.

AL: If you could start again would you want to change course.

BM: I may have left Shell earlier, I'm not sure whether I would have gone in for television or not, I was trying that at one point and it never really happened and then a film turned up.

AL: What I meant would you have chosen a different career altogether.

BM: No. I wanted film, somebody came to talk about film at school and they referred to Film Till Now and that really started it, and we ran the school film society and we ran it on 9.5 with silent films to begin with, but we were going to run one 35, I was crazy to see Potemkin, but I got in touch with them, it had all been arranged, I don't know quite what happened but someone blew it to the headmaster that we were planning to show a banned film and that was cancelled, so we then managed to show The General Line instead and at the last minute I got a telegram saying the General Line wasn't available and they sent The Man with the Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov, and by this time the master in charge of films was so worried and so on the run that the sequence of the tramp and woman getting up in undies, he cut all this out of the show, but also, because we were running. But also there was a book called Film Photos which was half a crown and I had a copy of that and the film master insisted in tearing out all the pictures of women in undies. We ran the thing, we were running Variety, the Murnau film and I said I hope the headmaster doesn't come in, and the headmaster said at one point I think I should like to see your one of your shows so I'll come this evening, so we put on a programme, it was Ralph Smart or something, it was a film called Soap that you could get free and one from the Shell industry, and we put these on, he thought these were ever so boring that we must be mad. We used to run a little news reel too which was quite fun.

AL: Thank you Bill.

You were talking about Cambridge and John Cornford and you particularly liked him.

BM: He had a particularly lively mind and was fund, he would talk almost like a machine gun and because he came to Birmingham at one point, this must have been the summer of 36, just before he went to Spain and I had a wonderful grandmother whom I adored, my grandfather was lord mayor of Birmingham and he was actually Lord Mayor of Birmingham and they were sitting talking together and he died with a stroke and she was left, he was only in his 50s and she was left with two daughters in their early 20s and this company which makes keyrings and she ran that very well until she died in her nineties during the war, she did a lot, she was a fighting person, she always talked about the work people as the lowest form aof animal life but she always looked after, it annoyed us because she looked after some terrible old scroungers too, and she loved arguing and she was wonderful arguing with John Cornford, she just loved fighting, and she was the only person I really met who could drive him

into a corner, having changed side quite often herself, she'd say you can see I'm right, you're right, you're wrong. And he took this very well. He was great fun and I remember him talking at Cadbury's when the Spanish Civil War was just beginning and Dame Elizabeth just sitting there in her large car enchanted by this large flow of bruck talk, he would probably, might have been a poet or writer but became involved in politics. And I think there's an odd distortion about it, it seemed to me, in that ghastly tv programme on Anthony Blunt, did you see it,

AL: No.

BM: The whole idea of it seemed to me, I think people don't realise if one was aware what was happening in Germany and later in Spain and the real horror of it and the feeling with Neville there you might well be in a war on the wrong side. This, there was so much support for this, the horror and evil which was going on and so much is out of context.

AL: Yes it is, it's seen in today's light, today's climate.

BM: I think too, the Stephen Spender thing, The God that Failed. Lots of people who were party members, the party wasn't a god, people were fairly often anti establishment, just as much what they saw into the party and there were attempts to bring people into line because people were concerned with some of the Stalin affairs and it was not the kind of fanaticism which people portray it as being. It covers such a wide field really.

AL: Were there any other people you remember. You said Stephen Spender was there.

BM: No he came down to talk. People were political, you couldn't avoid it, and of course John was killed, that was rather shattering, one doesn't know where he would stand today, people say he would have remained a staunch party member, I'm not sure.

AL: Thank you.