

✓  
PORTRAIT OF OUR CHAIRMAN

P.M. *How did you enter this strange business?*

R.L. I was living in Wales, and had intended to be a chicken farmer, but in 1933 when I was 17 a well-connected uncle got me an interview at Sound City, Shepperton. Nothing happened, so I applied to other companies, but a while later I got a telegram from David Cunningham (Korda's right hand man): "REPORT MONDAY" and was taken on as a dogsbody. So it was that in 1934 I took over as numbering-boy on THE PRIVATE LIFE OF DON JUAN from Bob Compton-Bennett, who moved up to 1st assistant.

P.M. *From whom did you learn most in the early days, and what happened next?*

R.L. I only ever assisted 3 Editors: Bill Hornbeck on SCARLET PIMPERNEL; Francis D. ("Pete") Lyon on MOSCOW NIGHTS and REMBRANDT; Jack Dennis on HAIL & FAREWELL, he also supervised me later when I edited THE SQUEAKER.

In those days the Editor and assistant also laid the tracks; we usually had 2 dialogues, 1 music and maybe 2 FX, but no charts, so Red Law (the mixer) just had to remember everything! I'm thankful we have Dubbing Editors to handle all that work now.

I had been in the Territorials from 1933-7, but at the end of 1939 thought I'd have a change, so volunteered for the Royal Navy. I went through officer training and thence as a 1st Lieutenant onto Motor Launches, then in command of a gunboat.

In 1943 I was loaned to the Crown Film Unit for something, and found myself co-editing CLOSE QUARTERS with Gordon Hales, since it required a knowledge of submarines (which I lacked, of course). Back to sea until D-Day, then out to produce, direct, write and co-edit a documentary about the Mulberry Harbours. It was made by the Admiralty but with assistance from the Army Film Unit, and Dickie Best ably co-edited. It was chaotic; I remember finding no money to pay the orchestra, so I had to borrow it from the Sergeants' Mess!

In 1946 I edited Peter Ustinov's first picture as a director: THE SCHOOL FOR SECRETS, a lot of Service people worked on it, and Ralph Richardson and David Tomlinson were in it.

P.M. *Who were the most interesting Directors you worked with?*

R.L. John Huston, of course. He's not only technically competent, but re-writes a lot as he goes along - usually for the better. It's what he adds which is so interesting. He's always pencil-sketching, and his good eye for composition carries through onto the screen. He used to be a great prankster, and still is a strong character; he's been known to read a newspaper during shooting if he dislikes an artiste, though he's secretly listening intently.

He's generous to a fault: he called me aside at Ardmore on SINFUL DAVY and said "I want to give your children a pony"! What could I say - no? He really is a very nice person, and has a great grasp of the emotional and amusing aspects of life. He shoots economically, but gives scope where it may be needed later. He doesn't like cutting straight in without a reverse - but then neither do I.

William K Howard inspired me a lot in my early days.

J. Lee Thompson (1965 RETURN FROM THE ASHES) has a very cinematic mind, also a strange habit of tearing bits out of his script and rolling them into spirals.

Alan Pakula (1973 LOVE & PAIN & THE WHOLE DAMN THING) was another director of great intelligence and feeling, but I couldn't get him to make quick decisions; he was slow to accept suggestions for cuts. I wasn't so keen on his scenes with ad lib. dialogue: they made great cutting problems.

P.M. *Can you name anyone who should be directing or producing now but isn't?*

R.L. It would be easier to name Directors and Producers who shouldn't be!

P.M. *Seriously please?*

R.L. You and me. Ohhhh.....



P.M. *What type of material do you most enjoy cutting?*

R.L. I just love cutting. Well-acted scenes and good action, but also trying to make a good scene from poor material. Perhaps especially suspense, stretching scenes to breaking-point.

P.M. *What do you feel are the major changes for better or worse since you started?*

R.L. In writing: not having to have a beginning, a middle and an ending of each scene. I also like cuts instead of dissolves, but so often the Director hasn't designed it properly to work that way. I don't like cuts from an artiste to himself later in time (with maybe only a costume change) where the dialogue continues uninterrupted. Why not just continue the original scene?

I'm sorry the old system of the Big Producer and Studio has gone; they had more control over pictures, and I liked film people running the business instead of conglomerates. I also used to know everyone; now the business is so fragmented.

P.M. *What d'you regret most?*

R.L. The one time I got to co-direct (LAST DAYS OF DOLWYN in 1949 with Emlyn Williams), the end occurred in a slump, so the opportunity of further directorial jobs was nullified. Having a family to feed precluded hanging around and waiting. Mind you, to impress potential backers you have to have enough ego to say "I AM THE BEST", and that would embarrass me.

P.M. *What was the best piece of advice you ever had?*

R.L. From Jack Dennis I think: "Keep it simple. Don't overcut, because you're not paid for the number of cuts you make".

P.M. *How big a family do you have?*

R.L. By my first marriage: a son, John, who is a Captain with Hover-Lloyd (no relation!)

By my second: Nicholas, an architect; Christopher, a second-assistant in the cutting-rooms; Jane (not plain) who looks after our horses (that one Huston pony has grown to eight animals owned or liveried); Michael still at school, and of course my wife, Valerie, who runs everybody.

P.M. *What sort of future does the Guild have?*

R.L. The possibility of a good one IF a larger proportion of Members become involved. Luckily we have some very dedicated people, otherwise we wouldn't have film shows or dinners. One thing we must attain is status in the eyes of producers and other departments; we must MEAN something to them. Membership should confer prestige, and I personally think lowering the entrance qualification to 3 credits and 3 years was wrong. All Members should use 'GBFE' after their credit (I have been no shining example), as a step to it meaning what 'ACE' means in America.

P.M. *D'you think you have achieved something during your office?*

R.L. Not really, though I was glad we changed the basis on which our Awards were made this year. The Board is often unable to put ideas into action because of lack of quorums at General Meetings; this forces stagnation.

P.M. *Finally, how would you compare the status of picture and sound Editors here with that in other countries you've worked in?*

R.L. Picture Editors - better than on the Continent, but similar to the U.S.A. except for pay which is much better there. Sound Editors - much better here than in either of those places. In the U.S.A. they are often "under" the sound department.

P.M. *Thank you very much*