

THE ACTT HISTORY PROJECT - CEDRIC DAWE, ART DIRECTOR.

INTERVIWER: ROY FOWLER.

The copyright of the following recording is vested with the BECTU History project. It is the 19th of November 1991. We are in Chartridge in Buckinghamshire at the home of Cedric Dawe, an Art Director whose career in the industry goes back to 1932, but we will start at the very beginning. Cedric would you tell us when and where you were born?

C.D. From the very beginning, I was born at Earlsfield with Irish decent.

R.F. What, in South London.

C.D. Yes. From there to Harrow and from there to Brighton. I haven't got very clear memories of that.

R.F. What was the family background? What did your father do?

C.D. Oh, he was a painter, the same as myself. He was a specialist. He had a commercial studio in London and he became very very well known as a commercial still life painter. That is before the days of photography.

R.F. What was the year of your birth?

C.D. 1906.

R.F. We had better have the exact date for the record.

C.D. The 2nd of July 1906. So I shall be 86 next July.

R.F. It is good to see you so hale and hearty.

C.D. Well, up and down. I can recall most of the time when we moved to Brighton. I was at Boarding School there. That was during the 1914-18 War, after which I was sent to the Brighton School of Art in those days. Then I spent six years at Brighton Art School, living in Brighton. Very happy times and then Father had his studio at home in those days and he was my best critic. He taught me more than anything I ever learned at any art school. He was a very fine painter but only in a commercial sense. Anyway, from there onwards I left the art school after six years and went to join my Father. At that time he had a studio in London and I was also at Art College in the evenings only and spent every day for a year with him. I was in an apprenticeship as it were.

R.F. So you had a very long training.

C.D. Then(name), he was promoting my work and so forth,

I then wanted to go into films. I had an idea that I would like to do stage work, ballet, which I did.

R.F. What year are we talking of?

C.D. When I was 19. So it so happened that next to my Father's studio there was a sculptor who was architecturally.....as well and he introduced my work to the Architectural Association, and I was made a member straight away on the strength of my portfolio. Well that started another period when I was made a member I had access to any employment and that particular year I was 21.

R.F. What sort of training did you have in construction techniques and actually designing as an Architect?

C.D. I didn't have any training at all officially at college although I was made a member of the Architectural Association. Nothing to do with construction in those days. It was all purely design and there was thecompany in Toronto which is a big store like Selfridges in this country. They gave me a contract for a year to go out to the Eton Company and design domestic interiors, furniture decor and whatever. From that I spent three years in Toronto. The first year was as I say with the company and when I finished I thought I would start up for myself. A young chap without any experience, of course it folded up completely. But I had a try and I befriended an Architect and he and I became great friends. We shared a flat and he went into the architectural field and I was intent on designing for the stage or display work of any kind. Then I did a large horse show exhibition. An annual thing in Toronto which was very successful. From there I did various for the stage, ballet, vaudeville and knocked around all over the States.

R.F. A wonderful experience.

C.D. I didn't go to Hollywood. That was the intention eventually but due to my Mother's illness, I came back to this country, having met a young Canadian in the stores where I was working and we planned to get married in this country which we did later on. It was the time of the depression and everybody....when was the Hunger March?

R.F. I'm not absolutely sure. Was that before or after the General Strike?

C.D. 1926. Well that was the period I came back.

R.F. Can I just ask you to remember what you can about designing for silent films. Did you work for any of the Mid-West chains?

C.D. No I didn't do any film work out in the States.

R.F. I didn't mean production work. You said stage work.

C.D. Oh yes, that was in Canada.

R.F. In theatres rather than cinemas.

C.D. No not cinemas. Stage shows. It was in the days when they had two features. And I designed the stage show which went between the two films.

R.F. Which was..what.. a very glitzy sort of enterprise was it. Show girls, chorus girls?

C.D. Well whatever the vaudeville was. It was just a one hour show between two films. I mean you could stay in there for up to five hours for one performance.

R.F. Was that freelance work?

C.D. Oh purely freelance, yes. There was no contract. It was all very precarious.

R.F. What would you do? Would you design.

C.D. I designed and painted like a scenic artist. Well I was a scenic artist on the stage.

R.F. Costumes as well?

C.D. No. Not at that stage. Here and there whenever the freelance work.....it is a bit hazy in that particular period but it wasn't so much in the States as in Canada.

Coming back to this country, because of family illness I eventually got married at a time when I just managed to get a job with BIP, you know, the old British International Pictures at Elstree.

R.F. Tell us how you set about that? Had you become a film buff, a film fan. Did you go to films a great deal?

C.D. No not at all. Well we did later on as a relaxation, but I will come to that later on. When I started in films it was a time when the British Film Industry was trying to get off the ground. We were competing with the American film and anything, providing we could make the quota to get on to the British screen was the thing to do. Anybody was trying to get into films and as I say this.....sketch artistother Art Directors who were also then...There was John Meade, David Rawnsley, do you know the name and Duncan Sullivan.

R.F. Now may I ask you how you actually set about getting that job and how you got it. Because it wasn't easy to break in was it?

C.D. It was very difficult. It took me a whole year to get in. When I first of all came back in 1930 from Canada, I went straight

to BIP and in charge there was the Supervising Art Director, Clarence Elder who liked my work and he said "I will give you a job in a years' time. Go ahead and do some designs for films and so forth, whatever I wanted to do" So I went back within the day, after my first appointment. Again that year I knocked around getting all sorts of jobs in this country and display work principally and shop designs and all sorts of freelance work. Living at home. So, Dina, my first wife, of course she died during the war, and I have remarried since, she went back to the States and as I say I knocked around for this year and then eventually came back to BIP, saw the Supervising Art Director again and he took me on immediately and said "Yes, that's alright, you can draw" Which is all I wanted to do, and design and so forth and they were in a terrible state. This was before the ACTT Union and there was a long queue outside the workman's gate 24 hours a day. Everybody was working night and day, literally to try get anything out on the screen and it was absolute chaos.

R.F. Do you remember what the deal was. How much they paid you.

C.D. Yes, £5 a week.

R.F. £5 wasn't bad in 1931.

C.D. But there was a long story about theside of it. When anyone progressed at all, not so much in salary, but in gifts, I furnished a whole house without paying for anything.

R.F. Off the set?

C.D. No not really. Presents from the people that I hired the furniture from. Mind you, in those days there were no assistants in the Art Department at all. There was hardly an Art Department.

R.F. So how did you function? You designed, you supervised construction, you dressed it did you?

C.D. Well that came later on. When I joined, I had the first set which was put up in the the British and Dominion Studio next to BIP. No sooner had that happened than the whole thing was burned to the ground and at the same time I think Korda was building at Denham and the three Art Directors, because of the chaos, we had sets in the studio that was burned down, next door. They all went to Denham to see if they could get a better job, better pay and left me, they wanted me to go with them as a Sketch Artist and I said "No" I had just got married. I had a bungalow in Boreham Wood for five bob a week and I said "No, I am not coming, I am stopping here. I have just got married and I will stay on and see what happens". And then I was told by BIP Directors that I could stay and I could have the Art Direction of not only one picture but two at a time. One at Welwyn and one at BIP and see how you get on with it. And that was the beginning of how I started in the film business. Now doing the two together was one might think impossible, because actually I didn't go home for a fortnight. It was nighttime at

Welwyn or vice versa. I had a studio car. I could go up to town and hire everything from The Old Times Furnishing Co. for instance When I did the Old Curiosity Shoppe I simply went up to their shop in Victoria Street and said "I'm doing The Old Curiosity Shoppe, I'll take the whole lot. Send it all down to the Studios." Which they did. Of course they sent a whole lot of presents for me to where I was living and it all started from there. I was getting more of everything I was wanting for the home without paying for it. This went on right up until the outbreak of the last war. And it was absolute chaos. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

R.F. You were with BIP all that time were you?

C.D. From 1932 to the outbreak of war.

R.F. Alright. Let's talk then about the studio when you first went there, and then we will come on to the pictures. The conditions, the people who were there and how it operated. The Art Department first of all.

C.D. One should appreciate the fact that there was no organisation whatsoever. Everybody was out for themselves. It was survival of the fittest. They were sacked at a moment's notice if they collapsed. And the next person in the queue outside the gate was taken on.

R.F. You are talking now of what area of work? The Stagehands, the Carpenters?

C.D. Well, all the construction crew. Plasterers, Carpenters, not the Electricians. They had a body of their own.

R.F. They had a strong Union had they?

C.D. Yes. You see the point was, I can't give you any very accurate recollections of the Studio as a whole of any other department other than the Art Department.

R.F. Well let's talk about the Art Department. You probably remember Grossmith and Mycroft.

C.D. Oh very well.

R.F. Yes, well we will come to them, but let's talk about the Art Department. You say Elder was in charge?

C.D. Yes Clarence Elder. He was the Supervising Art Director.

R.F. What do you remember of him? What sort of person was he?

C.D. Well, it is very difficult to say. He was looked upon as a big bully. A very hard headed Scot. I haven't any interest in people's personalities and so forth. It was all doing one's job. Getting the work out in time.

R.F. You say he was a bully. So was there an atmosphere of fear in the Studio?

C.D. Generally among the Construction Crew, yes. And the Master Carpenter, Arthur Moss, he and Elder were great friends and seemed to run the Studio between them. But, no I can't say anything good or bad against different people themselves because I have no interest in that. It was all

R.F. What had Clarence Elder been trained as?

C.D. I think he started life as an ordinary painter. As far as I remember.

R.F. So he administrated the department. He didn't contribute that much to it?

C.D. Well he was a big extrovert.

R.F. While we are talking about people, if you have any recollections of Walter Mycroft for example.

C.D. Well I haven't any personal recollections of Mike as we called him at all. It is difficult to appreciate the work was so demanding. That is the Art Director's responsibility took everything you've got.

R.F. O.K. Then let's talk about that area of activity. Was the first picture you worked on 'The Old Curiosity Shop'?

C.D. No, that was one of the first. The first one was called 'Happy' I haven't any recollections of that. There were nine pictures in the first year. That was 1932. The names of the pictures were 'Happy' 'Wishes' 'Freedom of the Seas' 'Lost in the Legion'..Leslie Fuller 'Girls will be Boys', 'My Song Goes Around the World', Sir Richard Tauber, 'The Old Curiosity Shop' and 'La Boheme'. That was with Douglas Fairbanks Jnr. Those are my immediate recollections of that period.

R.F. O.K. Well let's talk about...are there any films there that stand out in your memory?

C.D. Yes I would say more than any other 'The Old Curiosity Shop'.

R.F. Well let's talk about that then as an example of the way things operated and the way you worked in those days. First of all, when did you come on to a picture? How early in the scheme of things? Let me ask another question first. How many pictures generally were going through the Studio at any one time. It was a continual process wasn't it?

C.D. I couldn't tell you generally. I was only concerned with my own work.

R.F. When did they bring you in on a subject?

C.D. As I say when I first started when they had the flyer in 1933.

R.F. No I mean when a picture was scheduled, how quickly was an Art Director assigned to it and tell us how it worked.

C.D. It wasn't assigned. It was just a solo script and just on the floor. No time to do anything at all.

R.F. No lead time?

C.D. No time to do any drawings. The first picture I was on, which was 'Happy' I do remember there wasn't anybody to design it except me. So the construction crew, I think there were about 60 carpenters to start with waiting for a drawing to know what set to put up, and I hadn't even got a script.

R.F. So how did you proceed?

C.D. So with the Writer and the Producer, which I think was Tommy Bentley, we just decided on the floor what to do. And at this stage a lot of Carpenters, everybody waiting around for something to do, the responsibility was entirely mine. I looked through whatever pages of the script I had got to go on, not knowing anything about the story or what it was about and just said 'Well put a few flats here and a few flats there and see what we can do.' The Lighting Cameraman would come and approve and it was all sort of built together between us.

R.F. So you had no operating budget for the picture?

C.D. Oh no budget whatsoever, no no.

R.F. Nothing had been crafted out ahead of time?

C.D. No, no. There was no management as far as I could see whatsoever.

R.F. What sort of Scene Dock was there?

C.D. There wasn't anything. We started building on the lot and left them up there and they became permanent fittings. And then the Scene Dock gradually grew from stock or whatever. Whatever was made was kept. And that was the beginning of the Studio's stock. And that goes for all the Departments, so far as the Art Direction. The Art Director wasn't called an Art Director in those days.

R.F. What were you called?

C.D. I don't suppose I was called anything except a lot of bad names.

R.F. You got credit on the films didn't yo?

C.D. Yes, I have got them here. I am speaking of the period of 1932

having Art Directed a few pictures in that one year, then it seemed to get a little bit more organised. But to tell you about 'The Old Curiosity Shop' how we got started, my earliest recollection was as I say was just standing on the floor with a bit of scrap paper and the Carpenters waiting and what are we going to do? I said 'Well lets build the shop.' I remember 'The Old Curiosity Shop' itself.

R.F. Well, how did you set about designing 'The Old Curiosity Shop' Did you do any research?

C.D. No, I didn't. There wasn't five minutes to do anything. No. Ad lib on the spot, quite literally.

R.F. What were your references. They were obviously internal mental ones but...

C.D. No, pure imagination. I don't think I had ever read the book. I knew something about it. I knew it was an antique shop. So this is the time when I got a Studio car and went up to Old Time Furnishing Co. and said 'Right I'll buy the lot'. Or hire the lot as it were. It came down and I remember a lot of junk coming in to the Studio and standing some flats around it. That eventually became the set. That stood there for some time, which we converted and altered for other sets but it was all hand to mouth all the time. There was no preparation.

R.F. There would have been, I imagine, a lot of craft work on the set and things like that.

C.D. Yes, there was a certain amount, but everything was very much in its infancy. As I said, there was no organisation as far as I was concerned. All that mattered to me was how soon can I get the set up and something to photograph, no matter what it was.

R.F. What were the craftsmen like?

C.D. Well, they were picked.

R.F. They were good at their work were they?

C.D. Well, again it was very sketchy to start with but yes, as it resolved because of the pressure of work, I got the reputation of being the quickest person in the business, and it has been that way ever since.

That was only done quite accidentally by forming my own gang as it were and they stuck with me whenever possible. To come and do a picture with Cedric is enormous fun. Mind you, we had a lot of fun tremendous lot of fun. I don't think many of us were sober for very long, and there was the pub over the other side of the Studios. They were great friends to all of us and they kept us eating and drinking As far as I can remember, I wasn't able to go home for at least a fortnight.

R.F. Where would you sleep?

C.D. I didn't.

R.F. You didn't?

C.D. No.

R.F. You must have cat napped from time to time.

C.D. Cat naps on the floor, anywhere. I didn't have my clothes off for a fortnight. Actually I was kept alive by Guinness and oysters.

R.F. A fair combination.

C.D. Two people died, two of my crew. Two plasterers died on the lot of exposure, but we just carried on. Mind you this was one film, 'The Old Curiosity Shop'. I had got an Assistant at that time to take over at Welwyn, so I didn't have to go over to Welwyn so much. Only at night, but the conditions...it is very difficult for anybody to appreciate these days, how chaotic it was. It wasn't run at all, it was just a racket.

R.F. Well, what about the Studio Managers? Joe Grossmith.

C.D. Well he was a bit of a joke to everybody.

R.F. Was he?

C.D. Yes, he didn't interfere at all. He ..well I didn't have anything to do with him. He had his fire brigade in the Studio and he was a funny character.

R.F. Didn't help B & D did it?

C.D. No. Oh he came into his own in the fire. We made a lot of stock shots, library shots of the fire.

R.F. May I just ask you about the Director you worked with on those very early pictures. You mentioned Thomas Bentley.

C.D. The Director of 'The Old Curiosity Shop was Tommy Bentley'. I have forgotten who the Cameraman was.

R.F. Would it have been Frieze Green.

C.D. Frieze Green, yes. And a bottle of Scotch under his chair every day.

R.F. But he was still paying attention at that time was he? Because later on he didn't do anything I don't think. Just sat there. Your memories of Frieze Green and Tommy Bentley.

C.D. Tommy Bentley was a very agreeable technician. Everybody got on very well with Tommy.

R.F. A competent technician?

C.D. I just wouldn't know. I couldn't have cared less at the time. It was just one of those things. You see I didn't take what anybody was doing seriously. You couldn't. It was so chaotic that you lost all sense of proportion. It was just hell for leather.

R.F. Did you go to see the rushes?

C.D. As far as I remember there weren't any rushes. Whatever one would associate with the organisation of today or when I left, just in those days didn't exist. It was just ...unique like a circus or a stage show.

R.F. Were you on a treadmill by the sound of it..

C.D. On a treadmill, oh yes.

R.F. Nothing much to be said about Thomas Bentley?

C.D. Not as a person, no. I mean as I say I couldn't tell you today about.....

R.F. Well you must have some lingering mental image of these people. Some little thumbnail sketches are always interesting.

C.D. He always used to sign the thing, that was all. I used to sketch out something or whatever, dash up to him with it and he would say 'Oh, O.K. Cedric'. And that was it.

R.F. He didn't give you his requirements?

C.D. No.

R.F. O.K. And then he would shoot whatever you provided him with.

C.D. That's it, that's right.

R.F. And you were always against the deadline of their requirements.

C.D. There wasn't any deadline.

R.F. Well I mean trying to keep up with the shooting. Right, what other Directors were on the lot at that time? Harry Lackman?

C.D. I wouldn't know, I just wouldn't know.

R.F. Is Bentley the only one you remember?

C.D. No. I mean at that particular period. Appreciate the fact that I was working night and day. I had no sleep.

R.F. Not just on 'Old Curiosity' I am talking about other films at that time.

C.D. From that time onwards... I have got to refer to the diary here. You are speaking of Directors only now are you?

R.F. Well anyone that you remember.

C.D. Well Paul Stein was the other one. Henry Woods. I don't remember very many.

R.F. I saw Herbert Brenon in your book.

C.D. Oh yes Herbert Brenon.

R.F. Well now that's an interesting name to remember. Any recollections of him?

C.D. Yes, Herbert Brenon. I had no associations with him whatsoever. Other than 'O.K. that sketch, go ahead'.

R.F. Harry Lackman. Did you work with him?

C.D. No I didn't work with Harry Lackman. I remember Herbert Brenon very well, but it's so hazy I have got to have time to think about it all. I just can't recall it all of a sudden.

R.F. O.K. Well maybe that will come back to you.

C.D. I mean if I had time now to make a few notes myself I would...

R.F. O.K. well maybe we could do another session on the early days.

C.D. But to do it all of a sudden, like now I find it impossible.

R.F. O.K. Well indeed it's 60 years.

C.D. And of course in my 85th year my memory is not as good as it used to be.

R.F. Yes, but sometimes it is the early things one remembers very well.

C.D. Oh yes it is. I've got some highlights that I can remember. But names of Directors and Cameramen at that particular time just didn't interest me at all.

R.F. It sounds in a way as if you took your work seriously, but not the business. Is that a fair way of putting it?

C.D. Just a lot of fun, that is what it was.

R.F. It was a job and you were a young man and it was all a bit of a romp by the sound of it.

C.D. I mean, I wasn't concerned about the pay, the money or the future or whatever. It is just that we had a lot of fun building the sets as quick as we could.

R.F. I have to ask you the inevitable question and that is, do you remember Hitchcock at that time?

C.D. Hitchcock? No, Hitchcock had just finished 'Blackmail' when I joined I think.

R.F. A couple of years earlier. You didn't do anything with him?

C..D. No. No not with Hitch. Paul Stein mostly, Herbert Brenon Otto Kaderact (sp) the German Lighting Cameraman. Walter Summers

R.F. Well these are all very interesting names and maybe you'll turn them over in your mind.

C.D. I could go back to them given a bit of time. I will make a list and make it more interesting.

R.F. O.K. Well now we know where you are we can always come back. Well let's move on from that in your own time.

C.D. Those are the early pictures up to

R.F. 'La Boheme' was an operatic film was it or was it a story film?

C.D. It was a story film. That's the attic. Mimi's attic. That was Douglas Fairbanks Jnr. We became great friends on that. That's 'The Old Curiosity Shop' the Director, the Cameraman and people. (Looks through records). It needs a bit of study.

R.F. Can I ask you about Tauber and what you remember about that picture. That was one of his first pictures in this country I gather.

C.D. Yes it was. Again as a person I wouldn't know.

R.F. But you were on the set a great deal I imagine, weren't you?

C.D. Oh yes. I don't think the stars, Tauber etc were very interested in the set designs. He was interested in his own performance.

R.F. Yes and whether they could show their right side.

C.D. I don't remember him as a person very well except that he was singing and strutting about all over the studio.

R.F. A difficult man?

C.D. No very easy. I didn't do any art direction as such for his main picture which was 'Blossom Time'. 'Heart's Desire' that was one of his which I did. But it was all done very much as a stage show more than a film. I find now that I am recording it I have very few recollections of people themselves. My only interest by force of necessity was to put up the sets.

R.F. Well let's go down the list of pictures which you worked on and see if any especially stand out in your memory for whatever reason. Starting at the very beginning there's 'Happy' and you stop me if there is anything to say. 'Wishes', 'Freedom of the Sea'.

C.D. Yes I can stop you there. 'Freedom of the Sea' I thoroughly enjoyed because I had as an assistant or an expert, a retired naval officer and he and I went over the drawings very carefully. because they had to be absolutely correct. I knew nothing about building a tramp steamer which was necessary for this story. We built the whole tramp steamer in the studios and from the naval point of view everything had to be correct naturally. Commander de Bergh his name was and we were great friends. He was with me all the time I was very interested in the Navy itself. Tried to get into the Navy during the war but I didn't, but the Commander and I were sort of designing it together. I would say well you can't do that because you can't light it and he would say well you can't do that because it is.....to the Navy. And don't for God's sake call a staircase anything else but a companionway. We spoke in Naval terms, you know, we took it quite seriously and it was very enjoyable, very instructive. I will always remember that as one of the most interesting early films that I did.

R.F. Is a ship one of the more difficult tasks for an Art Director to build, to get together?

C.D. Well, in terms of making it an entertainment shall we say, which of course is what it is all about.

R.F. I was thinking in terms of the accuracy and also the weight of everything. If you have a working engine for example. It is a bloody great thing to get on a set.

C.D. Anything that was weighty of course would be built of light materials. If it was an engine, then of course it would be of wood. When you say was it difficult for an Art Director, I think the main thing would be not to design.....He wouldn't be an Art Director's job more a Technical expert, guided by the Art Director himself. From the point of view of photographing it. I haven't worked on other Naval pictures as far as I can recall at the moment, but then in later years, 'The Sinking of the Titanic' was built at Pinewood which had to be authentic, but only parts of it.

R.F. That was one of your pictures was it? I think Vechinsky did one of them. 'A Night to Remember'.

C.D. Oh, 'A Night to Remember' yes.

R.F. O.K. Well coming on down the list 'Lost in the Legion'.

C.D. The story about that was in the newspapers because it was the first time that the actual desert had been photographed as reality but built in the studio. And the sand was supplied by the Carpenter's Shop was a lot of sawdust. I have got a record of it in the book.

R.F. 'Girl's would be Boys' - anything about that.

C.D. No. That was done at Welwyn. Buddy Rogers.

R.F. 'My Song Goes Round the World' with Tauber. 'The Old Curiosity Shop' we have talked about. 'La Boheme' we have talked about then we come on to 1933. 'Student's Romance'. 'Heart's Desire' 'Music Hath Charms' that sounds vaguely familiar. What was that?

C.D. 'Music Hath Charms' that was an all star cast. I haven't got a record of 'Music' so far as the artists are concerned I think it was Buddy Rogers, Mary Pickford's husband.

R.F. Really, well that would be a matter of record. Nothing sticks out in your memory about it.

C.D. Not particularly, no.

R.F. 'Once in a Million'?

C.D. Yes, that was at Welwyn. No I don't think so.

R.F. You are not being pushed so much now, that was two pictures in '33 and two pictures in '34. Little more time now.

C.D. Little more time, yes.

R.F. Things are getting organised perhaps. '35 'Living Dangerously'.

C.D. Yes, that was Brenon's picture with

R.F. He must have been coming to the end of his career. 'Someone at the Door'.

C.D. Yes, I don't remember much about that. Walter Somers.

R.F. Yes, 'Ourselves Alone'.

C.D. 'Ourselves Alone' was done on location locally round about the Welwyn studios. There was nothing outstanding about that at all.

R.F. Well I think most of Elstree staff were...they were programme

pictures, weren't they?

C.D. Yes.

Side two of tape one.

R.F. 'Ourselves Alone'

C.D. I can't give you much on that period.

R.F. O.K. We will just read them off as a matter of record, shall we?

C.D. Yes indeed.

R.F. 'Someone at the Door', 'Ourselves Alone', 'Tenth Man' and 'The Dominant Sex' then in 1936 'Housemaster' 'James Steps Out', 'Black Limelight', 'Yes Madam', and 'The Outsider', 1937 'The Gang's All Here' 'Just William' 'Poisoned Pen', now that's a famous film.

C.D. That was 'Solly' Robson. That was made at the 'Rock' Studios Boreham Wood.

R.F. Oh, was it. Why did you move over to...are you freelancing now or.

C.D. It is all freelance...oh I beg your pardon, no it was all BIP.

R.F. You are on staff at BIP?

C.D. Yes up until the war years. '39.

R.F. 'You're lucky to me' is the one that is shot at Rock. But that was an ABPC picture was it?

C.D. Yes. BIP yes.

R.F. 1938 'The Limping Man' and 'No Escape'. And that seems to be your list of credits pre-war. What can one say about the Elstree operation? Did it get a bit more professional?

C.D. Yes it did. It seemed to get more organised. I had, during that period some assistance. The technical side of it was that I had one assistant who was an ex scenic artist, Charlie Gilbert. He was a Yorkshire chappie and he and I got on very well, but I still had to do my own drawings, not only set sketches but working drawings as well. I didn't budget the picture in those days, I just put it up for as little as possible.

R.F. Even up until the war?

C.D. It was economy all the time. Do everything on a shoestring.

R.F. Did anyone ever say 'No that's too much'.

C.D. I can't recollect anybody saying so, no.

R.F. Maxwell, who owned the place was very money conscious.

C.D. Yes indeed. No I don't think I can make any more interesting comments on that particular period because it is all very hazy to me now.

R.F. Yes, I understand.

C.D. I can comment much more from a personal point of view of the later films after the war.

R.F. O.K. During that pre war period you are still a young man but your work is dominant in your life is it? Or did you get much of a chance now to lead a normal life or was it all....

C.D. Not really, no, no. Whatever the film was, that had precedence over everything.

R.F. How about the pay. Did that improve?

C.D. Yes, well after the war.

R.F. Well before the war do you remember what they were paying you?

C.D. I went up to £14.

R.F. That was the most you made at BIP.

C.D. Yes. Then after the war or first of all during the war everything was commandeered. I didn't own anything at all. Designed a local builder a house. We lived there just before the war and furnished it by all the people who hired their furniture to the Studios. Making all sorts of presents and whatever. But it was all very chaotic right up until the beginning of the war.

R.F. Did you join ACT before the war.

C.D. No. When I came back, talking of ACT, to start again I went to BIP to pick up where I left off.

R.F. Well first of all let's ask what you did during the war. When the war came the studio was commandeered was it not?

C.D. That's right. When the war came suddenly it was all closed up and everybody wanted to try to get into the services. I, hopefully tried to get into the Navy.

R.F. Were you laid off, instantly?

C.D. Yes, instantly I went straight up and passed the medical test A1 and the Navy said 'Well we will have to keep you waiting until

we send for you'. So I went home, living in Radlett then, and built an air raid shelter and there waiting for a whole year before I heard anything from the Services and then suddenly I was conscripted into the Army.

R.F. How were you supporting yourself and your wife? Where was the money coming from.

C.D. At that particular period? Yes we had a few savings. I had no handling in the financial side of it at all.

R.F. So essentially you were out of work for that year, is that right?

C.D. Yes we just existed. One way or another.

R.F. Well there wasn't much you could do.

C.D. Eventually everything was given up and my wife and daughter, Dorothy, incidentally she is still in the film business as a buyer freelance. At that particular time everybody was being evacuated and Bin and Dorothy had friends and went up to Barmouth in North Wales and lived in a caravan for a little while.

R.F. And then did you go into the Service?

C.D. I was conscripted into the Royal Armoured Corps at Tidworth and I was in the Army for five years.

R.F. Do you know anything about what went on at Elstree during the war, the camouflage?

C.D. No nothing at all.

R.F. I am surprised you didn't get involved in that.

C.D. I tried to get involved. I was recommended for a commission in camouflage, but I think other people were there before me and it didn't happen. I was sent down for training at Tidworth and went through the usual square bashing and whatever and suddenly they discovered that I had been attached to the film industry and I had access to various things that were wanted for stage design like plastic columns and curtains and all the rest of it. So I designed a Garrison Theatre and from that moment on I was almost ashamed to wear the uniform because all I was doing was anything so far as entertainment was concerned. Concerts and dances and all the time I was trying to get into camouflage, then suddenly, this was at the gunnery school at Longworth, and I designed and made a miniature landscape which was a working model in other words whereby a number of students learning gunnery and tank corps could practice with a tank in the building itself on a model instead of going out on to the outside. And that speeded up the instruction. So that took another year, making the models etc. and then it was instructing in tank recognition and so forth and I was excused

all duties and kept on in that sort of capacity.

R.F. I see. I was going to say, before we leave the 30s finally you did mention David Rawnsley. I should ask you about your colleagues in the Art Department. David Rawnsley especially who went on to great things.

C.D. Yes, he was a very fine painter, a very fine artist. He did the Tauber 'Blossom Time'. One didn't have a chance to make friends or know anything about anybody else at all. It was all hell for leather. You just couldn't do anything else but just your job.

R.F. O.K. So essentially then we pick up your career with your demobilisation.

C.D. When I went back to BIP I was given immediately a picture with Robert Newton 'Temptation Harbour' which we made at Welwyn and that was one of my best pictures. Lance Comfort directed it, Victor ?Skzerzy? produced it. Otto Heller lit it and Robert Newton starred in it. Of course anybody knowing Bob Newton knew two characters. One was that he was never sober on the set. He could't act unless he was very much under the influence. I had been recently demobbed and incidentally at Lulworth I met my present wife and just after that my wife in Wales died of a heart attack and then my daughter Dorothy went over to Belfast and was brought up with my parents, my father being Irish and his home over there in Belfast. Dorothy was brought over here and I got married in Bournemouth. So it started all over again. We had a little flat in Bournemouth, where Barbara our present daughter was born and I had this film at Welwyn, 'Temptation Harbour'. Because of the difference I had to find lodgings somewhere so instead of that I camped out in the Studio. I had one of the dressing rooms turned into a liveable flat or whatever, and I stayed there every night and went home at the weekends. But the dressing room next door to me was Bob Newton's and you can imagine.

R.F. Was he living there too?

C.D. He wasn't living there, he always passed out in his dressing room but...

R.F. The clink of empty bottles all the time.

C.D. Exactly. But anyway for that reason I kept my door locked all the time and any free time I had after coming back from the restaurant at Welwyn I set up an oil painting.

R.F. Why did you keep your door locked? To keep him out?

C.D. Oh yes.

R.F. Did he want a companion always when he was drinking?

C.D. Well he was so far gone you couldn't talk to him at all.

R.F. Did he get obstreporous and violent.

C.D. Yes indeed. I remember on the same picture we had a location down in Dover on 'Temptation Harbour' he was a Southern Railway signalman and at the same time he was doing 'Odd Man Out'. We had second call on him and 'Odd Man Out' demanded that he had his hair down to his shoulders, so when he did a picture with us he had to put all his hair up under his Signalman's cap. It was a bit of a joke. Anyway, on location we stayed at the Grand Hotel at Folkestone and did a bit of night shooting at Dover. Bob was never sober, neither were any of the others. I can't recall it all but because Bob Newton was never sober, it got us into all sorts of trouble. We had a party as always and invited the three Naval officers. Simone Simon was the French star and we had a party after the picture and these three Naval officers, they had a minesweeper moored alongside in Dover and we went aboard for a drink with them which lasted about a couple of days. Everybody fell in the water, and I can't remember much about it. It was all this going across from one boat to the other. It was chaos. But as I say, I need a bit of time to put it all into words.

R.F. What about Welwyn. One of the lost studios. You worked there quite a bit both in the 30s and

C.D. Yes, this is 'Temptation Harbour'.

R.F. What sort of studio was it?

C.D. Oh, a small one.

R.F. Efficient?

C.D. Yes. Quite a good lot which we used quite a bit. We did a big circus scene out on the lot. Yes, it was a small studio but quite efficiently run.

R.F. Was Harold Huth in charge when you were there.

C.D. Yes I think he was.

R.F. Are you freelance now or are you back on staff at BIP.

C.D. I was freelance all the time. When I say freelance, it did include a year's contract now and again mainly with Rank at Pinewood, but that was later on.

R.F. Shall we look at the list? You've got 'Columbus', what did you do on 'Columbus'.

C.D. That was because the ACT came into that. When I had finished at Welwyn, that picture, the management of ... Eric Goodhead was the manager of an agency and said that if I went with him he could manage me as an agency, he could get me a contract with Sidney Box and that was immediately

following 'Temptation Harbour'. And with that I moved down to Shepherd's Bush to do a picture for Gainsborough. I think it was all Sidney Box's in those days. That was in 1947. In 1946 I left Welwyn and I was to go to Shepherd's Bush with Sidney Box to do 'Columbus'.

R.F. Were you the Production Designer on 'Columbus'?

C.D. I started to do it although the ACT stepped in and said 'Had I got a ticket?' I said no I didn't know anything about the Union. And they said 'Well you can't do the picture that you have got a contract for, which was 'Columbus' without you become a member. So it was decided that I should go home and design it at home. I think it was Morris Carter in those days who did 'Columbus' in the studio, but I started to design it in Bournemouth until I was stopped and given an ACT ticket to go over to another studio, I can't remember the name now.

R.F. Highbury.

C.D. Highbury, yes. Anyway that was 'Miranda' with Glenys Johns. Following that I came back to Shepherd's Bush and did quite a few pictures there.

R.F. So what did you do actually on 'Columbus'? That was a very troubled picture was it not?

C.D. Yes, I only did a few drawings, that was all. A few sketches.

R.F. Then Morris took over.

C.D. Yes. As far as I know I wasn't in the studio at all at that time.

R.F. As I remember it was a fairly daft project. A picture that size in Lime Grove. Too big for the studio.

C.D. And then I went back to Shepherds Bush and the first picture I did there.....

R.F. You are a member of ACT now are you?

C.D. Yes. Following that was a picture called 'Streets Paved with Water' which was cancelled. 'Once Upon a Dream' followed that one.

R.F. Some friends of mine were going to make that, Joan Mendoza wasn't it?

C.D. That's right.

R.F. Joan Mendoza and Tony Skeyne (sp?)

C.D. That's right and it was cancelled

R.F. Shop politics. They never really found out what the reason was.

C.D. No. 'Once Upon a Dream' with Googie Withers then 'Easy Money', these are all Shepherds Bush. 'Traveller's Joy', 'Quartet'. 'Quartet' was a very interesting one, that was Somerset Maugham's. Four pictures together. That was a very interesting one for me because of meeting Maugham himself. The four films we did were literally introduced on the screen by Maugham himself as though he was in his villa in the South of France. So a lot of things go down on photographs of his actual villa, we built it in the Studio, facsimile to what it actually was. So to do that I took a stills camera down with me and went to Maugham to photograph all his furniture and everything in detail so that we could build it in the Studio.

R.F. So you reproduced everything?

C.D. We reproduced everything except one particular piece of furniture which was a tremendous great Burmese cabinet in the corner. It was so intricate you would take a year to reproduce it. So Maugham said 'Well, this is all very well, but you are welcome to do what ever you like, take whatever you want and reproduce everything else. But what are you going to do about this Burmese cabinet? I said 'Well the only thing to do is to do is to miss it.

So then he said 'Well, I'll tell you what, a friend of mine has got a replica and that's another story.'

Apart from the interest of meeting Maugham, I didn't know he had an impediment in his speech for instance, but his great friend was Sir Gerald Kelly. Kelly was President of the Royal Academy at that time and I was very very interested and it was a hobby of mine at that time and I wanted to get back to oil painting myself. So I was looking forward to the meeting of Kelly and Maugham gave me a letter of introduction to go and see Kelly with a view to hiring this Burmese cabinet. Anyway, diverting from films, when I went to see Sir Gerald Kelly, it was on a cold November's day and I got a Studio car and I wanted to see if I could hire this cabinet and his secretary opened the door. The long corridor looking all the way down to his studio at the end, purposely built, a beautiful studio. I was very very interested in anything to do with Kelly. I admired his work very much. But his secretary said 'I am very sorry you can't see Kelly now, he is otherwise engaged.' And I had to wait and wait, and I got a bit impatient and looked down the corridor and there was a little figure right at the end with a white smock on kneeling down on the floor and Kelly's language was...well you couldn't print it. I went down and said 'Can I help', he was trying to light an anthracite fire and couldn't get it going. Oh, he was in a filthy temper. He didn't want to know me. He said 'Who are you?' So I said 'I've got an introduction from Somerset Maugham.' He took the letter and tore it up and threw it on the fire. He told me to get out and so on and I said 'No, this is an introduction to you'.

He said 'I don't want to know anything about Woolly,' which is what he called him. He said, 'if you want to know about Woolly, go up the stairs to the most marvellous studio like a Minstrel's gallery and you can walk right around it.' He said 'Have a look at all those canvases along the corridor at the top, like a great library and pull out one and see what you think of it.' And it was a full size figure of Somerset Maugham when he was in his early 20s. So I pulled out the next one, that was a year later and right up to about 60 or 70 paintings, Kelly had painted him on his birthday ever since ever since they were schoolboys. I was very interested. Anyway, he said 'Well if you say you want to hire a cabinet, you can't do anything of the sort,' he said 'It's up in my wife's bedroom and she is ill and go out and get a bottle and we will have a drink.' That was the start of it. I don't remember leaving it. He said 'What would you do with a fire?' I said 'Well, scrape everything out, make a great heap of ashes on the floor'. He said 'Now what are you going to do?' I said 'Well give me some wood first 'Go to the back of the studio and you will find a pile of wood out there, and if you can find a bottle bring it back with you.' There was a wonderful great case of bottles which was literally his wine cellar. He was a wine drinker. So I grabbed the first bottle with a bit of wood and it happened to be a lovely Napoleon Brandy and when we got back we had a glass of this wonderful wine, the fire started burning nicely and we started chatting. We finished the first bottle and he showed me all around his studio and he said 'You're laughing at me' I said 'No I am not laughing at you' He said 'Well everybody laughs at me because I am wearing the wife's hat'. He used it as an eye shield. Being bald, not only an eye shield, but he wore a lady's hair net to stick his brushes through. So he had this big wide brimmed hat like Churchill's, brushes sticking through and a filthy smock, and with that we became great friends and started talking about all films and so forth and I forgot all about films altogether. We built the set but we didn't have the Burmese cabinet in it. But I had a great insight into a great painter. That was the story about Somerset Maugham.

R.F. Did you stay at the Villa Mauresque when you went down there?

C.D. No. I think we did it all in a day actually. Photographed it. But, talking of the South of France, the most vivid impression, in fact the best holiday I have ever had, was a film that never happened. It was called 'Dangerous Meeting'.....?Production Controller called me up one day and he said 'We are going to hire you out to a film company that is going to shoot in the South of France. 'It sounds lovely to me. What do we do?' He said, 'Well, first thing you do, you have a Director's meeting in Dover what you do after that is over to the Producers and Directors. He didn't know anything about it except that the Producer was going to be Harry Reynolds, whom we later learned knew nothing about films anyway. In fact nobody knew anything about films. There were two Directors who understood, one was the Earl of Southesk who was just 21 who was a cousin of the Queen Mother and there was a very worthy Yorkshire miner or whatever and various Directors who put money into the so-called company and they were going to make a film. They hadn't a script, they hadn't

any artists, they hadn't got anything lined up at all and they were going to have a meeting at one of the best hotels in Nice which I learned later, two floors had been booked for the whole production. So, at this meeting in Dover, there were one or two dozen of us I suppose, altogether and Harry Reynolds, the Producer introduced me to one or two of their Directors. One, I later understood to be a Lady Saville and her boy friend, who was a Director. Would I be a co-driver to go down to the South of France? I said 'Yes, of course, what's the car?' Well I think it was a Rolls, but it was left behind. We went down, sort of incognito as it were in a little Citroen and I was the driver. The two of them were sitting in the back all the time and I was just there for convenience. But, anyway, they knew all the best places and we went all over the place, staying in different places, different hotels and I took the longest route down. Took a very long time to get down to the South of France and when we got there we found there was nobody there at all, except the Producer and the Director as well who was Teddy Fisher, another great friend of mine, almost an alcoholic. But at that time we hadn't a script and we hadn't got anybody so it was just a question of waiting. And we waited and waited for weeks and all we did was to live on champagne, go across to the Casino.

R.F. Were you getting paid?

C.D. We didn't get any pay, but it was all on the slate.

R.F. But I say were the bills getting paid?

C.D. They weren't, no. Everything was on the slate. The bar was always open and everything was there that you wanted. On my second trip down I took a easel and some paints and stuck it on the balcony. But the picture never got finished. I remember being shown up to the rooms by the hotel manager. All the rooms had connecting doors and balconies. So it was all one great big party. You can imagine it. All you did if you wanted anything, you just pressed the bell. That's how we lived. Until I did one conversion. We had the Vanderbilt villa at the end of Cap d' Antibes which was most marvellous, including their yacht. They were away on holidays. The housekeeper lent us the villa and I converted the exterior around the pool as a restaurant. That was the only bit of building I ever did. That was done with the Victrine Studios in Nice.

R.F. Was anything ever shot?

C.D. No, just a few feet. Until suddenly there was no more money. The hotel took two hostages and everybody was helping themselves. All the camera gear was commandeered. Lionel Gross and myself, he was the Casting Director. He said, 'Well, we have got to get out of this somehow', and the Producer Harry Reynolds said 'If anybody wants my car to get out of the country, you're welcome'. He was flying back. So Lionel and myself said 'Alright, we'll have a go and see if we can get the car out of the country.' We just left everything behind in the hotel, jumped into this Packard or whatever it was and ran out of petrol in Marseilles. Went up to the hotel, they knew all about us,

we were front page news and the proprietors there said 'Well, come and stay with us, it won't cost you anything, we'd like your publicity'. And this went on from friend to friend to friend right up to Calais. Wherever we went, everybody knew all about us and when we got to Paris - we went through French customs alright, when we got to Paris, going up the Champs Elysee we again ran out of petrol, we hadn't got any money and the Pathe.....the French newsreel said 'Well come and stay with us, we will pay all your expenses'. Then we got back as far as Dover without any hitch at all. We had all sorts of funny things in the car and the car was impounded and we were sent home, and after that it was a question of back payment. We had a meeting with the ACT and the Directors to see if anything could be done. It was all hushed up because of Lord Southesk, who was a cousin of the Royal Family and no more publicity was allowed.

R.F. Lord who? What was his name for the record?

C.D. Lord Southesk. The Earl of Southesk. The following Saturday morning I had a call. Two chappies came into the office at Pinewood and said 'We're police officers, we want to make some enquiries about misrepresentation of finance. Would you be good enough to accompany us.' Whisked me straight up to Scotland Yard and started to cross question me. It was at a time, of course where a certain amount of money was only allowed out of the country. So they said, 'Look, you've had a lot of money spent in the South of France. We have got all the receipts. In fact I had a win at the Casino, quite considerable actually, £300. I immediately went over and brought my wife and young Barbara some presents to send home. Because they had got all the receipts of what I had spent, silk stockings, in those days and perfume and the usual presents. They said 'Well, where did you get the money?' I said "That's simple," I said, 'I had a win at the tables'. And they all laughed and said 'Well everybody has the same story'. So there you are, that was the finish of it.

R.F. Well, would you say that was typical of the British film industry?

C.D. Not typical at all. But I had a marvellous holiday.

R.F. Who was the villain in the piece? Was it Reynolds, the Producer?

C.D. Yes.

R.F. A maniac.

C.D. Yes, that's right

R.F. Did they ever settle their bills I wonder?

C.D. No I don't know much about that side of it. Yes, I think they did. It was a fortune. Another time, talking of the South of France, it was on that particular picture or one that didn't happen. He and I were sitting on the beach in Ville Franche and his family was down there on a holiday and Harry was saying he couldn't afford whatever it was and his

daughter was scribbling trying to draw a little boat and I was telling her how to draw it, and Picasso came out of his usual swim, every morning, stark naked, came straight up to this little girl and looked at it, turned it over and did a scribble and he signed it. And I and I sent it direct to Christies and paid.....?

R.F. Not a bad way of spending a morning.

C.D. One or two amusing anecdotes....

R.F. Well it is extraordinary the things that happen in one's life especially in the film industry.

C.D. A lot of people have said, 'Well you could write a book about it'. But what's the good of writing a book. Nobody would believe it.

R.F. That was all around the time of 'Quartet' was it or a little later...when did that...?

C.D. Yes that was 'Quartet' in 1948. At Shepherd's Bush. This was all Sidney Box's pictures. 'John Wesley' that was made at The Gate Studio. 'Street Corner' that was Sidney Box again. 'So Long At The Fair' that's one of my epics.

R.F. That was quite a big picture, yes.

C.D. It was. And I had quite a bit of time to prepare for it. Hence I have a lot of drawings. That was in 1950. I have got quite a good record of it here. That was Jean Simmons and Dirk Bogarde, made at Pinewood.

R.F. Yes, and a very famous story.

C.D. Oh yes indeed. That required quite a lot of research in Paris to get everything correct.

R.F. Was it all Pinewood based? Or did you shoot much of it in Paris?

C.D. Well it was all Pinewood. The Exposition, you remember the Exposition when they built the Eiffel Tower in 1889. That was the period. It was a colossal set, but above head level was models and we built the bottom of the Eiffel Tower and all the other adjacent buildings in the Exhibition on the lot and from head height was models.

R.F. Hanging models was it?

C.D. It was partly hanging, partly animated. Yes, but mostly painted models. When I say a model it took up most of the large studio at Pinewood.

R.F. About half size I suppose.

C.D. The trickiest part, technically speaking was the main entrance the entrance on the Quay D'Orsay, hadphotographs, two very

large pennants as a decoration and they were always waving in the breeze and to make a model of that didn't work. So what I did was, the Special Effects took over and made a little model to go in a tank and the tank was only a couple of feet wide by about 6-10ft high. So that you were shooting through water and the pennants were put into the water in the correct position and made out of silk and then a very gentle air line put into the water to give the required slowness of the movement of the flags. Very tricky actually. But it came off very well.

End of side two ACTT History Tapes
CEDRIC DAWE.

R.F. Just let us run down the list. 'So Long At The Fair', 'Big Money', 'Dangerous Meeting', 'Another Man's Poison' that's the next one you want to talk about isn't it?

C.D. As you know, Bette Davis had a reputation for being a very awkward person to work with.

R.F. Difficult?

C.D. Very very difficult indeed. That was her reputation and everybody was very much aware of it when they built the set. The set, I say 'the' set because it was mainly a big composite. A mansion. Quite a lot of work actually. So everybody put their best shoulder forward to do whatever they could in terms of perfection so far as the set was concerned. Danny Angel who produced it gave us quite a lecture about what to do for Bette Davis. It was her first picture in the country and anyway my designs were approved and the first thing I knew about Bette Davis, she always fired her Directors to start with and did the rest herself. She was a marvellous technician. So we all gathered together on the Sunday to invite Bette down to have a look at the set. She took one look at it, and she said 'Well, this is far too good, we don't do this in Hollywood, so I was brought in and said 'Well what is wrong with it'? She said, 'It is much too good and will cost much too much money. We don't do anything from that level upwards, we paint it.' It was a big staircase set, two tier and I had an RSJ girder going across it, like you would do an ordinary building to withstand all the weight we are going to put on it. Oh, she said, why is it this and why is it that?' So she said 'Well it's too good for me'. That was her first reaction. Then she said, 'Why all this exaggerated floor?' I had had an actual tree chopped down to get a rustic effect and left the gap to show that instead of painting it, it was the real wooden floor. She said 'Well I can't walk over that, and she jumped on my back and said 'Give me a piggy back'. We went round the set having a look at it with Bette on my back and everybody laughing like anything, out came the drinks and she's got a tremendously loud laugh and she said 'Oh, you're all friends, you have done a most marvellous job' and so forth and had a lot of fun together and over dinner I said to Bette 'I'd like to know from you, quite honestly, why is it that you have got this terrible reputation of being the most awkward person to work with

whereas, in point of fact, you are the most charming person. And she said 'Well surely you ought to know that it's far easier to become notorious than to become famous.' Her attitude to everything was aggressive. She didn't take any notice of that. She was a very good technician. We had quite a lot of publicity about that. ACT gave me a write up and we enjoyed the picture very much. I didn't find her difficult at all.

R.F. The star's husband...wasn't he...?

C.D. Yes, Gary Mills and Anthony Steele and Barbara Murray. The Welsh actor Emlyn Williams.

R.F. Where does that leave us? We are in 1951, 40 years ago. What are some of the others now. 'Star of India'. Did you have much to do with Sidney Box during this period, or is he just the Executive Producer?

C.D. No, he was very friendly actually. In fact when he left Shepherd's Bush he formed his own Company, London Independent and I had a contract with him at Mill Hill for two or three pictures. We became very friendly. That was another period.

R.F. What sort of man was he, Sidney Box?

C.D. From what point of view? Social?

R.F. Yes.

C.D. Oh, just a big jolly chap. He always gave the impression that everything was alright. He was very considerate and he was a very interesting fellow, actually. I didn't know him other than what concerned the films we were making. But he was one of 'us'. This Company he formed, the London Independent, his wife Muriel and Betty Box, and another chappie, Ian McWhittie.

R.F. Bill, Bill McWhittie.

C.D. Bill McWhittie, he and I were very friendly, because we both came from Belfast. He was attached to the Belfast Telegraph. Anyway he formed the company. At Mill Hill we had this marvellous property of Sidney Box's home which is a purpose built circular thatched cottage in a very large scale. With that were outbuildings Bill McWhittie and his wife and family had another house on the property, which were the stables at one time and a house attached to it formed Sidney's offices. We became a closed unit as it were. We were looked after just like a family. I had a wonderful studio there. The pictures concerned were, I suppose, we did one at Welwyn, one at The Gate Studios at Elstree. That was John Wesley. For a year we were quite an uninterrupted family as it were. Reg Wyres did the lighting. We were all under contract to Sidney Box Reg Wyre, Bob Attrill, Production Manager. Elsa Hatchett and her husband.

R.F. So is there anything to be said about the pictures that were made. Were they successful?

C.D. Yes, so far as I know. They weren't large pictures at all. 'Joanna.....' was an interesting one because it was authentic of its period. That was done at the Gate. That was a semi-religious picture, naturally.

R.F. Was Rank involved in that at all?

C.D. I don't think so, no. I don't know that side of it. We did another picture, mainly on location, following 'Blue Lamp' which was made at Ealing. We did 'Police Woman'. That was done on location in London. A normal good picture. Another picture in Kensington, again on location called 'Lost'. I don't remember anything amusing about any of those pictures.

R.F. It was just work wasn't it?

C.D. Yes it was. I was a freelance of course but connected to that Company was the cause of me going bankrupt.

R.F. I was going to ask you about Muriel Box and then you must tell us about going bankrupt.

C.D. Muriel Box was a Director and she was always very pleasant, but I didn't see very much of her.

R.F. Who had the greater talent do you think out of the two of them? What were Sidney's strengths, and what were Muriel's strengths. Muriel was involved in everything, Production, Writing, Directing didn't they. How did you rate them both?

C.D. I didn't rate them.

R.F. Neither one?

C.D. No. Well I suppose typical of anything I can think of in the past is that I don't attach very much interest in the people concerned.

R.F. You didn't make judgements about Muriel as a Director.

C.D. I defended - I don't think I should name the person because it might be libel - he was the - what shall I say - he was the cashier, he was the financial controller for the whole company. He was the secretary and managed the financial side of it. He was a tax expert. His family and brother became great friends and he managed all my financial side at home. Paid all the bills. He paid everybody. He gave me a weekly salary and whatever and then I had one or two tax demands which I automatically handed over to him because he was handling everything and was not trouble at all and didn't owe any money at all in those days, to anybody and we were very happy about that. Then all of a sudden the Income Tax foreclosed on me. They said I owed ...whatever the sum was and gave me only a few days to do something about it.

So I immediately went back to the Accountant and he said 'Well, you haven't got any money anyway'. You have spent it all.' It turned out later that he not only didn't pay the tax that was due, but didn't even pay the Insurance.

R.F. Had he misappropriated it or....

C.D. What ever he did with it, that was his story. But anyway, I went straight down to the head office in Worthing to try and get it sorted out and they said, 'too late, you've got to go bankrupt.' By the time I got home the Board of Trade nabbed me for cross-questioning me at their offices and I was sent down to the house we had in Rickmansworth and that was it. We had to sell up everything sort out everything, even my passport was taken away, my driving licence, car, and of course my wife was broken hearted, naturally. Then Bill McWhittie came to the rescue, paid the school fees and so forth and one or two friends, including Sidney Box, said, 'Well all you want is another picture.' And that started it all over again. But that was really a tragedy that I have never been able to forget or live down.

R.F. Not unique in this business unfortunately. We are far too trusting actually. We trust other people with our money far too readily.

C.D. Well I have always been very easy, not very good at anything mechanical, money etc. Always leave it to someone else. All I can do is draw. But that was unfortunate, the only unfortunate part I have had in the whole business.

R.F. I am not sure if there are pictures here that you want to talk about particularly. 'Across The Bridge' that was another Pinewood film wasn't it?

C.D. Yes, 'Across the Bridge' with Rod Steiger, made in Spain. The main part there was to build the bridge or adapt the existing bridge just outside Seville to make it exactly the same as the bridge that goes between Mexico and the States. That took quite a few weeks, in which we used theStudios. We did it together, the Spanish crew and the British crew. Doubled up.

R.F. Those were the glory days weren't they?

C.D. Oh yes. Rod Steiger was a very nice fellow to work with.

R.F. He could be a difficult, a bit temperamental.

C.D. Temperamental I should think. Yes. He was very interested in painting the same as I was. We lived in Seville, and although I was there for as long as work on the picture lasted, we never saw Seville in the daylight. A coach came for us before sunrise to take us out to location. A little place called Lolla del Ria(sp?) right out, about 40 miles out of Seville and to do the building I built an American Motel which was quite an effort. And an orange

grove. Oranges on one side and palm trees on the other. That was very interesting, but coming back to Seville, I was very anxious to have a look at the place. It was the first time I had been down there. So the only time that was clear at all was the Saturday morning. I cancelled my flight and took the train back to Madrid so that I could do a bit of shopping. That was the only part I saw of Seville in the daylight. A wonderful city.

R.F. Was this the time of Bronston. Were you working at the Bronston Studios?

C.D. No not the Bronston Studios. That was from Pinewood.

R.F. Ah, I thought you said you worked in the Spanish studios.

C.D. Oh, in the Madrid studios. No I didn't work in them, I worked with them. I used their Personnel.

R.F. The next one is 'The Day of the Triffid' which was a bit of a romp?

C.D. Another big picture at Shepperton. Mainly of course with the Special Effects, who made all the Triffids, radio controlled. It was the most remarkable set we built. In the story 'The Day of the Triffids' the whole world goes blind except one or two people who have an operation on their eyes. Proper science fiction. The first shot was a shot of an express train coming into London, Waterloo, and the driver had suddenly gone blind and the result was that he went through the bumpers and the train turned over and it was a major accident. But anyway the Producer, he was an American Producer I met at the Airport and he said, 'Straight down to the Studios' straight into his office, put all his pills on the desk and said 'We're going to make a picture'. You know, the usual American talk. I turned over the first page of the script and there was this accident. He said 'How are you going to do it?' So I said 'Well, it has got to be part real, part model, part degradation, part of a lot of things. He said 'I don't want part anything, I want it real'. I said, 'Well you can't have an actual train turn over at an actual station.' He said 'Well we could do that in Hollywood'. I said 'Well this isn't Hollywood. You can't hire the station, Waterloo or something and make a film when you want to.' He said 'O.K. so we'll buy the joint.' He meant it! And the result of that was that we did hire Marylebone on one Sunday and the actual accident, I had commandeered a lot of old carriages and put in the full size of the carriages and stunt artists so that when the train came in, we did it in slow motion, frame by frame to turn the train over so that these coaches fell on the platform. The engine was done single frame shot whereby you wedge up the wheels for a few frames, cut it again, go on frame by frame until this thing falls over. And it worked very well. Plus a lot of steam.

R.F. It was a complicated picture I should think.

C.D. Very complicated indeed, yes. All the action shots in London

were very complicated

R.F. It was a terrible script I always thought.

C.D. Oh, yes. It changed out of all recognition, although I still got the credits I didn't have much of a result. Interesting to work on.

R.F. Yes I can imagine that. I mean technically it was very good. It was such a crappy film of the book. 'Hill in Korea'?

C.D. 'Hill in Korea' was another large picture. There was an interesting story about that. We did it at Shepperton and on a large stage there we built the temple with the tremendous great statue. We wanted to get it absolutely authentic so far as Korea itself was concerned and Ian Dalrymple who produced it had a friend who had just come back from Korea and he was hired as a technical expert and whatever designs I did, he and I got together and he pointed out what it should be and what it shouldn't be. And that's how Michael Caine started his career. He went on from there.

R.F. Was it all down at the Studios? One of those studio bound pictures?

C.D. A lot of it was, but the exterior shots were done in the South of France. In the hills between Avignon and the South, I can't think of the name of the valley. But anyway that was the aerobatics and all the air shots were done from there. The hill itself was partly built in the studio. I'd say 50-50. Part studio and part location.

R.F. The studios by this time were quite, since the war, were really quite efficient.

C.D. Oh, very, they got better and better, phasing out the work of the Art Director. Nowadays it is all video camera, push button and that's it.

R.F. Is there any more to be said about 'Hill in Korea'.

C.D. It was the size of the thing more than anything else. It filled the stage at Shepperton.

R.F. 'Fear'.

C.D. Oh yes '.....of Fear. The entire picture was done under water. It was the tank at Pinewood. The outside one behind the plaster shop. Yes, that was another interesting one to do. As I say, the whole of E Stage was a tank and we built a tank the size of E Stage, about 4' deep, and all the sets were built into the water. Very difficult for the crew.

R.F. Oh yes, very uncomfortable working under water.

C.D. Yes.

R.F. The Industry is changing I suppose now. Television is taking over and is it more difficult to get assignments now?

C.D. Well I wouldn't know.

R.F. Yes, but when I say now I mean at that time.

C.D. Well gradually, it seemed to phase it out as it were. I finished up doing television and then commercials.

R.F. Did you enjoy doing either one? Commercials or television.

C.D. I can't say I did at all, no. Thecommercials are the most horrible things to do. The old saying was the agony only lasted a couple of days so it was worth doing it.

R.F. What sort of commercials, do you remember? Were they large size ones for the major agencies.

C.D. Yes, well what I remember most of all was that we had a contract for I think it was Hartley's preserves where the story was, the commercial, the product was to be photographed from a helicopter, actually growing. The helicopter would go down as far as..... and finish up on the screen with a case of, say, peas. A big pod of peas on the screen. Or strawberries, or whatever the product was. The first shot was from the helicopter. So when it came to Hartley's marmalade, We had to go down to Seville to get the oranges growing. And that was the beginning of the story of how an orange could be photographed, taking a whole year to do it. Because when we got down there it was too late anyway. Then they tried to get a helicopter to do the shot in Spain, then they couldn't get permission and the whole thing went wrong.

R.F. Very costly by the sound of it.

C.D. Very costly indeed. But to get the shot that was wanted it was eventually done in the studio. And then they cut it altogether.

R.F. Did it work?

C.D. No it didn't work at all.

R.F. Who directed it, do you remember?

C.D. One of the commercial directors, I can't remember his name.

R.F. Do you remember the name of the company?

C.D. No I don't. It was Rank, actually.

R.F. Oh, was it. Oh well.

C.D. Because the offices were in Hill Street. Yes, television series again that was moderately interesting to do, except for the fact that you had to get one out a week. It was all a matter of improvisation. The last picture after that that I did at all was, again one of the interesting ones' to do was one with Stanley Baker and Tommy Steele. Tommy Steele, it was only his third picture. Anyway we did it in Dublin and it was called 'Where Is Jack?' Jack Shepherd, do you remember the highwayman? The legend. It was about his life in London at that particular period and Tommy took the part of Jack. Hence the title 'Where Is Jack'? Stanley Baker who produced it also starred in it as the opposite character, the villain and we built quite a lot of parts of London on location in Dublin. At the Ardmore Studios. A lot of the sets in Ardmore. I was just beginning to build the house here. You see we used to live across the road and I took about five years to build it all by myself. Central heating and.....and it was just about that time that this film came out and so we moved everything over to Dublin, bar the kitchen sink. Put the dog in the kennel and lived over there for about six months. It wasn't a very happy picture with various personalities. But it was a very interesting one to do, technically.

R.F. Were you behind the camera or in front of it?

C.D. Production control. It was the case of everybody else - some people wanting other people's jobs. I went over there as Production Designer and then the so-called Production Manager wanted to do my job as well and it was very conflicting. Then we had James Clavell who is the well known writer, as a Director. He had his own sketch artist, not designer, a very good one too. And all these various people conflicted with what I was doing. I was sort of made a scape goat as it were. If anything went wrong, the Art Director took the blame for it, and somebody else did it. It wasn't a very happy picture. I did some of my best drawings which are now in the Museum at MOMI. Incidentally, I have apparently, according to Bridget I can have access to any of the old pictures for my future exhibitions. So I was gradually getting back into the film world as apart from what I had been doing up until now.

R.F. Yes, well renewing old memories. What made you give up?

C.D. Well it trailed off. I was concentrating on moving house at the time, moving into here, at the time and I took all one Summer as a relaxation, as a hobby. It is all very well drawing something, but it is different thing entirely laying a brick. So I found that out, did it the hard way, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.. I suppose I gave up simply because, well there weren't any really interesting pictures to take on like I had had in the past, with the exception of this picture in Dublin. Other

commercials etc. I did go back to make one or two commercials but it gradually faded out. Because, having done some painting here, I found there was a market for it. And there was no need to go back there for another picture and it sort of grew from there.

R.F. Don't you find, too, that after a while one's done it all and it becomes boring.

C.D. Not so far as drawing is concerned because that's been my whole life.

R.F. Well I am talking about the motion picture industry not your painting. I am talking of the film business in terms of making the film. They cease to be challenges almost.

C.D. Well, yes I suppose so.

R.F. I suppose that isn't really true for Art Directors.

C.D. I don't think I can truthfully say that is the case because every picture is different. Every film is different and every picture has its own challenge. It's all inventive and I have a very inventive imaginary outlook and there is always something to create that hasn't been done before.

R.F. Looking back on your time, in the British Film Industry, what is it that particularly sticks in your mind or comes back to you, what is your overall impression. Are you content with it. Are you satisfied that you devoted so many years to it.

C.D. Yes, at the time, progressively, oh yes. Yes from a point of view of interest and depends how you look at it. I've always looked at it not only as a career but as a means to an end which is retiring and building a house for yourself and living quietly.

R.F. But there was satisfaction in your work?

C.D. There was satisfaction in as much as I was in demand as opposed to other people. It was very competitive. Fortunately, I wasn't without a picture, as far as I can remember.

R.F. It was a long run that you had.

C.D. It was a good run. I had over 30 pictures to my credit as Production Designer and looking back on it, personally I thoroughly enjoyed it. I think, mainly, it is because I was doing what I wanted to do. What I didn't want to do was to get involved in the emotional personal side of the industry.

R.F. I gather that.

C.D. That is why I have conveniently forgotten a lot things.

R.F. Yes, well I am sure things happen that you have chosen to forget. How about the Union? Is it true that you weren't much interested in the Union?

C.D. No.

R.F. You never sat on Committees?

C.D. No.

R.F. No, right.

C.D. I wasn't a person that was concerned with the conventional. I was a bit of a one off, as it were.

R.F. Did you accept conditions orin the 30s when clearly you were overworked and underpaid.

C.D. No, I don't think I did accept conditions. I think I wanted to do it my way and that was it. Yes, it's a bit difficult to explain. I think the main thing about my work is the interest sponsored by the imaginative side, the inventive side, where I could make something from nothing. I am a born painter, artist. I had an art training and both my parents were the same and gave me great encouragement in the first place.

R.F. Well, it is very interesting, designing for motion pictures or the stage because there is first of all the creative input and it's highly technical.

C.D. One or two highlights. I did a command performance once, requested from Pinewood and I was selected to do the design. It was stage show held at The Odeon at Marble Arch and produced by Jack Hulbert and Herbert Wilcox. I designed the stage setting which consisted of a fantastic fairyland staircase, mostly in plaster and drapes, very effective. That was very interesting because I had control of the actual building on stage at the theatre. Herbert Wilcox and Jack Hulbert were the Producers.

R.F. The halt leading the blind.

C.D. I was talking to Jack once at rehearsals and I said the effects I want to get is this staircase which is the main feature of the effect, I want it when the artists come down to be presented, the whole thing wants to be glitter, because I said I have got a vivid recollection of being taken to the pantomime at Drury Lane when I was 5 or 6 years old by my Father. And I said the lasting impression I have of that was not what was on the stage, but the glittering sequins on the curtains, along the Orchestra. I said if I can get that effect...and Jack said O.K. go ahead. Now's your chance, experiment. And that was very interesting. I thought how on earth am I going to get this effect with little sequins on the net curtains and so forth. I went out and bought all sorts of sequins and I couldn't get the right effect

at all. It must have been in my imagination that it was very much better what I saw as a youngster, than what I can do now. And suddenly by accident, one of the sequins fell off on to a net curtain, right from the flies down to the wings. And there was this wonderful star. The sequin, that's all it was, was in the spotlight and it was brilliant. I couldn't make out why it was. I went up to examine it and it was so small I couldn't find it. Until the light came on again and I just caught it and it just showed that what I had put on the staircase was far too large. I had only got one or two tiny little sequins, because as you know, if you look at a star what you see with the eye is not what it actually is at all. It is the light from it. A little dress sequin and a very high light can in the right light look more brilliant than the light itself.

R.F. It solved the problem for you.

C.D. Yes.

R.F. What was Jack like to work with.

C.D. Oh, very nice, yes, a very ordinary sort of fellow. Yes I liked Jack very much. Herbert Wilcox was very pleasant too. Very friendly, very cooperative. Didn't show their position. Left it all to me. They said 'You're the designer so go ahead'

R.F. I did some shows with Jack. He was alright, he was a madman to work with.

C.D. I didn't do any films with him at all. Only this Command Performance. Yes that was quite nice.

R.F. What else occurs to you looking back? It has been a long life.

C.D. It occurs to me most of all that so much time has gone so quickly.

R.F. We all say that.

C.D. No, I have no regrets in any way.

R.F. You wouldn't have chosen another career or profession?

C.D. Well, that's hypothetical. At the time, no of course not. If I was to choose one now I should think anything but films.

R.F. Really, what, do you mean today?

C.D. The main thing, as I see the Industry is based on luck and efficiency in one's job. Whatever it is.

R.F. Well, yes, but there is a third ingredient and one hopes, which is talent, but not always. And we can do without the bent

accountant.

C.D. Well there is always that element I quite agree. But I think by and large, I wouldn't choose it as a career if I had the option. I wouldn't choose anything artistic.

R.F. You said you have a daughter working as a buyer did you say? Does she enjoy it?

C.D. Yes she does. She enjoys it very much. She is a technical expert on period design, furniture and also a dress designer and she is a very gifted person, actually. She had the same training, article wise as myself. This is my elder daughter from my wife in Canada, who died during the war.

R.F. Died very young I would think.

C.D. Yes, yes. She died in 1944. Anyway, so far as Dorothy is concerned, when she left Art School and came to support herself, she started as a Dress Designer with Bermans, the costumiers and she went designing with theatre productions including 'Camelot' and then suddenly fell in love with one of the employees.

End of side 3 (2 of 2)

It was a very quick marriage and they got married and set up a little flat in London and within weeks they were divorced. He just walked out and she has made the best of it ever since. But she's done very very well since and that was a long time ago. She eventually took a job as a buyer, property buyer. Although she is freelance, she is principally with the BBC.

R.F. Ah, well that is a very satisfying thing anyway.

C.D. She goes under the name of Dorothy Elliott. That was her married name. Apart from that she is a painter like myself. She had a lot of her holidays up in Suffolk, painting and so forth and she bought herself a Chapel and converted this Chapel as a studio. That was the intention and then sold the Chapel and bought a little cottage near Southwold, pretty little place up in Norfolk and she uses that as a weekend cottage. During the time when she started with the BBC, she met somebody else and they are absolutely perfect partners, and they have been ever since. They didn't get married. He was divorced. He had a cottage in Devon and she had this cottage in Suffolk. So they sold the two and bought a lovely property down in Cornwall. He is a buyer and they are both independent and they have got everything.

R.F. Lovely. We are wandering somewhat from your career. We will interview her in due course I suppose.

C.D. Maybe. Oh, she will cooperate.

R.F. Is there anything to add. Anything you'd like to say.

C.D. Not that I can think of, off the cuff.

R.F. Well we will leave it that you will search your memory, especially for recollections of the early days, and if you would like to add to the tape, then we can do.

C.D. I have enjoyed the chat very much.

R.F. It has been interesting indeed.

End of interview.