

JOHN TAYLOR

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Name of interviewer Stephen Peet

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SP: Where and when were you born.

JT: 5th October 1914, Bartholomew Rd, Kentish Town.

SP: That's a little bit bare, what kind of place was it and what kind of people were your parents.

JT: They were shopkeepers, really, I suppose, they had a grocers shop on the corner of Bartholomew Rd and Lawford Rd., and we lived there for about 10 years. Then they went into the coffee shop business dining room business which was much more profitable than groceries and they had various, the old fashioned type of coffee shop with pews and benches and so on and as far as I can see they have almost disappeared now but they were the eating house for working men in those days.

SP: Do you remember when you were small what kind of working day your father and mother had.

jt: Not really. I think they opened at 8 and closed at 7 and Saturdays they would have been 9 and Christmas it would be midnight, Christmas eve, I can remember Christmas Eve was very late, but that was in the grocery business. In the coffee shops they opened at 7 and closed at 7 and Saturdays was 7 till 1. And then my father and I would go to Smithfield and Covent Garden buying meat and things like that, not Covent Garden, Smithfield and we used to get to Smithfield about 6 in the morning and he used to go into the and have rum and coffee and i used to have to wait outside.

SP: Was this when you were a schoolboy, before you went to school in the morning.

JT: We had one called the Hope Dining Rooms in the Holloway Rd which was a very properous shop indeed, my mother was a wonderful cook, really quite exceptional, and we used to take shops that were slightly broken down and her cooking would fill them in about 3 months. And I used to work in the shop in the evenings when I came home from school, they used to make big cakes every day, nearly 3 ft long and square and I used to make the cakes. And everybody used to sit around cutting up the steak and kidney pie and doing the vegetables, it was very pleasant actually.

SP: So they were full time in their work. Were they in any way political people.

JT: Not in any way. Mondays used to be a bit of a trial. It was all very primitive, cooking was done on an open coal range, an enormous range and in the summer you can imagine what it was like cooking roast beef and roast pork, it was fantastically cheap.

A leg of pork, I don't know where they came from, Poland or somewhere, half crown, they were enormous legs of pork, they mostly weighted 14-16lb. Australian frozen rabbits, 1d each. This was all at Smithfield. We'd bring home some meet but most of it would come home by carrier. Monday mornings, and washing up, there was a woman called Lizzie, and they were appallingly badly paid, really shocking pay, only 15sh a week, and Lizzie would go to the boozier over the weekend and if she was feeling bad on Monday mornings she didn't use to come in. And so I had to stay at home from school and do the washing up, which was absolute hell, from 7 in the morning to 7 at night, over an enormous tin bath in the sink, with grease on your arms half an inch thick because there were no detergents.

SP: You wouldn't have had hot water either.

JT: I can't really think, there must have been running hot water.

SP: My mother used to use soda.

JT: But at lunch time you were washing up 200-300 dinner plates.

SP: How did they manage the fact they were kept home from school, what about truancy.

JT: Nobody bothered.

SP: Where were you at school, a series of local schools.

JT: I went to an infant school in Br Rd., I don't know what the intermediate one was but I ended up in the Ackland Central School which is in Fortis Rd, but nobody bothered. And the schools weren't, the masters were pleasant and some of them were very good, but although the school had all the latest equipment I think out of 20 masters only 1 or 2 had been to university and the teaching was pretty primitive, looking back on it.

SP: Did you expect to stay at school beyond the norm, what was the school leaving age then.

JT: 14. The Central Schools and intermediate, you set an exam when you were about 10 or 11, if you passed properly you went to a grammar school or a secondary school, and if you only half passed you went to a central school and central schools were divided into two halves, technical and commercial, the commercial side of it did Spanish and French and typing and things like that. And the technical side of it, they had a very good metal shop, and tool working shop, and one of the wood working teachers was very good indeed and you did physics and chemistry, it was all fairly slapdash, they never bothered if you did your homework and that kind of thing.

SP: Did you enjoy school.

JT: It was something you did, I don't know of I enjoyed it or not. What I remember of it it was quite pleasant, a number of the masters were very nice people.

SP: Did it lay the foundations to the film work you were going to do.

JT: I wanted to be a carpenter actually, a joiner, which is more skilled carpentry and that is what I intended to do. But in about 1928 old Grierson appeared on the scene, my sister worked with him on Drifters and he had a flat in Upper Park Rd, off Haverstock Hill, which had a large gas fire in it and a hand turned projector and about 50 tins of nitrate film.

SP: You say she worked with him, how did she come to be doing that.

JT: She started out as a typist with a film company in Wardour St and I don't know what she was doing when she met him but she was working in films, and if you know Grierson, anyone was told what to do roughly, but she'd held the fort while they were away on Drifters or worked on the cutting of it. That handturned projector, the film used to go into a bin and I was allowed to turn the projector and so on, it's unbelievable how primitive how all the equipment and everything was.

SP: I've heard, because Marion Grierson was down here, how the various shots of Drifters were hung on nails above the fireplace while they were cutting this, it this a piece of imaginary memory.

JT: Not knowing Marion. I don't remember that but certainly there was film all over the place. And he smoked all the time he was working and every one else did. In those times everyone seemed to smoke. Come Easter 1930 there was a conference in the kitchen of the Hope Dining Rooms in which my future was decided by Grierson who said look we don't want any of this nonsense, you can come and start for us on Tuesday.

SP: When you say nonsense you mean being a carpenter.

JT: Yes.

SP: This is 1930. Had your sister married Grierson or was this later.

JT: No, she'd married Grierson. I should think in about January 1930.

SP: What was your sister's name.

FT: Margaret.

SP: Were there just the two of you in the family.

JT: Just the two.

SP: And she was older than you.

JT: She was 7 years older than I as.

SP: You'd left school,

JT: I hadn't left school. He told me to leave school, Uncle

John, he was like that, I was still at school and he said start work Tuesday morning, £1 a week. I arrived there, and one of the early things, oh it wasn't £1 a week, it was 15sh.

SP: What did your parents feel about this.

JT: Grierson steamrollered any one pretty nearly, they seemed quite happy. In those days, they were so different, our world was so different, you didn't expect to go on and work for Satchi and Satchi or in the city, you thought you were going to be a carpenter.

SP: So you just walked out of school and that was that.

JT: I must have told them because they gave me a reference. The headmaster lived on that estate that you lived on, his name was Lineker.

SP: Holly Lodges.

JT: And I was very proud of my reference, it said this is a very fine boy and dom dom dom, I took it and showed it to Grierson who said this is the most illiterate bloody letter I've ever read in my life. He was a nice man the headmaster, he'd been badly wounded and gased during the war, his intentions were good, even if his grammar wasn't up to it.

SP: In 1930 you were 15. You were at Central School but you were continuing.

JT: I had no intention of leaving until the end until Grierson being Grierson, everybody lives he tended to, he would tell people not to get married or to get married, and so on and so forth.

SP: You went off to work for EMB.

JT: The Empire Marketing Board.

SP: What was that, an office, a studio.

JT: We had Dancing Yard, a turning which runs between lower Wardour St and Lower Dean St., parallel with Gerard St and it's an alley way, it has a Chinese name now, and in the middle of it was one of those iron gentlemen's lavatory, and it was the place where all the sandwich board men used to go at the end of the day and turn their boards in, and they used to sit around on the ground with sheets of newspaper spread around sorting out the cigarette ends and they used to put the burnt piece in one pile, the wet piece in another pile and the good piece in the middle and they used to have mounds of this stuff, and every one was smoking and throwing them away and they'd be picking them up, and they sold the middle pile to shops which made their own cigarettes, if you can believe it, I think we were on the first floor and we had one small cutting room and one slightly larger which was the office as well, and the lavatory. And we had a 35mm projector in the lavatory, and 2 or 3 vaults, I was a complete innocent, I didn't know anything about anything, I couldn't even answer the telephone. If there was nobody there, I'd pick up the telephone and here what they said and say sorry



there's no one here and hang up again. And about 10 minutes later Grierson would come rushing up the steps and say what do you mean, I've been trying to get you on the telephone all day.

SP: So really it was a completely new world. How did you get down there, tram.

JT: Tube to Tottenham Court Rd. When I arrived there there was Grierson and a man called Jimmy Davidson who was a film technician and he'd done every thing in the film industry, he'd been an assistant director and assistant cameraman and he'd done a certain amount of camera work, he was really the only one who knew anything about films at all, and Basil Wright.

SP: He was there already.

JT: Yes I think he'd arrived at Christmas.

SP: What was the purpose of the Empire Marketing Board.

JT: The purpose was to promote Empire trade, understanding, the Empire Marketing Board, it must have been quite a big organisation, they had their own very nice poster boards all over the country, do you remember them.

SP: Yes buy British goods

JT: The did that but there were quite a lot of good artists who were commissioned, all the contemporary good graphic people of the time and painters were doing the posters for them, today you'd look back on it and say the Empire Marketing Board and imperialism and so on but Tallents, Sir Stephen Tallents, who ran it was a liberal and would be much more in tune with Commonwealth than Empire, though the Empire was still there. In those days the Empire, there was Empire Day at school and that sort of thing.

SP: The films were they made for home audiences or sending over seas.

JT: To start with we didn't really seem to do much for the Empire Marketing Board. They were reediting the Russian films, I can remember, I was the office boy and general dogsbody and did all the dirty work which nobody else wanted to do, I can remember going to Argus, maybe, and when I was younger my father and I went for a walk on Parliament Hill on Sunday afternoons and half way up Parliament Hill there's a white stone monument, pillar, where there was public speaking going on, in those days there was a lot of speaking from wooden platforms, and one of the people we used to stand and listen to quite often, one day I first started work I was told to go and pick up a copy of Turksib, and I went into Argus and banged the counter, they had iron sheeted counters in those days because the film was flam, and out from the back comes the bloke who's always speaking on Parliament Hill, Ralph Bond, I say please can I have a copy of Turksib for Mr Grierson.

SP: It strikes me as rather odd that here's the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit and you're reediting Russian films, how did this come about.

JT: This was Grierson. He sold the Empire Marketing Board the idea of making films by showing them Russian films, and Tallents must have been, the public relation officers must have been quite different men, they had a much wider perspective on what they were there for and people like Tallents and Beddington and Ryan and Lesley, who was at the Gas Board, there were half a dozen of them who in some way quite blatantly used the money they had to do progressive stuff or progressive stuff, which I can't particularly had any great effect on what they were supposed to be doing. Not only that they were editing a German film about skiing, I think it was called Matterhorn, it was a silent feature which had got into trouble, and Basil was doing the donkey work and Grierson was doing the supervisory stuff on it. And they were trying to reedit it and knock it into shape. Every morning when I went in there would be 8 rolls or 5 rolls or 3 rolls of film with hundreds of paper clips in it, because in those days, in silent days, cuts were much shorter than they are now, and I'd spend all day with no equipment at all for joining except a piece of blotting paper and a paper clip and bottle of estone, and the blade of a knife and you had to scrape these beastly things by spitting on them, the joins must have been appalling, when they used to go through the projector, they sound like gun shots going through.

SP: How big an overlap, just a little bit bigger than the sprocket hole.

JT: It was half a sprocket hole from what I remember. To the first half of a sprocket hole, they were quite big because otherwise they wouldn't stick and always in those days you had trouble with cutting copies breaking up while you were running them.

SP: It was a long time before you got one of those big heavy joiners.

JT: I think we must have been pretty backward because some of the equipment must have been around the studios. There was always very little money for equipment.

SP: Was there any production going on, what was the first thing you worked on.

JT: The first actual shooting, there was a lot of editing, at Dancy Yard, there were only the 4 of us, but all sorts of people used to come in, Paul Rotha, Paul Rotha always said I showed him Turksib when he was sitting on the lavatory, which was the only place to sit anyway to see it, but this was his standard story. The first film I can remember, was a film Grierson was making for the Port of London Authority, and we had a handturned Bell and Howell and a hand turned Debrie, and small camera called Devrai which took 100 ft of film, and that was about it really.

SP: Who was the cameraman.

JT: The Film Unit was managed by a company called New Era and they'd had Days of Glory and so on and had made quite a number of successful box office films and they had two, a building in D'Arblay St, with commissionaires and pageboys and so forth, and we kind of drew on them for anything we wanted, I think they

managed the money and when we bought stock from Kodak it was done through New Era, New Era made an awful mistake on the early days of sound, it was really a prosperous film company, they'd made Zeebrugge, Q Ships, the Cooptimists, but when sound started coming in they went for sound on disk and they put all their money into projectors with this great big disktable at the back, and by the time I started there they had a dispatch department at the back, a well run film company, but the projectors were coming back half a dozen at a time and they had a big yard at the back where all these wooden cases were stacked, and the desperate gamble they went in for clock golf which was the craze at the time, they had like small billiard tables on the floor where you knocked a ball around, and after about 6 months all the golf tables came back as well.

SP: Were they sent to amusement arcades or was it going to be connected with the cinema.

JT: I can't remember I think it was amusement arcades.

SP: It seemed that the Empire Marketing Board at first were just studying other people's films and persuading the Empire Marketing Board that films should be made in the style of Turksib.

JT: This had all happened before. Grierson went to America on a scholarship, something like the reverse of the Rhodes scholarship, and he must have at the time, films were 99% entertainment, and it was something like someone going into the Guttenberg Printing Press and realising that you could use printing presses for something other than bibles. And he came back and met Tallents, I don't know how he met Tallents, but Tallents was obviously already thinking about using film because they'd already made one film, One Family which was an absolute and complete disaster. It was a silent film and about an hour long and it was made by a man called Walter Crichton who previously had been organising things like torchlight tattoo at Wembley. It was a disaster this thing, it was full of society ladies dressed up as Britannia, and it was a small boy going round the Empire collecting the contents of a Christmas pudding for George V. It was very sad because it cost a lot of money. And it had one showing. They hired the Palace for a week and I went to one of the shows, it was appalling, they had 3 people there. Crichton had made One Family with a lot of publicity and Grierson in the meantime had convinced Tallents, and he made Drifters in parallel, and Crichton's film went on and on, and they didn't finish it till 1930, in the meantime Grierson had made Drifters which was a tremendous success both critically and in the cinemas, it got quite a bit distribution, and so from then on he was running the thing. Originally I don't know what his purpose was, originally he was going to go on making films himself, he certainly started this Port Authority one, and then he realised that one man could only do so much, and if his purpose was to use film, which he always said it was, to use film to some social purpose, one man's not going to do very much. So we did quite a lot of shooting on the Port of London one and we had a professional cameraman from New Era called Sidney Blythe, a very good feature cameraman and I don't know what happened in the end but I think Grierson just diverted the money from that film



into the unit.

Going back it's slightly misleading to say they spent their time editing Russian films, German films, at the same time they were making two films, one was called Conquest which was silent and another one was called Lumber which was made out of library material.

SP: What was Conquest about.

JT: It was about the opening of West America, and in those days people used to use anything they wanted to, nobody bothered about copyright or anything like that, it had all sorts of bits from Covered Wagon in it. It would be very interesting to see it today. For a long time people just used to use material. I suppose they made Lumber because there was an immense amount of material from Canada of trees being chopped down and carted around. Grierson was really a magnificent salesman, the films weren't that good, he just used to tell people they were wonderful and they believed him.

SP: On this part of London shooting, did you work as an assistant to the cameraman, how did you train because very soon you were shooting things yourself.

JT: One of the things about Grierson was, I suppose from the beginning he would just say to someone do this, and you went and did it, this went all the way through, Davidson was very good, he was a martinet but he was very good in teaching people. A bit later when we grew to a bigger place, all the younger people were taught how to develop and print and make stills and how to work a camera and how to service a camera. And you automatically, you'd go in and they'd say there's the projector, and you'd lace it up and run it. We could come onto the teaching bit later when all the others came in. But from the beginning, when I was 15, although I spent half my time dragging film cans around London, you were expected to do anything which came up. Like joining, the first day I was there I was joining up, which was a simple thing.

SP: It's still a skill.

JT: But not particularly the way I did it.

SP: What was the first film you actually worked on as part of the producing team.

JT: That would be the PLA film. We for a while had a boat on the river, a motor launch, there was Grierson and to start with Sidney Blythe, Grierson didn't really want to know about technicians like Sidney, Sidney was a wonderful cameraman, but Grierson wasn't interested because mentally he knew the camera man would never understand in what he was trying to do, that the cameraman was interested in taking good pictures, beautiful pictures and he, Grierson's purpose was something else. And he wanted people who started from the basis we're not here to make bloody films, we're here to be of use to society. Davidson soon caught on to this to a certain extent, and he replaced Blythe, and I was always with them as the assistant. And very soon you did things like loading magazines and canning out, and setting up



the camera, I don't know how long the Dancy Yard thing lasted, it might have been 3 years.

Then we moved to 167 Oxford St and then one day Davidson came in to me and said here's half a crown, go and hire a coster barrow which you can get down the road. So I go down the road, and he says we're moving today, we're moving to 167 Oxford St, we'll see you there. And there were 3 bloody vaults full of film, and we were on the third floor, and the vaults in the new building were on the roof. I can still remember that day with horror. Loading up the coster barrow, pushing it up Wardour St, and carrying all this film, projectors, cutting benches, the lot up, we didn't have much, but it seemed a lot to me at the time. And there we had a very cutting room, and an office and projectors with arcs, the cutting room was the theatre itself, and it had these enormous projectors with arcs. And then all sorts of people started to arrive. Marion Grierson, Edwin Spice, and then there were a whole crowd of Cockney children, Jonah Jones, Fred Gamage, Chick Fowle and Phylis Long, Olive Plumb. And they were all 16. And really it was the strangest place you've ever seen. There was the upper crush like Bas, and everybody had to say Mr, it took me weeks to say sir and mr. Grierson would come home where I lived in the evening, he said you've got to learn to say sir to people, not growl at them, and call Wright Mr. In the end I called everyone Mr and Sir and it took years to get out of it.

SP: Just a technical point, some point after you joined, even if it was hand cranked had switched from 16 or 18 to 24 fps, because if you were making silent films in those days, I often wondered when the change over came.

JT: I would have expected, we were all pretty ignorant technically, including Grierson, but I suppose they would have been that conscious that all cinema projectors ran at 24 now so they would have turned at 24. We'd spent days, not days, but you'd really practice for hours with a handturned camera, because the bell had to, but it also had the pan and tilt had handles, so you had to practice keeping constant speed on that and going backwards and forwards with the other two, you sat for hours doing that, and Davidson was very good at, all the camera equipment was absolutely spotless, the gates were always cleaned every morning, it was really a school. And the same thing applied to people like Basil, it was as much a school for them as for the younger ones.

SP: So everyone was doing everything, like a film training school now.

JT: Absolutely.

SP: How did the other Cockney kids get involved, we know how you got involved.

JT: As I moved up the scale, Jonah, I don't know how Jonah came, he lived in Southwark and his father was with the Southwark Fire Brigade, Jonah Jones. He came as an office boy and everyone's ambitions was to be a cameraman. Chick Fowle, I've a vague idea, Grierson used to live at the Elephant and Castle and Chick lived

at the Elephant and Castle, and I've a vague idea that Grierson got to know Chick through a local youth club. Where Miss Long came from I don't know. She was 16 when she came, so was Miss Plumb. She was an amazing woman, she's still around. Grierson was fairly rough and tough, he wasn't sadistic, but he rushed around all over the place, nobody could read his writing, my sister was the only one who could read his writing,

SP: Did she work there too.

JT: No she used to be bought in, if they wanted some one to cut the negative she would come in and cut the negative, anything like that. For part of the time she was an assistant manageress of a cinema out at Wood Green and Grierson would go and meet her every Friday and collect her pay. He was always hard up. He never had any money. He didn't believe in private property. He'd give anything away. He was amazing. Until he started that Scottish television series, which was late in life, he never had a penny. Miss Long appeared this 16 year old, uncertain, and had a terrible time with Grierson because she couldn't understand what he was talking about. People like her never answered the telephone and didn't use the telephone.

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

SP: You were saying Miss Long had great difficulty in understanding people like Grierson dictating articles about Kant, what on earth was he doing writing articles about Kant.

JT: Practically every article he ever wrote had Kant mentioned in it somewhere. He was an honours philosophy graduate from Glasgow and had to flash it around a little. But Miss Long for 6 months or so really had a miserable time, and you'd find her crying in this passage in the back, and after about 6 months she had Grierson completely under control and he thought it was the best thing which ever happened to him, that Miss Long would bully him, and she had this phenomenal memory, and ultimately they had this quite big filing system, after a dozen big filing cabinets, and she knew every bit of paper in it. And it was very nice the reverse roles, after a while it was she who was the boss and she was 17 or something like that. And the nice thing about Grierson was that he would appreciate that sort of thing. He was very very good with people, especially young people, very good indeed, it went on all his life. Anstey's children, Forman's children, they all, he was quite extraordinary with young children, he wasn't interested in anyone over 25 really you know, and I suppose it was his background because his mother and father were both teachers, 3 of his sisters were teachers, his mother and father were really dedicated Scottish teachers, they had a small school in a coalmining village somewhere in the middle of Scotland, somewhere between Edinburgh and Glasgow and they had the highest rate of entry to university, as a percentage, of any school in Scotland. His mother, I don't know now many children she had, 8 or so, but she took the equivalent of the 6th form class in bed, they used to go to her bedroom, because it wasn't a very big class. His mother was a wonderful woman. I didn't know his father but I knew his mother well. And she was a life long socialist and a life long teetotler. Right the way through his life, young people were the interest to him. The last job he did

was lecturing at McGill University Canada, and they had a lot of quite serious run ups there, and someone I met not long ago had been in his class there, and when none of the other classes were meeting even Grierson would have 350 young people listening to him in the middle of this student thing, with none of the university working, they'd go and listen to Grierson talking.

SP: This was in his old age.

JT: Yes. He was quite an amazing man. He had his bad patches, but when he was young he worked like everyone, with him driving behind, it really made the thing work.

SP: There you were in the EMB Film Unit in Wardour St in the early 30s, learning all these things. What was the first film you played a part in after the Pool of London, according to some list, which looked wrong to me, Industrial Britain, was this made about this time.

JT: 1931.

SP: Was that directed by Flaherty.

JT: Yes

SP: How did he come onto the scene, because you worked on that as cameraman didn't you.

JT: No. He was the best cameraman.

SP: So he did all his own shooting did he.

JT Yes. I was his dogsbody, except for the last one, Louisiana Story which Richard Leacock photographed. Let me tell you about the first location I went on, we had Grierson and Davidson went in a car for some reason or another

SP: Just for the record what was Davidson's first name.

JT: James, Jim. And I went with the camera equipment and for some reason we took everything we had, Devrai, Debrie, Bell and Howell and I went with Mac, who was the, in an old van which had no side windows and a plate glass window at the front, literally a plate glass window, and at the back it had leather curtains, and we used to use this on Grierson's PLA film, but the first one I can remember we went to Eastbourne Research Station and I had to stay in the van all the time the equipment was in, so I could never go and have lunch, so I sat in the, we we were in a big kind of barn, Mac and they had all gone off for lunch together and they'd left me there and I desperately wanted to have a pee but being a city bred boy I didn't dream of just going into the corner of a barn, so I wandered around the barn and there was a large tin in the corner which was empty so I peed in the tin and then the most appalling fumes rose, it was an old tin of acetelene, I can remember that vividly, I can remember standing outside the door pretending not to notice what was happening with fumes arising around me. At the end of the day Davidson have me half a crown, you and Max stop and have tea on the way back, so we got in this bloody old thing and chugged our way back, and we stopped at a cafe on the road and it had a large garden in front



of it, and we had two boiled eggs and bread and butter and cake and tea and with the change we bought 10 Players each.

SP: And the equipment was safe.

JT: We drove into the place and we could sit and watch it out of the window. So long as Davidson and Grierson wasn't there, I could get out. Another one I remember, we went to Doncaster, I don't know what we were shooting, but Grierson, Davidson and I, I had to go early and pick up the camera equipment and get to Euston or wherever it was, and we had breakfast on the train, and to me that was absolutely wonderful, and we got out at Doncaster and got a taxi and it was one of those old Daimlers, and Grierson and Davidson sat in the back and it was one of those folding seats which used to come back, made of strips and metal, I sat there, and when I got out it ripped the seat of my pants, straight across, and nobody said go and buy a new pair which you could buy for 5 bob or 10 bob so all day long I had to hold the seat of my pants while we were traping around whatever taxi it was. And going home at night, going home by tube holding the seats of your pants together, unbelievable..

SP: You were still living at home.

JT: For part of the time, I used to stay with Grierson and my sister quite often, they had a house in a square down there called Merrick Sq, near the Elephant. I can't remember which, you start doing bits of photography, there were no exposition meters or anything like that, so it was slightly more tricky than it is today, and you looked through the camera and turned the iris until you thought it was right, you could judge it through the ground glass, the density of it. And bit by bit, you did a bit of this and a bit of that, it was only part of what you did, you helped in the cutting room and you did projection and whatever happened to come, or made the still,s really the training was very good indeed although it was probably primitive to what it is today.

SP: I don't know it sounds more thorough.

JT: A lot of people complained, Harry Watt used to complain about it, Edgar, Edgar's wife was talking yesterday about Edgar being sent on the Challenger, a navy survey ship to Labrador, Grierson took him down, and he'd never used a camera before in his life, and Grierson took him down to St James Park and said I'll show you how to do it, Grierson was always playing down any technical side, this is the unimportant side of it. It was the other side to what you were trying to do was the important side of it. I don't thing quite a lot of people ever caught on this was what he was really interested in. He also had a cutting room in the basement of his house in Merrick Sq where I used to go quite often, with a hand turn projector, and he was making, he made two or three films on marionettes, with ASFI I think it was, Associated Sound Film Industries, they were very famous Italian family I think called the Gornos, and the studio had burnt down, but a collection of about 300 years of marionettes had gone up with the studio, the studio paid them to make 3 Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton and I can't remember the other, and Grierson directed 3 things down there. He seemed to be doing a number of things at the same time.



SP: This had nothing to do with the EMB.

JT: No the work wasn't done at the Empire Marketing Board, it was done in the basement of his house down there, you could do it because all you needed was a rewriter, a packet of paper clips and a projector really. Then things started, I suppose 1931, we moved from Wardour St to Oxford St, opposite Frescarti's.

SP: It sound like the place Marion Grierson had later for the Travel and Industrial Association Film Unit.

JT: She was on the top floor and we were on the third and fourth floors. At that point Marion was there from very early on, and Edwin Spice came over, she came over and started as a sort of production manager, very soon she moved into directing. Grierson said to Miss Long once, would you like to be a film director, and Miss Long said how dare you, of course I wouldn't want to be a film director. What a terrible thing to say. She was daft, most likely she would have been very good at it but it wasn't within her terms of reference, and that was when they put the advertisement in The Times and Edgar and Arthur Elton and another Davidson called Norice Davidson from Ireland appeared on the scene in answer to that advertisement. Anstey's wife talks about the date of it and it was 1931. And quite a lot of other people appeared at this time. At Oxford St we had 2 floors, a proper theatre with proper projectors, a large cutting room and another cutting room, 3 offices on that floor, and upstairs we had vaults, another cutting room a big general room, we had one of the vaults converted into a stills room.

SP: I'm not sure but I think it's Preview 2 now that building, it's either 37 or 39.

JT: Then quite a lot of people came, Jenny Brown, amazing Scotswoman, she came from Glasgow and I think quite a well healed young woman who wanted to make films. She came, bought a Newman and departed to the Sheltands. And where she started making films. Flaherty arrived at this point. Flaherty was in Germany trying to setup a film

SP: Murnau.

JT: No this was after Moanna. They'd finished that then, he was trying to set up a film with Zinnemann, he was a young man at the time and Flaherty was trying to use him to set up a film in Russia, I don't know what the subject was and they, the Russians were going to provide the facilities but they had to provide the stock and so on but they didn't have enough money, and Mrs Flaherty rang Grierson from Berlin, all his life when you think about it how few films he made, admittedly they did take a long time to make but longer periods of unemployment, although he wouldn't have liked to call it that but he did, a lot of the time he must have had, crazy really, his years in London, nobody ever asked him to make a film, we didn't even ask him to make a short. Mrs Flaherty rang up from Berlin and Grierson said comeover. And he came over and appeared, this incredible character which he was. He was just big time. Miss Long would type a letter for him, there was this very posh chocolate shop in New Oxford St called Debries, he would go along and buy a pound of the most

expensive chocolates and give it to her. Everything was on a different scale from we'd ever seen but he always had this incredible personality of being able to talk, it's difficult to describe, he just had a personality which came roaring across.

SP: Was he employed or under contract to make one film. What was the arrangement.

JT: At that time other people, this is one of the things people have forgotten, they started to make 3 or 4 hour long films, Basil Wright was going to make a film about the Scottish highlands, Elton was going to make a film about Wales, Noris was going to make a film about Ireland and they were all an hour films.

SP: This is for showing in Britain and overseas under the aegis of the EMB. What was Flaherty's film going to be.

JT: Flaherty's film was the last one which was England, Industrial Britain. In the mean time a strange character called Golightly appeared on the scene, whom Grierson had found in Devon, he was really a forrester, Grierson believed anyone could do anything and he'd just say you can do this, you can be a production manager. Poor old Golightly he knew all about the inside of pubs and forests but not much about production managing. And he was very much a gentleman, from the upper classes, his father was a general or something like that and he and Flaherty went off and after they went away for about a week there was a desperate call for a dogsbody and that was me. I went off and joined them. The first thing Flaherty did, up to that time we'd used the Bell and the Debrie and the Devrai. Flaherty although he had no technical skills whatsoever he was tremendously progressive on equipment, he was practically the first man outside Germany who used Ariflex, he was one of the first men to use an Akley, a surround camera with a focal plane shutter and you can go almost in a complete circle with it. One of the first things he did, he came here, and I went out with him, he said I've heard there's a wonderful camera here called the Newman Sinclair and I was sent up to Newmans, I went up with Flaherty to Newmans to look after him, by taxi needless to say, he never dreamed of travelling by any other conveyance, and either they lent him a Newman or they bought him one, I think they must have lent him one. We came back.

SP: Was this Newman's near Kentish Town.

JT: Yes, Archway. Grierson, Davidson and Flaherty and I went down to London Bridge with this Newman, and the cameraman said you can't possibly use a 6 " lens, because you get wobble and waver and movement, and Flaherty put a 9" lens and leant on the parapet and photographed this thing, the pool of London which was packed with ships at this time, Davidson was jumping around saying it was a bloody waste of time, you know what film technicians are like, what am I standing around here for with this bloody old fool, and he had 9" lens for Christsake, the next day we see the rushes and it's as steady as a rock.

SP: It was resting on the bridge.

JT: They said you couldn't use it on the tripod, that would be the attitude, and they bought a Newman and Flaherty took it with him.

SP: Was it a scripted film.

JT: I can remember a scene with Grierson and Flaherty in the office with Grierson saying look Bob I've got to have something on paper and Flaherty hadn't been to school much like me, and he was left handed and wrote upside down like that, and he wrote industrial Britain in large large writing, various shots of industry, R. J. Flaherty and gave it to Grierson. Grierson said wonderful, that's exactly what I wanted. Grierson was always telling stories against Flaherty in later years but they really were very very close over many years, Grierson in the end began to take the micky out of Flaherty which was quite wrong, if Grierson was sitting in a pub with two or 3 people he'd start taking the Micky out of Flaherty but that wasn't the way he felt about Flaherty, he had tremendous respect for him and great affection as well.

So we started out and we went to the Rolls Royce works. We'd just turn up, and we've got Mr Flaherty outside and he wants to take pictures of your works, literally, and in those days there were very few film units going round the country, we photographed in Rolls Royce, Chance's Glass, we had two appalling floodlights which was my job, they were cans with 1500 volts which you couldn't focus, just a general flood, and with this he got absolutely beautiful results, in the glassworks, the pottery.

SP: So you plugged in any where. It wasn't too powerful, the fuses.

JT: Not 1500, no. 1500 is very low. I don't know how many amps. But all the factories had electricians and we just have them an end and they'd run a cable, they were more than willing to help. Wedgewood. The year before last Flaherty's daughter was over here and wanted to see some of the work and we saw a film edited by Marion Grierson called the English Potter, it's about 500, 600ft, silent with four or 5 titles in it, a beautiful little film, and it's just a sequence of a man throwing a pot, we went into a coal mine, his stuff was quite outstanding. He'd do things like black industrial backgrounds with white steam coming up out of it. There were occasional shots which they've used in other films, he was an absolutely brilliant cameraman.

SP: So that was all shot first and thought about afterwards.

JT: At the time there were plenty of money because they were going to make four or five equivalents of 2nd features. This would be early 1931, summer of 1931.

SP: But this was government money so somebody must have approved these budgets.

JT: It would be Tallents. By then the unit was beginning to get attention in the press. Grierson's ability of selling anything, he was going round lecturing and film societies and Lejeune was always around the place, and I suppose by that time Graham Greene and people like that were beginning to write about it, it was



beginning to acquire a reputation, on pretty flimsy grounds, but Grierson was a powerful.

SP: But it can only really have a reputation from the finished product and there weren't many of them by that time.

The organisation was unique at that time.

JT: There was nothing like it. I don't think there was anything like it before or since. There really was a feeling of cooperation, nobody would go off home, work would continue late into the evening, you'd go off and have a drink and come back again.

SP: So what happened in the end, was it months and months of work and then a bit of extra shooting.

JT: One of the peculiar things, one of the hotels we were staying in, Oswald Mosley appeared with all his young gentlemen, what was the man who became the Oxford group man, he was one of these thugs at the time, he was an Oxford Blue or something like that, I knew nothing about politics, Flaherty knew even less, and Golightly less than that, but Flaherty had this personality that every one came and talked to him, literally, he'd sit in a restaurant, and he knew everyone, and he'd meet people all over the place. When we landed in Dublin years later he knew everyone in Dublin straight off, everyone asked him out, I don't know what it was but he had this. But all the well known writers and poets and painters in Dublin would invite him out. Anyway, Mosley came over while we were having dinner and chatted to Flaherty and said would you like to come to our meeting, Flaherty said yes. So Flaherty and I go to this meeting and sit on this stage, and the whole stadium fills up and Mosley starts talking, and within about 2 minutes someone picks up a chair and throws it at the stage and then all the chairs in the audience are thrown, we're out the back door.

SP: Where was this.

JT: I'm blown if I can remember, Derby, Stoke on Trent. It was incredible. That was my first introduction to the political scene. I think we were at Derby and we'd had supper, this was just the preliminary, it was cold, he was shooting a script, he was making a script with the film. There were great arguments in those days about improvisation, Grierson was very much on the provisation side, it all had to be worked out before hadn, and Flaherty was something quite knew, you went and looked at it and photographed it. We were at Derby and a call came and it was Grierson for Flaherty, look Bob, I'm very sorry, the Empire Marketting Board is closed down as from this moment, it was 1931 economic crisis, and it was closed like that, literally that day it was closed, it was the time they cut the Royal Navy pay by 10%, I think they were getting 14sh a week at the time or something like that.

SP: It was the time of the Invergorden Mutiny.

JT: Yes. And we packed up and went home. And Flaherty went back by train, we had a very old morris, an appalling motorcar and these horrible lights and Davidson, the pride and joy of his



life, they had to be carried in wooden boxes, they were so precious, which we had in the back of the car, and we were going down hill and there was this old man crossing the road and Golightly was half blind anyway and the worse driver I've ever seen, and he put the breaks on and one of the boxes fell on him and pulled him to the steering wheel, I can just remember looking up and seeing the old man who was crossing the road leap clear out of the way, then I managed to push the box back up again. Grierson always said he sacked Flaherty because he was slow shooting but that was rubbish, all the other films were called back as well.

SP: They'd started as well.

JT: Yes, Bas had been up in the Highlands for months. Elton had been in Wales. Bas was a soft hearted gentle character and you know how the roads of Scotland are full of stray sheep up in the Highlands, Bas had the Buick and was steaming along one night and hit a sheep and broke its leg. He got out and said I can't leave it the poor animal there, I'll have to cut it's throat, and got his pen knife out and started cutting its throat, in the end he lifted the sheep up onto the seat and drove it to the nearest place where it could be disposed of.

SP: So this meant there were miles of rushes which had been abandoned. No doubt Flaherty's was the greatest amount.

JT: The best.

SP: He did shoot heavily.

JT: Yes but compared to shooting today it was nothing. I suppose in 5 weeks he shot 20, 25,000 ft, roughly that. Compared with any modern shooting it was negligible. In those days Grierson, not only Grierson, they did tend to think of film as very precious, they had to, they hadn't that much money. Out of those things various films were made. The Northern Ireland one was called Hen Woman, they'd shot quite a lot of that and that was never seen again. I think what happened on that was the money Grierson had for the Port of London Authority film was used to carry the unit on on just a maintenance basis until it moved over to the GPO.

SP: That was fairly soon afterwards was it.

JT: I don't know because I went away.

SP: You left at that point.

JT: Soon after, I continued with Flaherty. The Welsh ones which Elton had made were made into films, there were 2 or 3 shorts made out of that.

SP: Under the aegis of the GPO film unit.

JT: I suppose EMB.

SP: But Industrial Britain emerged eventually.

JT: Eventually the lot of them emerged as the Imperial 6, they

were six shorts they sold to Gaumont as silent. And Gaumont put the sound on them and pretty badly too.

SP: There was a film called Industrial Britain.

JT: Out of those four original films, they ultimately made 6 2 reelers, out of the stuff Elton had shot, Bas had shot and Flaherty had shot. It was an awful shame because there was a lot of very good material in that. And one of the things about Flaherty is that very few people ever learnt how to edit his material. He wasn't a filmmaker in a conventional way. He wasn't a skilled filmmaker who would say we could cut from there to there, he just had this instinctive way of shooting and it would be done probably with no continuity, to find someone who could really edit it you would have to find someone who would ignore the continuity and edit it for its pictorial value, they didn't understand that when they edited Industrial Britain. Grierson knocked it into a hard sell for Britain which suited I suppose his purpose, but if he'd edited it for what it was, judging by this from the English potter that Marion edited, they would have had a very lovely film. Beautiful material that he shot.

SP: But then your personal story is that you went off elsewhere with Flaherty. Because you got to know him by the chance of being employed on this film, So who then employed you.

JT: My dear brother in law, a born crook,

SP: Your referring to John Grierson.

JT: I was getting £2/10sh a week, Grierson said look I've hired you out to Gaumont for £4 a week but because you've got to think of your future, I suppose they had no money at all and any was a help, we're going to go on paying you £2/10 sh a week and we'll keep the £1/10sh. If they needed the money I couldn't care less. One of the things Grierson taught you was that you should never worry about money what ever you did, that was the last thing of any importance. So come Christmas we departed. There's a point here, there was a long article in Sight and Sound about a year ago attacking Flaherty saying his imperial progress, and took the best house on Aran, I heard Ivor Montagu on the radio once saying absolute rubbish, that film, because they go out and catch oil for their lamps but every house on the island had electric lights.

SP: We're talking now about Man of Aran.

JT: Yes and Flaherty. And of course there were no electric lights on the island, but fashions change and it's fashion now to pick on poor old Flaherty, but imperial progress for Flaherty to the West of Ireland was him and his wife and 3 children and 17 year old assistant, which you can hardly call imperial progress. The house we had there was a bungalow which had no running water, no lavatory, the lavatory was about 50 yards down on the edge of the cliff, a dirt lavatory, and the water was a rain water tank outside, and he actually lived very simply. It was boxing day 1931 we departed with a mound of luggage, 3 small girls, Mrs Flaherty and me.

SP: Was there any advanced preparation for shooting there. Had

he'd been visiting there.

JT: He'd been over and seen Aran, and he'd been in touch with Pt Mullen who became my father in law and arranged to come back. I had nothing to do with it but Flaherty had arranged with Gaumont all the stuff to be sent out.

SP: What was the equipment. It seems mainly a family party and no technicians.

JT: We had nothing with us except typewriter and a guitar, the children were very good at singing South Sea Island songs. And a violin which Flaherty played. And trunks, endless trunks, because they spent their whole life travelling that lot. All the stuff was crated out or shipped out, the camera stuff, the laboratory stuff, and the generator. We just travelled with our equipment. Cutting equipment.

SP: Laboratory stuff. Was everything processed on the island.

JT: Yes.

SP: Who did that.

JT: The house Flaherty took was on a bay on the island and just underneath it there was a fish shed.

JOHN TAYLOR

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

SP: You were talking about the preparations for Man of Aran, was it shot by Aran instinctively, sequence by sequence or was it scripted to any extent.

JT: I wouldn't have thought he scripted anything, really. No, he got the idea from reading Singh, Riders of the Sea, and there's a two volume description of the Aran Islands when he lived there called the Aran Islands, shall we go on about the technical stuff for awhile.

Although he couldn't use a screwdriver, he was a very practical man, and very innovative, he was always ahead technically on things, especially photography. He developed Nanook of the North in the Arctic, the printer he used, they didn't have electricity. The window was blocked up and they had a hole in the woodwork which blocked the window which let the light in to be the printer light. And he was very good at getting the other people and trusting other people to do the work. He trusted me to develop the damn thing, which was fairly brisk for someone who is 17 to develop it, it wasn't a costly feature but a fair amount of money was involved, in some ways he was not unlike Grierson, he was very good with young people, in encouraging them. And having confidence in them.

SP: It seem extraordinary to me that here on Aran you printed from the light from the side of the shed.

JT: Oh no, there was electricity. That was Nanook on the Arctic.

SP: You must have been very nervous. Because if you did a days shooting and then you went to do the processing, was that in the same evening as you shot.

JT: Not usually, I'll tell you we started off, we had a 2 kw generator which is nothing, one electric fire really. And the drying drums had been made at Gaumont, large wooden drums about 6ft long, about 5 ft in diameter, and he converted this fish shed which was this rough stone shed and lined it with wood and painted to keep the dust down.

SP: You did all that after you got there.

JT: Yes. We moved into the house. There were one or two quite good carpenters on the island, noone knew anything about electricity at all except me and I didn't know very much, I wired the house and things like that and did the wiring, all that kind of thing you learned at the GPO or EMB

SP: And also you were a carpenter.

JT: I didn't go any carpentry. That was the electricity side of it. Nobody knew how to start the generator, by luck I read the instruction manual and find out, there was no one on the island who knew anything about engines, we'd been trying to get the thing going for about two days and nothing would happen, and one



evening I read the instruction manual carefully, and from then on I was a genius on anything mechanical as far as Flaherty was concerned. We started off with, we had terrible trouble with the laboratory, we couldn't get it to work, we started off with a thing called corex bands which were celluloid bands, the kind of band they used to use for dipping lica rolls with indentations, there was 200ft of celluloid which kept the film between the two as you wound it, and the only snag was this was that this band had corex patent every meter along it, punched through it, and it printed it onto the negative, so the first 200ft we developed had corex painted over every meter. We threw those away and then we started on the old-fashioned, we had tanks made, I suppose about 1 ft wide and 4 ft long and 5 ft deep, and there's a wood rack, a bit like an old wooden clotheshorse, one bar each outside and you wound the film on it, 200 ft, and pushed it into the tank, and we got flutter and waver, and uneven development on that,

SP: Did anyone suggest you have a dry run before you left with the equipment to Aran.

JT: You couldn't have done it any way because it would have meant setting up the equipment, the point was that he'd done it on Moana, and on Nanook, and he couldn't understand why, we did endless tests. One of the things about him was that he was persistent, he would go on and on and on from morning till night, and you'd do, we did hundreds and hundreds of tests of different ways of developing.

SP: This was before shooting began.

JT: No, he was was shooting at the same time and I was left at home to do the tests. But every night Mrs Flaherty who was a very good stills photographer and every night we would have about 3 lica rolls I'd develop before supper and we had an enlarger in the dark room and we would go down and make 100 prints, and every night of the week this went on and it never stopped, never stopped Saturdays or Sundays, we must have worked 6 months without a break.

SP: What were the 100 prints for.

JT: Stills of what he was shooting, so he knew what he was shooting. There was a trade war on between Britain and the Irish Republic at the time, and Britain had put an embargo on anything coming from Ireland so we couldn't send the rushes back to London, because there was a duty like a shilling a foot of film going from Ireland into England, so we kept it all there. And he had a lot of trouble doing the casting. They got the boys easy enough, the man, I don't think they got the man for 3 or 4 months. If you're doing things that way it does take time to build a laboratory, it must have taken a month or two months to do the building work there. He was a very uncertain worker, he seemed to have no confidence in what he was doing.

SP: Was there a regular supply boat which brought extra film stock. As well as stores for the island.

JT: I used to do everything on the thing. I was production manager, accountant, laboratory man, assistant cameraman, nursemaid to his children, the lot. Once a month we used to get

a registered letter from Gaumont or Gainsborough and I can't remember how much was in it, because the value of money has changed so much, but I suppose about £100 in white £5 notes. And Flaherty used to open the envelope and take two or three and give me the rest, and I'd put it in my back pocket. At the end of the month, both of us were completely illiterate, and he couldn't write and I could only just write and we'd do the expenses, say Thomas McDonna £2/10, Pauls, the local shop £14, Dalys, which was the pub £12, and so on and we'd get it up to about £52 and we didn't know what we did with the rest, and I didn't know how to spell it, I put misc expenditure, £49. Gaumont used to accept these without any quibble, they must have thought it was the most peculiar production they'd ever seen, but he had this business if you were going to make a film, you went there and you got to know the place. The cost were minute, I was getting £2/10sh a week. Pat Mullen became the production manager and arranged everything and knew every body and fixed everything and told Flaherty what to do and what not to do and got £4 a week. The assistant in the lab was my future brother in law who's name was PJ, I think he was getting £1 a week.

SP: Was your future wife there.

JT: No she was in America. She lived in America. I met her later. And then there were two girls in the kitchen who maybe were £1 a week and an odd job man who used to empty the lavatory and things like that so the cost was negligible, and this is how he succeeded in making films, you got to know the place and the people, it went on, we couldn't in the end, we more or less gave up the laboratory.

SP: It's a way, and I'm getting here that's only used by anthropologists, filmmakers now, to go and live in a place for months and months and months.

JT: In many ways he was almost an anthropologist, in a simple 19th century way. Remember he was 48 in 1932, so he was born during the Victorian era.

SP: It was 6 months you were there.

JT: A year and 8 months.

SP: The initial period was 6 months. Did you come away and go back.

JT: No he went over to London and took the exposed film with him and saw it in London with Balcon and so on and everybody seemed quite happy, and he brought back a 17" lens was unknown of.

SP: You say he saw it with Balcon, was he supervising it.

JT: He was the producer, and the man in charge of Gaumont or Gainsborough, whichever it was. Balcon had been nagged into making the film by the film critic of the Sunday Express, a man called Cedric Belfrage, and Belfrage saw Balcon and said you've got one of the great filmmakers of the world in London and all you're making is crap about Jew Suss and so on. And Balcon fell for it.

SP: I suppose the cost was small in comparison to a big feature production.

JT: The original budget was £11,000. I think we went slightly over that on the shooting but only slightly. But when they went back to the studio they added, there were things like a pearl necklace for one of the young starlets bought by one of the Ostrer brothers, for which Flaherty blew his top, and said what's the hell this doing on my cost, but there were things like that added and the final cost was £26,000. Which sounds tiny money today but in those days wasn't that small, but Jew Suss cost about £200,000. It was a tiny budget. Balcon, the strange thing if you talk to him, the one film he was proud of was Man of Aran, of the hundreds of film he produced, he would always say when we made man of Aran, amazing, I suppose it was such small beer, and Flaherty was such a personality. There's a long story about his getting this 17" lens. Balcon had a brother known as Chan Balcon who was his right hand man for stopping anything happening, and he fled from Flaherty, who was pursuing him to get this lens, and Flaherty waited outside the lavatory for hours and hours until Chan finally had to come out, and he came back proudly, I think it must have been one of Flaherty's stories, with this 17" lens.

By the end of the summer they got the cast together, Maggie, Mike the boy and Tiger the man. Then Flaherty brought from London a man called Coulinson in charge of testing Kodak's stock, at Kodaks, a very responsible job, every foot that went out, there used to be lots of problems, coating stock, all sorts of things could go wrong with it, and he really knew what he was talking about. He was a small young Cockney, a very nice man indeed, he came out and in the meantime Flaherty had sent to America and had got things called Stineman racks, a minelle metal rack, a flat spiral, not a spiral going up into the air, of 200 ft minelle metal about half an inch deep, and you run the film onto it and it loads itself more or less. and a lot of the stock was short ends anyway, because on those 1,000 ft cameras, if they got 200 or 300 left they put on a new one, a lot of the stock I had to rewind into 200 ft rolls. Flaherty sent to America for these things which he'd used before, we had about 6 of them, Coulinson arrived and took a look at it and said the width of the Stineman tanks, was about 3 or 4" deep, you want a tank which is 3 ft deep and they built 3 big tanks of wood and corked the seems, and we had to make up the developers, there were various formulas, D76 was the one we used, I think, I haven't mentioned D76 for 50 years, he did all sorts of things. He wrapped the baths of the drying drums with gauze and he showed me how to run the negative onto the drums with a pad of chammy leather with which you took off the surplus water.

SP: This was after the shooting had begun.

JT: This was about October.

SP: So a lot of the final film included footage previous to this date.

JT: Not much.

SP: Was it abandoned because it wasn't good enough technically.



JT: He hadn't shot a lot by that time.

SP: Just general scenes.

JT: I can't remember. Just sequences in the film, the storm sequence hadn't been shot. One of the reasons we stayed on for so long was we were waiting for a storm. During the first year we were there, the basking sharks came and went and it was only me and PJ, there were some harpoons which were left over from when they went shark hunting, and PJ and I went out one day shark hunting in a canoe, which was a daft thing to do because they turn over as easy as anything, trying to kill a shark with one of these enormous great irons, and I couldn't even stick it in the shark let alone get it harpooned, and Flaherty came down and said what are you doing, we were trying to harpoon a shark, and he said where did you get the harpoons from, PJ said they were in the loft at home, and Flaherty said we're going to have a shark hunt in it, this is where the idea came from. We rushed off to Galway into the library, and dug out, there were 2 or 3 books on shark hunting on the West Coast of Ireland, it probably hadn't been done for 60 years, Flaherty then sent off to Scotland to a Captain Murray who was a whaling captain, who's a wonderful man. he was a captain of a sailing whaler when he was 26, and he was now about 80, but he was supposed to be the finest ice pilot who ever sailed inside Hudson's Bay and Flaherty knew him from there. Somewhere on the island we dug up two harpoon guns so it had been done fairly recently, Tiger who was the leading man in the film was also a black smith so he got the guns into working order, and we hired a big sailing trawler, and the gun was mounted on the front, and we sailed out to kill the sharks, by this time all the sharks had gone so we had to wait another year for the sharks to come back. All sorts of things happened all the time. Cedric Belfrage appeared

SP: Is he the man who went to New York and started Contemporary Films there. Or was that another.

JT: Cedric was the film critic of the Sunday Express. And in those days you had 2 full pages in the Sunday Express and he was very highly thought of. He was a very elegant young gent. His brother was Bruce Belfrage and so on, the actor. He appeared in a light plane, a two seater, and they couldn't land on the island, and we went and collected them, and took them out shark hunting. And we had a boat called a \_\_\_\_\_ which is the actual one they used in the film, and then we had a fishing boat, a 40 ft fishing boat for the camera, and somehow, I was always getting into trouble for something or other and I think poor old Flaherty really must have suffered for having me as his assistant, but never mind, we had big thermos flasks, great big ones, and someone left them at home, I suppose I left them at home. We were out all day in these two boats with nothing to drink at all, plenty of food but nothing to drink. In the evening we went across about 10 miles away to the mainland and there was Belfrage and his pilot and Flaherty and a man called Rowe who was a writer and about 6 or 7 Aran islanders and me. And there was a tiny pub in this place, you wouldn't recognise it as a pub, it was just one room with a barrel of porter and so on, and we went in there and they really started drinking, they cleaned out the porter to begin with, then they drank all the whiskey and gin, there wasn't a lot of it. Then Flaherty said someone go up the



road and get a jar of potcheen, one or two of them went up the road and came back with a big jar of potcheen, a ferocious drink, and the drinking went on and on and on, and finally, there was a place there called the Hotel of the Isles, a place where about 3 in the morning we all went in to have breakfast. The West of Ireland was like this in anyway, it was quite accepted, everyone was paralytic by this time, we went out of the harbour at full speed and it was a very dangerous harbour with rocks all over the place.

SP: Was it light by the time you left.

JT: Yes, a beautiful sunny morning, we got out in the middle of the thing, and Cedric Belfrage was standing up in the seat, in the middle of the Atlantic this is, if he'd gone over the side nobody would have known, saying Beaverbrook, fuck him, and then singing life's just a bowl of cherries, the man called Rowe had passed out by this time. The Aran islanders said this is very dangerous, anyone passing out from potcheen, we must make him sick, so put his finger down his finger down his throat at which point Rowe bit him. They said this is no good, just drag him over the side, so they just put him over the side, and held him by his legs. Absolute crazyness, 5 miles each side from land with 14 paralytics,

SP: Were you drunk too.

JT: By this time I wasn't. I'd sobered up. I wasn't 18 by then but I'd had too much to drink. And there were 2 or 3 unconscious at the bottom of the boat. And Mr Flaherty disapproved strongly of Flaherty drinking, because when they were in the South Seas, he'd had had poisoning of some time which affected his liver, so any drink for someone who had no liver left was very bad. We finally got home and got back to our quay, there was a quay by the fishshed, Belfrage and I and PJ and Pat carried Rowe up to the laboratory and put him on the floor, and then we carried potcheen up, potcheen was all up with one of those anchors, he had gallons of rope all the way round him, and we picked him and the grappling up together and put him on the laboratory floor. And everyone departed for bed, and Flaherty and I went up to the house. And there was a big wicker chair and Flaherty sat in it and had the this gallon or 2 gallon of potcheen and went to sleep. And there was a big long corridor and I crept quietly down there, and I was just going into my bedroom, and Mrs Flaherty said John, I said yes, Mrs Flaherty, where's Mr Flaherty. I think he's in the sitting room, and there was slam slams of doors all over the house. It was a fantastic night. Things like that used to happen all the time out there.

SP: You had a year and 8 months to make the film in. You had plenty of time.

JT: One time we had Roger Casement's brother, Tom Casement, who had just won £500 libel from the Daily Express, and was in advanced state of DTs, and I used to sit up with him at night feeding him spoonfuls of whiskey and water, because they said it was very dangerous, not to let them dry out. We had Liam O'Flaherty's brother, who'd just done life in American prison for labour troubles. And we had Dr Flower, keeper of the manuscript at the British museum who was having a nervous breakdown. And we

had a very beautiful young actress called Ria Mooney and these 3 old gentlemen all focussed on her. And persued her all over the island. Tom wasn't good at this so he took to his bed and had to be spoon fed, things like this happened all the time. Pat would go off and get drunk and Flaherty wouldn't speak to him. I would get the sack, I used to get the sack occasionally. Flaherty could get very irritable indeed, especially if he'd had anything to drink. I used to pack my bags and go an stay in the local hotel. It was all a mad Irish thing.

SP: On the island.

JT: You couldn't get off the island. One knew the boat didn't come for 3 days so that was perfectly alright. Then 2 days later you'd be sent for any everything would go on as it had gone on before.

SP: Did you do any of the shooting yourself. Or did you work as an assistant.

JT: Very little, bits. When Flaherty was in London, Mrs Flaherty shot a sequence which is in the film. She was much more than just Mrs Flaherty, there was a very definite partnership between the two of them, they worked together as a team. Although she was never credited with it. Anyway old Coulinson came over and within a week everything worked perfectly. We had a lot of stuff to do and developed it. And started shooting and the big seas came. I normally went with him shooting especially if there was something special. With one of those old Newmans you had to focus through the side, and I used to sit at the side of the camera and focus it and set the stop and then he didn't have to move he could just shoot straight off. I usually went with him.

SP: Did you just have the one camera.

JT: No, we had two, one was dropped, this is the kind of thing you did if you had to do. We were shooting up on the cliffs one day, and the Sinclairs made an awful tripod of aluminium and the camera just sat in a cradle, and the leg buckled like that and the camera went crash onto the ground, and a Newman just explodes when it, and at the time it was the only one we had, and I took it to pieces and put it together again, it was the only thing you could do. I didn't know anything about it but bit by bit you could do it.

SP: Did you have any disasters in the processing with important sequences or did everything go alright.

JT: Once Coulinson came, the thing worked like clockwork. It was incredibly primitive, you can't believe how primitive it was, you loaded the film onto these Stineman racks and you bolted two together, one above the other, developed it, washed it, fixed, it washed it in a cascade. We had 3 wooden tanks as cascade. But then there was a round white enamel tray about 4" deep full of fresh water, you tested it first with permagnate of potash, if it was clear, if it had been washed clean of all the acid and fixing stuff, you took a test on the water, and the permagnate of potash came out purple. If there was any acid left, it came out brown

and you had to go on washing it. Once you'd washed it, you picked up this rack and turned it upside down and shook the film out into the water, 200 ft of film. Then we had a carpenter's brace and bit with a nail and a wooden centre out of a 200 ft roll, and you'd clip the end of the film to it and wind it up 200 ft on a carpenter's brace and bit in the water.

SP: It did get scratched or damaged.

JT: No,

SP: Incredible.

JT: And then PJ would hold it on a nail, and I'd clip it on the drum, and with a large pad of chammy leather turned the drum and took off all the surface water which would leave stains on it. And the lab, in the drying room we had a 2 burner valor perfection oil stove to provide the heat for the drying, in the other room we had a 4 burner valor perfection oil stove, with an open wick, it seemed incredible primitive. Now it seems primitive, but it worked absolutely without any problems at all. If you were doubtful about developing anything, you took a test off an end of a roll to see what it was like. Then we had a little printer which took 200 ft negative and 200 ft positive on spools above, and it had a gate with red glass on this side of it because it was positive stock and not sensitive to red light. And on the right there was a diaphragm control and you sat and watched it and changed the thing to what you thought it was. It worked perfectly. But by this time, John Goldman had arrived from Gaumont. He was sent up as an assistant cameraman and Flaherty immediately made him the editor, I don't think he'd edited anything in his life before. And Flaherty built 3 cottages, one as a set which I slept in, one was John Goldman's cutting room which he slept in, and there was a 3rd one there which I think the children had.

SP: Was the idea to do a rough cut on the island to know if any extra shots were needed.

JT: Not a rough cut. He cut the picture completely. And they sit there for hours and hours running it through, running it through, running it through. He had, as I said before, this persistence, of going on and on until everyone was going mad.

SP: But the negative was left in tact.

JT: The negative, yes, we had a pigsty which was a clean pigsty and the negative was kept in there in transit cases.

SP: But they all remained on the island in case you wanted to have to use it, did you have to print some of it up again.

JT: We couldn't take it back to England.

SP: I just wondered with all this editing and reediting going on you had to reprint some 200 ft lengths at times, to replace

JT: There was a certain amount of reprinting. But once the problem was solved, the laboratory was no problem at all.



SP: Were you aware at the time what an astonishing adolescence you were having.

JT: I don't know. It was quite incredible really. We had a big outboard engine and I used to run the motor boat over to the mainland knowing nothing about the sea. And the sea out there is really the sea. And we had all sorts of going on. One evening Patcheen and I were going out to Connamara.

SP: Who was Patcheen.

JT: Patcheen was carpenter who worked all the way through it. And Frances Flaherty who was the second daughter who was about 14 came down, she went over, picked up what we were supposed to pick up, got back in the boat, came out of this very narrow bay, it was quite complicated to get out, and we just got out and there was the most appalling storm going on we'd ever seen. Patcheen who knew about the sea said round, so we all go back in again. And we board the boat and went up to the hotel and Frances went up to bed, it must have been quite late at night and we were sitting there, and there must have been the most appalling gale blowing, and the doors flung open and David Flaherty, who was Flaherty's brother appeared, soaked to the skin, Bob thinks you're drowned, they had got a big boat out and had come out in this appalling storm, and I said we've been trying to ring the island, but out there nothing worked much anyway, so David said I'll have to go to the nearest telephone to tell them. I said you can't go, I'll go. And I borrowed Patcheen's jersey, seaman's jersey which keep the wind out and a bloody bike of which the chain kept coming off the wheel, and pitch black for miles, no light of any kind, on a dirt road, with bog both side of it. I fell in the bog, the chain jammed and I went over the handle bars, I finally got to a police station, I rode down the hill to it, I could see the 2 white posts of the gate, and I rode down at full speed, I didn't realise there was a steel gate inbetween, I went straight over the gate, the bike jammed in the gate, I banged and rattle the station, and hours seemed to go by, and finally came, I said it's very urgent, can i use your telephone, they said sorry, it hasn't been working for two or three days. I finally got back and it was light again, day and night meant nothing out there, and when I got back the next day I got a very frosty reception from Mrs Flaherty, but you couldn't do anything about it.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Friday 18th March 1988

JT: We were there a year and 8 months, we finally packed up in August 1933. I can remember packing all the negative up into transit cases. One of the things about Flaherty and Grierson to a certain extent, they really put complete confidence into people, I was 18 at the time, and the negative, it was quite valuable, and it was quite natural I would take it to Dublin, and today I don't know if if would trust an 18 year old with a year and a halves work, but he seemed to. I left the negative in Dublin because the trade war was still going on, and they sent negative cutters to select the stuff they wanted, and Flaherty,



by this time, the end of the first year two other people had appeared on the scene, Flaherty's brother David who was an experienced production manager, and managed to knock some order into the production and John Goldman, during the war he had to change his name to munk because the Jewish thing, if he was captured, he was at the Crown film Unit during the war, after the war he was John Goldman, he was the editor. I finished then and went back to the GPO film Unit and then went on to Shepherd's Bush to finish the cutting and to put the sound on.

SP: You say you were left to transport the negative to Dublin. There must have been crates and crates of it at the end of a year and a half shooting.

JT: There was quite a lot but not as much as people say. I think it's partly, if somebody says something, if Grierson exaggerates slightly it becomes, the footage shot grows and grows and grows, as a point of fact I think he undershot the stuff, the real life of the island. There were quite a lot of nice things he could have shot and a certain amount he did shoot, but in the end the film was just 2 shark hunting sequences and 2 storm sequences, whereas all the rest of the stuff, it was really an exceptional place Aran in those days, it was a hangover from the 19th century, people lived very simply indeed.

SP: I forgot to ask yesterday, the camera a Newman Sinclair but not a hand cranked one.

JT: No, it was a 200 ft, we had two, one which broke and I mended.

SP: They were both the same were they.

JT: Yes, and there were 12 magazines, and he used very largely 6 and 9" lenses, he very rarely used shorter focuses than that, even when shooting sequence like the boy on the rock fishing, which is quite a nice sequence, that was all shot with a 6" or something like that. He was very good at looking at something. For example, I think it was a the first christmas eve we went out with 2 cameras and shot an awful lot of footage because it was the first chance of shooting big sea stuff, and we came back and I developed it, and he saw it, and it was all shot with the horizon in the picture, and waves bursting up in the air, and so on, and he then formulated the theory if you want seas to look big don't show the horizon, and if you see that, the storm sequence, if he did nothing else out there the storm sequence is really quite exceptional, which he and Mrs Flaherty shot.

SP: So you loaded up the magazines at the beginning of the day the whole lot and they were ready for as much shooting as was wanted, they wouldn't be reloaded during the day.

JT: That day I did actually, I reloaded 12 magazines twice, once, I loaded them and then I reloaded, but that was a very unusual day indeed and we were taking advantage of the fact that we hadn't had a storm in a year.

SP: And that would be much more than an evenings processing.

JT: Not particularly, we had 6 racks linked together in 2s, that

was 1200 ft. On a day like that I think when we got back we'd develop 2 lots of 1200 ft each, that's 2,400, and the next morning I'd probably do another 1200 before breakfast and another 1200 after breakfast when the racks had dried off and the film on the drums had dried. You could do it in a day. If you really worked at it you could do 4 times 1200. But he was very very good at looking at something and saying that's not right, the next time. And if you ever see the film again the sea sequence is quite out of this world.

SP: Did he only view positive.

JT: Yes, the negative was sacrosanct, you never touched it except to do reprints. It's quite amusing actually, because usually on big days I would go with him, and on the day they shot the boat in the big sea, there were 3 or 4 days on the last sequence of the film, and some of the days I was there and some of the days I was using the second camera, there's a shot where a very big wave comes over Maggie and Mike and the crew of the boat when they're on the beach carrying the fishing net up, and the wave absolutely buries them, we nearly lost them as a matter of fact, very nearly, it was touch and go, there were 2 cameras on that, you can see it on the film, they cut from one camera to another. But on the day of the big sea where they shot the boats, I got every thing ready and loaded everything up and we travelled by car to the place where we were going to shoot that stuff, and Mrs Flaherty came up and Flaherty said you better get on with the developing today, I said are you sure, I mean today's the day we've waited a year for, he said no you get on with the developing, and what it actually was I realised years afterwards, at the time they weren't that old, they were only 48, he was 48 and his wife was a bit younger, and this was there big day together and they wanted to do it together. At the time I thought this was crazy having waited a year, but I realised this was something which meant a lot to them, but they shot this superb stuff which was terribly dangerous, it really was dangerous, there were 2 or 3 shots in it, they still run it in Aran every Sunday night in the village hall, for the tourists, but the locals every time this shot comes on, the locals you can hear an intake of breath as the canoe swings around a rock and pulls off it, and another one when they're coming out to an island and one of the men pulls a boat around and you can hear the audience sigh because they know what it means. I think they paid them £25 each, which was a hell of a lot of money in those days. 20 times at least, £500 equivalent. It would be much more than a family income for the year out there but the danger was quite something. But if you notice that there is no horizon in it at all and the seas look enormous. When David Lean was making Ryan's Daughter, he had a copy of Man of Aran there and everyone who worked on the film, Paddy Carey worked on Ryan's Daughter, David Lean said to him have you seen Man of Aran, Paddy Carey said yes, well you go up to the projection room and look at the storm sequence, because we've got to do better than that. I don't think they did really. And this was just Mr and Mrs Flaherty, and it was rough shooting, and there were waves breaking over them and big gales blowing. And she was quite an amazing woman, and quite a partner. When we were talking about money yesterday I thought we used to get £100 a month, today you think £100 is nothing, but it would have to be multiplied by 20 so it's really £2000. Which I used to stick in

my back pocket. The island, there's no money at all, nobody had money. The shops everyone had a yearly account with the shops and they settled when they sold their pigs or cattle at the end of the year. Most people 95% of the people on the island, it was a very even society, there was no one with money at all, and so everyone was in the same position and you didn't notice, you didn't have this division between people with money and without money. And so although nobody had nothing, you didn't notice it, I don't think they noticed it as much as you do today, everything was terribly simple. I don't think there were 4 water closets on the island. Everyone grew, the gardens were beautifully kept and terribly important, because they grow carrots and cabbage and onions which they lived on, the only fuel was brought in by hookers from Connamara, and that was very much a barter business, of giving salted fish for it. It really was a very isolated place at that time. A lot of people didn't speak English, they only spoke Irish. It was an amazing place to be. I got completely involved in it and when I finished the film the last thing I said to PJ and Pat Mullen, I'll be back next week, I was going back to live.

SP: In effect you did keep your connection with the island, unlike lots of people do, they finish in a place and they move onto something else, and maybe go back later, but you said your future wife was in America, when did you meet her. Was that years later you got married.

JT: A long time, 1941.

SP: But the strange coincidences in your life that your sister married John Grierson and he sucked you into the whirlpool of these kind of films, and then the chance of going to Aran lead onto later connections and to your being married.

JT: It affected the whole of my life. I had it completely fix I was going back there to live. I wasn't going to make films it was a complete waste of my time. But when I got back to London needless to say Grierson got to work and poured scorn on this idea of going out to be a romantic fisherman on the west coast of Ireland. I got completely involved with the life, by the time I left I could understand Irish and speak a bit of it. I was really committed but Grierson was a pretty definite character. Anyway we packed up and I went back to the GPO Film Unit which was quite big. By this time they had the building in 21 Soho Sq and the studio at Blackheath.

SP: Grierson was in charge of that and in ran it in a similar way to running the EMB group except that it was much bigger.

JT: It was much bigger and they now had a sound truck with a very primitive kind of sound. Blackheath had, it wasn't a dubbing theatre, the studio was a dubbing theatre with a projection box outside it and I think they only had 2 sounds heads in it for mixing and the mixing was done in the sound truck which was parked out at the back. And there was quite a nice studio.

SP: You ceased to work for Flaherty at that point, or where you still connected with the film through the editing stage.

JT: Not in any way. I'd finished and that was it.



SP: What did you now consider yourself to be, a trained assistant in many ways.

JT: The first thing I did when I came back, Basil was cutting Song of Ceylon.

SP: He was cutting it already. I thought you went out with him.

JT: Sorry, I'm jumping here. The first thing I did, I started doing camera work, when I was reading Rachael Low's book, there are two or 3 films for which I've got a shared credit with Jeakins you know, Cable Ship, various GPO films, I can't remember the names really except Cable Ship,

SP: Air Pilot.

JT: Vaguely but it was a long time ago.

SP: Geoffrey Clark directed it according to a list I read. Also Pet and Pot, that was in 34.

JT: Pet and Pot must have been

SP: with Cavalcanti.

JT: Oh yes, I really wasn't competent to do a lighting job in a studio, I shouldn't have done it really, anyway I did it and it really was a disaster.

SP: But unless my memory is wrong, didn't that film run into trouble in other ways.

JT: The photography was alright in the end but I didn't really know what I was doing. Cavalcanti appeared on the scene, and there were all sorts of people like Stuart Legg and Jennings, Jennings I think was the art director on it, and Knox and Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton, and there were a lot of young people there as well, these 14 year old recruits which Grierson went in for.

SP: At what point did Grierson suggest you go to university, roundabout then.

JT: Just a little bit later. But just to go on about Pet and Pot for a little. It was completely out of the line we'd been working on. Cav was a very nice man, very skilled producer, not such a good director, very good with training people, but he didn't have the underlying idea of what documentary was about.

SP: What was Pet and Pot about. Was it acted.

JT: It was acted and it was a kind of send up of suburban life. The other thing was that Cav was a Brazilian who worked in France and knew nothing about England at all, really, he had no English background, and this strange film which had the GPO choir singing, it was taking the micky out of suburban life, and why Grierson every went for it I don't know, he made 2 or 3 of that kind at that time, it must have been Cav's influence because it was way out of the general line. They mad The Glorious 6th of



June which I think was the one in which Jennings played the part of a post office messenger being blown up by a bomb. I don't know what you'd call the thing. But we were very disapproving of this departure.

SP: When you say we, do you mean some of the young people working there who were more conventional.

JT: Yes and no. I know I was. At this time I was living in Griersons house and there used to be quite violent arguments about Pet and Pot which Grierson defended to the death.

SP: Was it ever distributed.

JT: Yes.

SP: Oh I thought there was one which got stopped.

JT: Grierson fought like mad for this film, because it was out of the general line and wasn't connected with anything we'd done before, but I can remember arguments at that house, quite bitter arguments that this was a wrong departure. No the film was finished, but it wasn't what we were supposed to be doing, and this was the start, it wasn't really a division in documentary, but where documentary started to diversify, put it like that, and Cav, I always thought, although I worked with Cav a lot and liked him, he was very nice, amusing man, but he wasn't doing what we thought we were doing. We thought we were doing films which had some social purpose. Cav was interested in filmmaking and a lot of young people were very much influenced by him, Harry Watt for instance, and Pat Jackson and Jack Lee, and went off onto the kind of story film.

SP: Around this time you went to Ceylon, was that within the GPO Unit. It was outside it wasn't it.

JT: No it was made by the GPO Film Unit.

SP: So how did that come about, if I'm not out of chronological order, it was about that time, wasn't it.

JT: Yes it would be about the end of 1933, I came back from Aran in August and we went to Ceylon in December 1933.

SP: Just the 2 of you,

JT: Yes. Grierson by this time was realising the limitations of GPO money and he was behind starting the Shell Film Unit and he realised there was a lot of money outside, with these people like Beddington and Lesley at the gas company who had a fairly wide view of what films could do for them, and that, the money for that came, I can't remember but there was some connection between Tallents and a man called Huxley who was the chairman of the Ceylon Tea Board, Gervaise Huxley, and there was a connection there and that's where the money came from. But how Grierson got away with it I don't know because all the time it was going on the trade were attacking Grierson and the unit because they didn't want the Government to make its own films, they wanted to make the films and there were bitter attacks from men like Bruce Woolf and I can't remember their names, Conservative Central

Office. Bruce Woolf was a nice man and a filmmaker, and a good man I thought but it was in his interest to get the films made by outside companies and there was considerable opposition from the cinematograph film trade or whatever their organisations were, the renters and the cinema owners and so on. Grierson fought off all those attacks. At the end of 34, 33 we went to Ceylon by ship.

SP: In what capacity, you went as cameraman.

JT: No, assistant. Bas did his own photography. He'd photographed a number of films by that time.

SP: So it was really him and you as his general assistant, and one camera, and a tripod.

JT: We had a 200 ft clockwork Newman and a 400 ft Newman as a standby. In those days it took 3 weeks to get to Ceylon so you had to have something. We had a packing case full of lights, and I must tell you one other thing. Before we went to Ceylon, I was in Soho Sq one day and Flaherty used to come in and out, he was close to Grierson, most nights they used to go out to supper with Grierson, and one day Flaherty appeared with a Lika camera in a case and it had a 2 " lens and a 4" lens and a 6" lens and a very posh view finder and every thing in it, filters and magazines, the lot, in a beautiful leather case, and this was his present to me for working on Man of Aran. Incredible. I know it cost £125. And if you work it out at 20 to 1.

SP: Did you take that with you to Ceylon.

JT: And we did the same thing in Ceylon as I did in Aran, every day I used to develop a roll of lica film, we didn't see any rushes while we were out there, and there was a very nice teaplantier named Scott who was a keen on amateur photographer, and he had a dark room, and once a week or once a fortnight we'd go up to this place and stay the night and i'd make enlargement of the things so Basil could see what he was doing, a very useful way of working when you couldn't get the rushes in. We had quite a big crew.

SP: You didn't take short strips from the end of the film and develop them as a technical check.

JT: No, I loaded the film from the camera magazine so it was the same film and I worked from the same exposure he had. We had, he had an enormous collection of stills when we came back and they were lost somewhere, before he died I asked what happened to the still of Song of Ceylon and they got lost on the wayside which was rather a pity. There are a few production stills left.

SP: How long were you in Ceylon.

JT: I don't know, about 3 months. We had a crew of Ceylonese who are very nice people and a very good contact man called Lionel Wedd who was half Dutch and half Cylonese.

SP: When you say crew, you mean people for carrying the equipment and rigging the lights.

JT: The Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board had kind of travelling caravans which travelled round Ceylon, doing publicity work and they lent us one of the caravans and the crew of about 6, which was wonderful really, and made everything very easy, Bas was a very efficient and very organised man.

SP: You were both very young.

JT: Bas would have been about, I was 19 then, and Bas was born in 1907 so he was 26 roughly, but he was very experienced, by nature he was the best filmmaker I ever met, he really knew how to make films.

SP: If you remember, the eventual shape and form of the film was that something he had from the beginning or did it evolve during the editing.

JT: No he had terrible troubles during the editing which he's described in various places. He came back with this mass of material, maybe 25,000 ft, something like that, and he really suffered with the editing because Grierson was at him and wouldn't accept anything except something special and between them, with Grierson pursuing him and Basil being tortured he produced this formula of the 4 parts of it. He also, the other thing was, one of the special thing was the special use of sound, and this was very much Basil.

SP: This is what I was thinking of, I just wondered if this evolved during the editing.

JT: It was practically the first sound film made, and he evolved that technique of contrapuntal sound or whatever you call it, which sound really played a very important part in, it's completely forgotten now, no one uses sound in any way but straight forwarded, music or straight sound, but that kind of sound which played as important part as the picture, we ran a sequence of it the other day at that show for Edgar, the first sequence of the film, and the sound track even now which is 50 years later, I haven't heard many soundtracks like it, and the equipment was so crude you could only mix 2 or 3 tracks, you couldn't mix 10 tracks or 20 tracks, he really was a very very intelligent man, very well organised and a very imaginative filmmaker.

SP: What kind of time pressures were there on you. You say you were there 3 months, I presume the editing was a long time, it's very different from work nowadays, particularly for television, isn't it, with deadlines to meet.

JT: Very different, but one of the things obviously, we were talking about Man of Aran, the costs were so low, I suppose I was getting about £4 a week. I don't suppose Bas was getting much more than £8 a week, so what did it matter. And I think practically everything on the production was free. We stayed a lot at Government rest houses which were very nice places, especially out in the jungle, and that was contributed by the government. The van and the crew didn't cost anything. But I'd say the total cost would be £3,000, I guess, you could do that, also there were few precedents for people like Basil who were

trying to find his way, how to make this kind of film, there were no other films really like this.

SP: Did you do any shooting yourself on it.

JT: No, we had a Devrai, going up Peak I might have taken the odd shot here and there, but it was entirely him really.

SP: Were there any alarms during the shooting of it or did it all go smoothly.

JT: I think it all went very smoothly indeed. Partly because he was so organised. He did the accounts and he was a very thorough character. It all seemed to go quite simply.

SP: I suppose this is going a bit off a tangent, you and he and other people at the GPO Film Unit weren't aware that lots of things were being innovated, that you were trying out ideas, but it was a very exciting time and a gruelling time but you weren't aware that you were part of what is known now in the history books as the documentary movement. Or did you have big discussions.

JT: There were lots of discussions but I'm sure we were insufferable in some ways, we were so bloody superior to everybody else, we must have been a pain in the neck to many people. But at the same time I think Basil, there was a feeling this was something new, and there was tremendous cooperation between everybody and completely unselfish contribution, people would go and help other people, it really was a nice time with the cooperative thing which went on.

SP: And you were really quite separate from the commercial film world, feature film world.

JT: More or less.

SP: And also separate from the beginnings of ACT. Or was that part of your life.

JT: I suppose it must have been when we came back. I suppose we came back some time round April 1934, and I think by that time Ralph Bond was the studio manager at Blackheath, and everybody, I don't know if everybody did but I think almost everybody did more or less, joined ACT, because it was the way people thought. When he came back Basil started editing it and I worked on, they made four shorts out of the material as well as the film. In those days they used to use it all up, a number of these films, there was the main film and they made 3 or 4 one reelers, or 750 footers, and I can remember making cuts of The Gun Boat Host, I can't remember the others, but there were 4 one reelers and Song of Ceylon, they rather prided themselves on their shooting ratio you know.

SP: Did this help keep the ratio down by making the shorts. Were they silent shorts with captions.

JT: I don't know because all I did, I made silent cutting copies, but what happened after that, I think they probably put sound on them because this was 1934, and they had sound there, they probably put some, towards about September Grierson said



some phrase like you're an ignorant little bugger, it's time you got some education and he drew up a list of the things I had to do, and everyone seemed to do what they were told by him, there was moral philosophy, psychology, political economy, fine art and English.

SP: Was this big brother's advice to an employee or to his brother in law.

JT: He treated everyone the same more or less.

SP: Did anyone else get given these suggestions.

JT: I think practically everyone did. He'd think nothing of interfering in people's marriages or proposed marriages, and so forth.

SP: What happened as a result of his suggestions.

JT: He said go to Edinburgh University, and do that. I got on a bus and went to Edinburgh University.

SP: But paid how, were you kept on the payroll.

JT: No, you could live very cheaply. I went to Edinburgh, knew nothing about universities, walked into the University, saw the office and went in and said I've come to the University, they said fill that in and I filled it in, and they said that will be £2/10sh. And what classes are you taking and I gave them a list, and they said they're 5 sh each and I was in the university.

SP: For how long, was this the beginning of the academic year.

JT: Yes, September or something. And there I was. When you hear today of characters doing the utmost to get into a university, with all the problems and the A levels they have to get, and that was for an arts degree. I didn't get an arts degree because Grierson told me to pack up and come back to work.

SP: After how long.

JT: 2 years. I used to work during the holidays. The holidays were a month and 3 months during the summer. And I used to go back and work and save enough money. It cost about £2 a week to live in Edinburgh.

SP: So you were really working your way through university by working.

JT: My father occasionally used to give me £10,

SP: How long did you stay at university.

JT: 2 university years.

SP: But your names on credits for films at the time.

JT: They were done in the holidays.

SP: Such as Housing Problems. Before we get away from university, you didn't get your degree, but did you feel you benefit from it in any way.

JT: It was wonderful, there was a very good, they had a thing called fine arts which was art appreciation really, a man called Talbot Rice who just appeared as a professor, and there was a tremendous man called Grierson who was professor of English literature, he was the man who discovered D. H. Lawrence, and that Scots poet, They see and Grieve, an amazing old man, you could sit and listen to his lectures and regret.

SP: He was no relative.

JT: He was no relative at all. And there was another one, a man called Taylor, a moral philosopher, who was absolutely wonderful, the standard up there at that time was very high, and I made a number of friends who lasted through the years since then, it was wonderful thing to do really.

SP: Did you stay privately up there or was any of the Grierson family

JT: To start with I stayed with Grierson's mother who was a wonderful woman and for lunch I used to have, they lived just outside Edinburgh, I used to have half a pint of beer and bread and cheese, and when I went home in the evening, I used to go into her sitting room, she was a semi invallid at this time but a very definite lady, and I'd walk in the door and she'd say John you've been drinking. She could smell beer after 6 hours. She was a wonderful woman, quite exceptional, really very nice woman. I went there in 34 and 35. I don't know what year was Housing Problems, was that 35.

SP: Yes

JT: That must have been during the summer holidays. It was a terrible summer. They now started a thing called Associated Realist Film Producers, Basil and Edgar and Arthur Elton and Grierson had left the GPO Film Unit, no they couldn't have done by then, but some of them had left the GPO Film Unit, Elton had probably left and there was a thing called Associated Realist Film Producers and there were about a dozen people like Harry Watt, Rotha, Basil and so on and they set up a cooperative thing at 34 Soho Sq.

SP: Did people of this fairly small group move around between the GPO and Associated REalist, back and forth.

JT: Realist hadn't started then, but Strand had.

SP: Associated Realist, I'm mixing it up. Strand was one of many little companies.

JT: Strand was the first one which was run by Donald Taylor who married Marion Grierson, he was no relation of mine, he just had the same name. Strand was working then, they were a very underestimated unit you know, they made about 350 films and some of them were very good too.

SP: Through about 20 years wasn't it.

JOHN TAYLOR

SIDE 5, TAPE 3

SP: Can you tell me about the making of Housing Problems, and who the directors were and what your role was in it. It was during the university holidays.

JT: It was made for Associated Realist, they were the production company.

SP: But it has on the credit, the Gas Board,

JT: It had the Gas Company Credit on it, but the production company is given in Rachael Low as ARFP and you find she is nearly always accurate. They made a programme of films for has of which Housing Problems was one. I can't remember what the others were, Men Behind the Meters, and so on. How Gas is Made. And they were all shot at Beckton Gas Works which was the biggest Gas works in the world at that time, that's when Frank Sainsbury appeared on the scene.

SP: You by now were a fully fledged cameraman were you.

JT: I was really cameraman director, we didn't see Anstey and Elton at all, for years after I thought they were a mean couple of buggers

SP: You're talking about Housing Problems.

JT: Housing Problems and, no this was on the films about gas. They wouldn't give us a car so I had to go by bloody tram to Beckton, and to get to Beckton at 9 o'clock meant leaving home at something like 6, Beckton is right down the river.

SP: You were still living in Kentish Town.

JT: No I was living at Grierson's, at the Borough.

SP: You had to carry equipment with you.

JT: No, we used to put it in a shed down there, and a wheel burrow. Beckton Gas Works was miles long, and poor old Frank Sainsbury and I used to trundle the wheel barrow around all day long, and we had lists of stuff we had to shoot.

SP: Was it scripted by somebody else.

JT: I suppose Elton and Anstey had scripted it.

SP: You're talking about Men Behind the Meters and how Gas was made.

JT: It was a very hot summer, and a haze over the sun and no clouds, and there was a haze hanging over Beckton and in the whole of that thing they didn't have a single shower or facility for washing, and they had these retorts which blew powdered coal into them, so you can imagine what it was like for the men



working there.

SP: It strikes me that your time at University which you were in the middle of was making you more socially aware because when you were younger this wouldn't have seemed very surprising.

JT: No, by then I was and certainly Sainsbury was, you see Ralph Bond was there and the trend was more and more to be aware of what was going on. It really was an experience, Beckton, there were no washing facilities in this place. You used to come home at night as if you were coming home from a coal mine, and I can remember getting back late one evening, it took 3 hours, I don't know why Edgar and Arthur were so mean, I remember once getting back to the house and every one else was away and I was exhausted and had a hot bath and went to sleep in the bath and woke up about 2 o'clock in the morning with coal dust floating all over the bath and stone cold and feeling very miserable.

SP: Would any money have been given to stay down there so you wouldn't have to travel so much.

JT: Apparently not, in those days car hire was about £1 a week, £2 a week, why I don't know at all. But I suppose it was one of their early productions and they were worrying about money. Housing Problems, by this time Griersons other sister Ruby had been working at Strand for some time and she did all the contact work, she went and found all the people and coached them, she had been a school mistress and was very good with people indeed.

SP: Where was it shot, the King's Cross area.

JT: No down by Stepney and Bow and around there.

SP: My muddled memory, I think it was in King's Cross that I saw the film.

JT: Edgar tells a long story about rigging up lights and the generator outside, but I told him at one time recently, what we really had was a big old open Buick with about 12, 15 car batteries and we had 2 500 watt small lamps and that was really the lighting equipment. The rooms were minute, you couldn't get. And I think we had a Mitchell, I'm practically certain we had a Mitchell from Merton Park, and one of those enormous sound trucks, and I think it was York Scarlet who was very good and very nice sound recordist.

SP: How big was the crew.

JT: If Elton and Anstey were both there.

SP: They were co-directing, that must have been rather difficult.

JT: They were co-directing but in actual fact, it was really Ruby, she knew the people and talked to them and she was in the room with them whereas everything else was shooting through the doorway or window or wherever it was.

SP: Who in effect did the interviewing. Or where they staged pieces rehearsed.

JT: Ruby coached them through.

SP: And then you shot it.

JT: She contacted them and picked the people and so on. The houses were stuffed with bugs. At night you used to go home and take your clothes off and shake it over the bath and the bugs used to drop out. Frank and I were went down to do some extra shots of bugs which are pretty poor when you see them in the film now. But there was a caretaker on the estate, and they'd just emptied a row of houses, when they moved people from the old houses to the new houses, the furniture all had to go to be fumigated in a place, but we went down there and said to the caretaker we want some shots of bugs, and he said come with me, and there was one of those wooden framed spring beds, and we went into one of these houses which had been abandoned and he got a hammer and hit it, and the bugs fell out, and there were heaps of bugs on the floor and we scooped them up and filled a whiskey bottle with them, there were so many, and it was easy to do, and this is where people had been living until fairly recently, they were really appalling places.

SP: You say the shots of bugs in the film are rather poor, is that you weren't able to get close enough.

JT: You could put extention tubes on but they were pretty ineffective, because the point of focus, the depth of focus was an eighth of an inch each way, and you couldn't follow anything because the parallax on most cameras wouldn't go down that low. They had a parallax on the back viewfinder which you had to adjust according to the distance. That was fairly accurate down to 3 or 4 ft, but after that you didn't know where you were. I think I saw it on television 3 or 4 months ago and I thought Christ those shots of bugs are pretty ineffective, but never mind.

SP: Nevertheless its in the style, admittedly rather crudely because of the problems you had with enormously difficult apparatus, it's in the style of television programmes of years and years later. Again I suppose Grierson and others weren't aware they were innovating a new kind of style.

JT: I don't know where the idea came from, whoever thought the idea of doing the interviews with the people, I don't know if it was Grierson, rising maybe from the March of Time, but it was either Grierson and Anstey and Elton, together or separately, someone said look photograph the people and that was the key to it. The work anyone could have done, but that was the step forward.

SP: But also it must have been a step forward in that here were real people, London cockneys, and not actors pretending to be Cockneys which up to the time for the ordinary audience, on the screen would be the only thing they saw.

JT: Yes, this was one of the kind of themes which went through it, which old Harry always took as his guiding principal, putting real people on the screen. Old Harry was very good really, although he drifted off to features he stayed very much a

documentary director, as opposed to a lot of the others, Where No Vultures Fly was the first film on conservation made, and he pulled it out of a hat from somewhere. Eureka Stockade was another socially relevant film. Old Harry used to shout and carry on, but he was very good really.

SP: At this point you're still at university, did you get the opportunity to follow a film to completion, or once you'd been working on camera or as an assistant, go on to another film and other people worked on it.

JT: We did all of it, you know, you'd go back and help in the cutting room, there was a lot of interchange of help, if someone wanted help on a form a, you did anything which came up.

SP: What about trying out rough cuts or almost complete cuts. Who made the decision of the final shape of these films, was it Grierson, it he have a say in everything.

JT: I would have thought that Grierson was the key figure behind things, certainly on rough cuts like Housing Problems, he would be involved. And he would probably be involved in rushes and rough cut and final cut.

SP: What about of audiences for these films, because it strikes me there was a tremendous amount of work going on, which is now more famous I'm sure than it was then, they didn't unless I'm wrong get a very big audience.

JT: It's a very good point that, sometime around this point, Grierson realised the kind of films he wanted to make would not be shown in the cinemas and this was one of the divisions which came between Grierson and people like Cav and Harry, Cav and Harry wanted cinema distribution, it was at that point that Grierson set up the non theatrical distribution, and they had travelling projectors, I can't remember how many, they had a non theatrical manager called Thomas Baird and a chief projectionist who was Flora Robson's brother, and a number of people like Duggie Smith who went right the way through and ended up at Anvil in the dubbing box. I can remember working during one of my holidays during the Radio Exhibition, they had a Radio Exhibition there, and Duggie Smith and I had 2 automatic Philips projectors with 3 copies of Radio Interference made by Harry Watt, on each projector and they were push button projectors, in those days.

SP: Was this 35mm.

JT: Yes.

SP: Because in those days nothing was reduced to 16mm for this kind of thing.

JT: It was beginning, by then but I worked for 2 weeks in the box up there, and Baird was the theatre man, they had a theatre in the exhibition, and people poured into the cinema and he used to shove them, the film was about 10 minutes he'd get them in and out in about 12 minutes, and then we'd run another copy, another 10 minutes, in and out, and we did this from 10 in the morning till 10 at night. This was the start of the non theatrical

distribution, after this was taken over by the Ministry of Information and expanded into 160 mobile units, which travelled during the war, it was said the audience was something like 18 million during the war,

SP: That was in war time. But before the war when these films were being made, theatrical distribution was very small. I remember seeing North Sea and Night Mail, in the Tatler I think it was on Tottenham Court Rd, which is a wonderful place for seeing these films, and I wondered how many other cinemas showed these films.

JT: North Sea and Night Mail got quite good distribution.

SP: Did they go round with feature films.

JT: Yes and Song of Ceylon had not too bad, those type of films you could show but films like Housing Problems or any of the other films there was no chance really, and this is why Grierson started the non theatrical division. The studio was the depot for the projecting people, and I don't know what size it was by the time they finished but it had built up into quite a business by the coming of the war.

SP: Where are we now, 1935, or 6, you moved to Strand in 36 for a little bit.

JT: Only temporarily.

SP: Who was running Strand then.

JT: Rotha, and I was freelance by now, I don't think I ever went back to the GPO itself, I did odd jobs there, but I wasn't on the staff after that.

SP: SO, you were directing, you were director/cameraman combination on Air Outpost, Smoke Menace and Dawn of Iran.

JT: Strand was a very well run company, very busy and they had a contract to make a series of films for Imperial Airways and Alex Shaw, Ralph Keene and George Noble were going on to Australia and I was going to Persia or Iran as it's cool and Ralph Keene and I stopped of at Charga to make a 2 reeler, it was an amazing place, it was really a Beau Geste fort in the middle of the desert, with machine gunners on each corner. And they had these beautiful Hannoplanes, Hanno class, the biplanes, the top speed was about 100 miles an hour. They built 8 in 1926 and the 8 were still flying in 1938.

SP: Out of Croydon weren't they.

JT: Yes, absolute luxury, there were about 12 passengers, Ralph Keene and I were codirectors and I was doing the camera work and I suppose we made one in a week or two weeks at Charga, and then I went off for one for Elton, which was being made for Strand called Dawn of Iran by myself.

SP: This is the same trip or you went out specially.

JT: No, I went on from Charga up to Abberdan,



SP: With free travel on Imperial Airways to make these things.

JT: I suppose so. But part of the way I went by bus, I can remember going across the desert somewhere. I suppose we flew up to somewhere and then I got a bus across.

SP: With all this equipment by yourself.

JT: I had 2 Newmans and 2 tripods.

SP: And a lot of film stock to keep cool.

JT: It was all tropically packed in those cans which you had to rip the sealed tape off.

SP: But once you shot it you had to get it away for processing.

JT: It was the winter and it wasn't hot in Charga at all and in Persia, it was fairly cold indeed and I got two toes frost bitten. I got to Persia.

SP: But the title of the film uses Iran.

JT: Yes because Persians were very sensitive about everything concerned with the oil company, it was the Iranian Oil Company. I think I did meet Elton in Abadan, I did meet Elton in Abadan, and he set me off. Told me what was what and took me round and introduced me to the oil people. And then I was given

SP: Here is Elton giving you instructions and you go off on your own, was there any written script.

JT: None at all.

SP: In that case you shot what, according to a list of ideas of what was wanted, and collected all the facts and figures, or did you just do the shooting and

JT: I had a large note book and everything was written down in it.

SP: After shooting, or while you shot.

JT: While you shot, you'd work it out before hand. The oil one, one was about oil, it was a straight forward 3 reeler about how oil is held in the ground, how it's refined and all the other things like that, and the other film was about Persia itself, the relations between the oil company, Reza Shah, the last shah's father, were very strained indeed, the oil company was so stupid you couldn't believe it, they had the whole of Persia as an oil concession, and they were fiddling the books and not paying the Persians royalties, and the Iranians cut their concession to half of Persia. Half of Persia's got all the oil you could need for anyone, and even then they got it wrong. It was run entirely by old admirals, Churchill bought 51% of the shares and the navy just put admirals and colonels in to run it and it really was an awful business.

SP: Did they appear in your films.

JT: Oh no, they were the people who were running the company, they thought the Persians were just a load of wogs and give them a few beads and they'll be alright.

SP: These were all shot silent, and in the style of the day comemntary and music would be the rest of it and no sound effects.

JT: But it was difficult shooting because I had a policeman with me all the time, who had to look through the camera and pass each shot and I wasn't allowed to take anything which might Persia in a bad light. And an interpreter, and we had 2 big chevvs, chevrolets, very nice drivers.

SP: Why 2, one for the equipment and one for yourself.

JT: It's pretty primitive country, the roads were all dirt road and they had wind ripple on them,

SP: It rattles until you go above 50 or below 10 miles, that kind of thing.

JT: and if you broke down, you'd be there forever. There were big dodge lorries, freelance drivers and trucks going through them but you very seldom saw, and immense clouds of dust everywhere, the cars were always full of dust, we started off and I just went round Persia enjoying myself.

SP: It must have been a difficulty with the dust, if the cars are full of dust, what about the equipment. Did this cause you any trouble.

JT: Having been well trained by Mr James Davidson, you automatically cleaned everything.

SP: But things got scratched from time to time.

JT: I don't think so. We carried the cars with the cameras on the back seats of the cars, because you know the springs took the bumps out of it, but then they told me to prepare for an english summer and then it started to snow and it snowed and snowed and snowed, and when you were out you usually got out of it or you didn't, there was 200 miles before the next place.

SP: Was this the filming for the one with the ponderous title, Dawn of Iran, Dawn in the East, the Story of Modern Iran or were there 3 films.

JT: The only one I know is Dawn of Iran.

SP: It looks like 3 films, or maybe you made 2 extra ones out of the cuts.

JT: I did edit that, I didn't edit it but I was there when the editing was done, Alan Gurley or Sid Cole edited it, I can't remember which, Alan Gurley.

SP: He came out to the Central African Film Unit after the war.

JT: I went to Persephelus and Cum, do you know at the time there were no hotels in Tehran and when I went to Tehran I used to stay in a guest house which had no heating in it, the temperature was 20 below and supper every night was a small carafe of vodka, a plate with strips of toast, half a pound of butter and an enormous bowl of caviar. That was it. This was supper. It was a wonderful experience. The interpreter was an extremely nice man called Dedashki, and the policeman was a very nice young policeman with a revolver and so forth, and we had a great time. We just wandered around. Most of the time we were living in teahouses, there were no hotels anywhere. One night we were stuck on the road, I don't know what happened but somebody had broken the shovel, and I was under the car hacking away with a screw driver trying to get the snow packed under the springs and so on, and I got an intense pain in my toes, and I got back in the car, and two of my toes were frost bitten and black, they didn't drop off in the end, I didn't know anything about frostbite, but I realised afterwards we might.

We got to a place called \_\_\_\_\_ which had been a camel caravan stay, and it was a square with small rooms all the way round it. And I went to bed at night and woke up in the morning, they had French windows, small French doors and the snow was up above the top of the door. So I went back to bed and stayed in bed, and in the afternoon someone put a spade through the window, they were digging us out. We were there for 3 weeks. And there was a large dining room, a fairly crude place, and one night they had an English programme on the radio, which was unusual having a radio but there were a lot of truck drivers and so on, and I heard the Duke of, Edward VIII had abdicated on the window.

SP: That shows which year it was, 36.

JT: So, I don't know how long I was there, 2 or 3 months.

SP: That was extraordinary. You were shooting it and directing, was there any directing or were you just shooting things as they happened, or did you have to organise anything for the shoot.

JT: In the oil company they would have been organising things, I did quite a lot of aerial photography over Aberdan and so forth.

SP: That was just hand holding over the edge of the cockpit.

JT: Yes. No, it was a 6 seater cabin plane.

SP: What about a film like Smok Menace, because that's another one you're down as directing.

JT: That was the first film I directed with a cameraman. By then Realist, Basil had started Realist Film Unit.

SP: I thought you started it together.

JT: No Basil started it. And before that I went to Switzerland with Cavalcanti.

SP: A long list of films you did, you must have spent the whole

year there.

JT: No, we were there a summer. Chick Fowle went out, the unit went out, Chick and Cav and a bloke called Maurice Harvey.

SP: Was this for Strand.

JT: No, GPO, it was a joint production between the Swiss Post office and the General Post Office here.

SP: On the subject of postal matters.

JT: Yes.

SP: Let me remind you of some titles, all directed by Cavalcanti. Line to Cheer the Hut, Men of the Alps, Message from Geneva, We Live in Two Worlds, and Who Writes to Switzerland. They were all made on one trip.

JT: Yes.

SP: Sound films.

JT: No, silent. I wasn't doing anything at the time and I went into the GPO and there was a man called Fletcher who managed things and he said where the hell have you been, we've been looking for you everywhere. And he said Chick's got scarlet fever in Switzerland, you've got to catch the 12 o'clock train.

SP: This was after you'd been to university. You were back, recalled.

JT: I was told to stop wasting my time at Edinburgh and come home. So I rushed home packed my bag, arrived at Po and there was no one there, and I got a horse and carriage and trotted off, up the valley to some where like Roseg and there was Cav and Harvey and Chick had arrived and got scarlet fever on the spot and I was a replacement.

SP: On camera.

JT: Yes. And we had a tremendous time, we had a post office van, a post office driver, called Hulemann, who was a very nice man too, I don't know why everyone seemed nice but he was, and we just wandered around Switzerland, Cav was brilliant at that kind of thing.

SP: Did he script things.

JT: No,

SP: Because he's making several films, one after the other, or maybe several together.

JT: The main film was We Live in Two Worlds, which was Priestley,

SP: He wrote or was he brought in afterwards.

JT: I don't know whether he was brought in afterwards or came in early, probably he came in early, I don't know. But I don't



think anything much was written but they knew what the main idea was.

SP: Priestley didn't come there. And I think people just used to go and photograph anything which they thought was photogenic, really. They must have had, I don't know. The Line to Cherva Hut was the story of 2 post office men laying a line and doing climbing, they're climbing up a rock, along rock faces, over a glacier to a climbers hut right up in the valley.

SP: You were camera man on othat, so presumably it was a reconstructiron of a real thing.

JT: No they were doing it while we were there.

SP: And you were able to stop the m and start them and get big close ups of them in impossible positions with their boots.

JT: We stopped and started, once again faiargly primitive, I remember photographing, taking 2 telegraphs poles on mule, crossed and going back, all this stuff had to be carried by mule or someone.

SP: Int thosek days and agian it was Newman you were shootring with. Did you do any hand holding, because if you were climbing mountains in awkward places you couldn't always use a tripod.

JT: Cav was demented about handheld cameras

SP: Against it.

JT: For it. He was always saying, his favourite cameraman was Jimmy Rogers and Jimmy Rogers shot a dance sequence with a hand held Eclair, turning the handle at the same time. And he was always saying this, he was a very nice man, very pleasant indeed, and he was always throwing this up, you young chaps, you should see Jimmy Rogers shooting a dance sequence like that, certain amount of it was hand held, abut we were far to tied to tripods really.

SP: It's not easy to hold a Newman is it.

JT: Yes, very, it sits on your chest, those two underfoot, very simple, they were good hand held cameras actually. For instance that one of the mule, I can remember that because the mule didn't like me resting the camera on the pole at the back and swung out, it wasn't a drop but it was fairly steep anyway, and I hung onto the bloody pole and the mule and I nearly went over on it, but the men pulled him back and pulled me back to. Cav, he really was very skilled, a lot of nice shooting in it which he is really responsible for.

SP: What is the shooting of Men of Two Worlds, if you remember it.

JT: At the time nationalism was very unpopular and international cooperation was, I don't know what you call it, people forget the effect of the first world war and when you think nearly one million men in this country were killed to say nothing of the

French and the Germans, the after effect was still there, everyone believed in the league of Nations and international cooperation and that roughly, I don't know it was 50 years ago, but that was the theme of it.

SP: But filmed in Switzerland, some story of international cooperation, across country fixing of telegraph lines.

JT: 50 years is too long. What I remember of it , the basic idea was international cooperation. That was were Priestley came to work on it. Priestley appears in it but I didn't film that.

SP: That must have had sound.

JT: They made it at the studio, the sound sequences, at Blackheath.

SP: So at these kind of films the connection of the Swiss post office was merely the credit on the end, or did it publicize the Swiss post office and the GPO in any kind of way.

JT: It certainly advertised the Swiss, some of the films, Line to Cherva Hut. We Live in Two Worlds must have been about the telephone but what it was I can't remember. I don't know what the others were, it was a long time ago. Some of them were just general pictures of Switzerland, Swiss life.

SP: And again for theatrical release.

JT: I don't know.

SP: In those few years from 1930 as a boy to the beginning of the war, this was almost a non stop training period. Learning as you went.

JT: And I was no means alone in this.

SP: Well there weren't any training schools.

JT: All the others, there was Chick Fowle, Jonah Jones, Fred Gamage, Pat Jackson, Roy Stocks, McNaughton,

SP: Ken Cameron.

JT: He came in, he wasn't a sound recordist at all. McAllister. There were a lot of young people who were brought in and trained through this period. I was lucky because I was the first one there. So I was 2 years a head of most of them. And Pat Jackson for instance was sent to Grenoble for university, and I think he most likely did his full time there. It really was a comprehensive school, Roy Stocks, I don't think he was 17 and he worked as Cav's editor and packed up in the end for some reason or other. And became chief salesman at that Rolls Royce place in Berkeley Sq ultimately. A very prosperous character. But anyway, there were a lot of other people who were older than we were who were also being trained. Harry for instance, Harry was working as a storeman in British Home Stores.

SP: How did he get pulled into it.

JT: He went to see Grierson, and being one of Harry's stories, Grierson didn't want to know until he told Grierson he'd crossed the Atlantic on a sailing ship and got a job on the spot, that's Harry's story. Harry joined the Empire Marketing Board Unit in mid 1932. And he worked as a roustabout, driving the car, delivering messages, delivering goods here and there, helping with this that and the other thing. By 1935 he'd made Night Mail. It worked all the way through this training, and pushing people on quickly.

SP: From this time you were quite a number of years at Realist.

JT: Can we go back just a little bit more, at this time there were other units being started like Strand and Shell, but it still kind of centred on the GPO, Soho Sq and every Friday night they had films shows, to which everybody used to come.

SP: I came to some myself in 38.

JT: Very nice indeed, it was that kind of thing.

SP: To be entirely pedantic, I thought it was Thursday night.

JT: It was Friday. Because we got paid on Friday.

SP: That's how you remember it.

JT: Yes, everyone would go and have a drink to start off with, and you got all sorts of people there like Len Lye and I can remember Len who was a very cheerful character and very forthcoming one night saying after the film show, he said for chirst sake we can't stand around here, let's have a dance, and everyone said what will Grierson say, and Len said I don't care what Grierson will say, they took up the coconut matting and put a record on and every one started dancing, he was a wonderful man. And people met all the time, and Grierson about that time was running World Film News which everybody had to help with as well, he always managed to succeed, not always, but he had this great thing of bringing people together, he did exactly the same thing in Canada, all the people who worked at the Canadian Film Board still meet each other, and are still connected.

SP: There was World Film News, when did Reg Groves and the Documentary News Letter.

JT: Reg Groves was World Film News.

SP: Was he.

JT: Marion was the editor of World Film News for a while,

SIDE 6, TAPE 3

SP: You were in Strand, were you in an official capacity there.

JT: Jest freelance. You went for the job.

SP: So you were on call to Strand as it were.

JT: For that job, I was certainly there while they were editing

Dawn of Iran, I can remember tht. Then Bas started Realist and I went to Realist, on the staff, as a regular director, but you did everything.

SP: So some things you shot as well and some things you did everything and edited.

JT: That was were Jeakins, Adrian Jeakins had been working on and off for the FPO all the way through, did you every work with him, he was very exceptional, very quiet, but I think he was the only cameraman I knew who was committed to documentary. He believed this was the kind of film he wanted to make, and I know he had one or two offers for features, he was a very good cameraman, technically and theoretically he knew more about photography than any of the cameramen, he knew all the theory and he could do anything.

SP: Had he been trained anywhere.

JT: No he'd been dragged up the usual way through the film industry. He started off as a newsreel cameraman with Empire News, one of those early newsreels. Then he worked at all sorts of things, he worked for a cartoon company for a long time, where he became very friendly with Harry Watt's first wife, and the 3 of us, Jeak, Lulu and I have been great friends for years and years, and he and Bas got on very well together and I think from then on he photographed everything which Bas made.

SP: So Realist was a private company making films for various organisations.

JT: Yes.

SP: Did they ever set up films on spec with the hope of distribution.

JT: Only one and that was much later on. The first one was the film about The League of Nations which Stuart Legg made. That Bas made Children at School in 1937 which was a very good film. I made Smoke Menace which was alright.

SP: Who were the sponsors for instance of Children at School.

JT: Children at School and Smoke was Gas, this man Leslie, and Helen De Moulpied was there at the time as well. She was films officer more or less.

SP: What was Smoke Menace, about pollution.

JT: I think it was the first environment film made, I don't know, I suppose there was others, you can see why the gas companies interest lay in it, there was a society called the Smoke Abatement Society and we made it more or less in conjunction with them, it was their in formation. But it could have been a much better film than it was. We didn't really do the research very well in those days. For instance it would have been very easy to go to a steel works and get the most appalling smoke stuff which we didn't do.

SP: But was it filmed around England.



JT: No, in London and in the summer as well. In those days on the whole you didn't shoot during the winter. More or less, most people had a fairly thin time during the winter because you weren't being paid. The production nearly always started in May for the film to be finished by the autumn, so if your're doing smoke menace it's not really the best time of the year to make it. Films were made much quicker by this time than they had been previously. But at this time, documentary attracted a lot of attention, but even crummy films like Smoke Menace were something new, and people like Graham Greene was writing for whatever the paper was and Lejeune and Belfrage, he'd probably moved on, but there were a number of critics of a pretty high standard, Allister Cooke for instance was doing film criticism then and Richy Caulder was working for the Herald and you could get pages of reviews, amazing. Looking back on the film you think what a load of old nonsense to make all this fuss about these films, but at the time they were really new.

SP: But if the film critics were reviewing them they presumably were being theatrically shown.

JT: No. They had press shows for them, Lejeune was always around the place, I suppose at the time the films were something fresh and new.

SP: On the other tape we were talking about World Film News, that was self publicity was it.

JT: No, surprising, considering what we were supposed to be doing, Grierson used to deviate a bit, I suppose every one does and it was a paper about the film industry as much as anything. It had all the, a certain amount of stuff but it was a total film paper and quite a lot of attention to the commercial cinema in it. Why he was so keen on it I don't know, because it wasn't really the line we were going on or the line he was supposed to be going on. The Londoners, we did a lot of historical reconstruction on

SP: Was this 37.

JT: 38.

SP: Was this shot sync.

JT: Quite a lot of it was shot sync.

SP: And the story was for the 50th anniversary of the LCC.

JT: It was in 2 halved. The first half was now awful London was in 1858 or 88 or whatever it was. And the second half was how wonderful it was, I saw Alan Sapper not long ago, when the campaign was for retaining the GLC and they were using it as a film to supoprt the GLC's case. And it's a very much before and after kind of film but it was very amusing making it. We used to work at Marylebone Studios quite a bit. We used their sound truck quite a bit, not much in the studio. And we did all the historical reconstruction there with Phil Leacock as the

assistant on it. Phil Leacock was the assistant on Smoke Menace as well.

SP: Had he just joined.

JT: He'd been working at Strand, I think Phil joined in 1937, and he went on working with us after that when there was work.

SP: So it was quite a lengthy film. Where was that shown.

JT: That was theatrical.

SP: A second feature, it was 40 minutes or something.

JT: There was quite a lot of sync stuff shot in. For instance there's a sequence in the GLC Council Chamber, LCC Council Chamber with Morrison speaking.

SP: He presumably was behind the film very much or supporting it.

JT: Yes, he and Leslie, Leslie was very closely associated with him, the Gas Company public relations man. He became, when Morrison went into the Cabinet Office during the war, he got a very high up job in the Cabinet Office, in charge of information and that area.

SP: I suppose that a film like the Londoners which was much bigger than anything you'd done before had to be shaped and approved in advance.

JT: It was scripted in advance. If you know London Labour and London Poor, the book by whatever his name was, the reconstruction sequences, I can remember writing those, came straight out of that.

SP: So you wrote the script.

JT: Yes.

SP: And then it was approved by Morrison.

JT: I don't know whether Morrison, but certainly the Gas Company and Helen De Moulpied who was there at the time. I can remember one detail about it. We shot a sequence of debate in a boy's school in London somewhere, 12 year olds debating the Tolpuddle Martyrs, and it was quite a nice sequence, 12 year boys enjoying themselves speaking, and when we showed the cutting copy to Morrison he insisted on cutting that out because it would be politically bias. But things were very different, there was strong political censorship on all these films.

SP: Where from.

JT: The British Board of Film Censors.

SP: Before it could be theatrically shown.

JT: I can remember having a row, it was a strange organisation in that street down by The Highlander, Georgian or Queen Anne building which was knocked down during the war. I had a long

argument with Brooke Wilkinson who was so far out of touch with anything which was happening, I think he was secretary, they were a quaint old lot of people. There was a sequence of a woman dying from fever in the early sequences in the Londoners and there was a close up of her face beaded with sweat, and kind of Sally midwife attending to her, dirty old woman in a slum, and he was determined to get this sequence out on political grounds.

SP: What kind of political grounds.

JT: It wasn't showing Britain in a nice light.

SP: It was historical reproduction.

JT: Unbelievable. But there was definite straight political stories. One of the stories Daphne Anstey had the other day, the March of Time, a number of March of Times were censored and not allowed to be shown here, anything which said anything unkind about Hitler, you couldn't show it in the cinema, today you can't believe it, she had a story about Edgar taking, I think it was called Inside Nazi Germany and the Board of Film Censors turned it down flat, offensive to the head of another government, it wasn't offensive in modern terms, it just showed what was happening. And Edgar took it to Churchill who was out of power at the time, and Churchill said this film should be shown to everyone in the country but I'm an old man and I can't do anything about it. Edgar said he was lead out by his son limping on his cane, this was 2 years before the war started. There was very heavy censorship on anything they liked. You weren't allowed to show policemen in a bad light, it really was political censorship.

SP: Did this apply to non theatrical showings of these films.

JT: No, if it was on non flam film, it certainly didn't apply because Ivor Montagu and Ralph made a number of political films which were shown like the Spanish series they made which were shown outside the cinemas. But early on you weren't allowed to show any Russian films.

SP: I remember censorship of bits of Spanish Earth, the famous line in the commentary over a shot of a plane which had been shot down and a close up a fusillage which had some words in German, and the commentary said I can't read German and either that was asked to be removed by the censor because it was offensive to the head of a foreign power.

JT: Today we think we've got an infringement of free speech, but the only place you could show the Russian films in 1930 was the Film Society, but they weren't allowed to be shown in cinemas, amazing. The Londoners was quite a pleasant job to do. Then Bas had to move on, Grierson needed him at Film Centre.

SP: Was he co director of Realist.

JT: Bas, he was the producer and ran the place. I was employed by him as Jeak was, it was a small unit, there was Bas, an accountant called Bill Dixon, Pat Gerald Keen, Jeak, myself and Miss Stevenson, that was it.

SP: Basil Wright had to move on by instruction or request.

JT: Yes, he moved into Film Centre to do promotting, he made a film after that but he moved over to Film Centre as a producer, producing films in various places, and I took over as manager of Realist, not as producer.

SP: And was that for the entire length of the war.

JT: Yes, and after a while I became a producer.

SP: The war was approaching and started, alot of documentary makers appeared to have continue making films right through the war, was this a reserved occupation right away or did a certain number of people volunteer and go into the services and others remain, it seems interesting to me so many seemed to work right through the war filmmaking.

JT: It varied. Crown for instance, they had block reservations.

SP: Did Crown start right after the beginning of the war out of the GPO Film Unit.

JT: When war started in September, the Ministry of Information was staffed by the most incredible lot of people who had ever been, they hadn't the vaguest idea of what to do or what they were going to do, they disliked us intensely

SP: When you say us you mean the group of documentary makers,

JT: And told us quite straight forwardedly you can shove off and they made these awful films like The Lion Has Wings which Korda made, which even then was incredible.

SP: Were these instructed by the government.

JT: They were Ministry of Information films, promoted by them, but in actual fact from September to the fall of France they did nothing at all. They did The Lion Has Wings, Ealing made one, and at that time, that's when we started Documentary News Letter to attack the Ministry of Information. And to try and get some sense into the thing. Basil, and there were about 5 or 6 people on the editorial board, and they changed occasionally. But that was the purpose of it.

SP: But the staff of the GPO Film Unit were in effect in action right from the first days of the war.

JT: Yes but not because of the Ministry, they went and made the films on their own. And got into trouble over them.

SP: Who financed them, the GPO.

JT: The GPO was financed by the Ministry of Information, right away, they took over the production unit and non theatrical distribution.

SP: So what was happening was a maverick group deciding to go out and shoot in order to record what was happening.



JT: Cav and Harry were the leading lights in it.

SP: Where was Grierson.

JT: Grierson was in Canada. He wasn't here at all. From 38. In 38 he was going around the world starting up these units, Australia, and 39 he was certainly in Canada. He wanted to come back but they wouldn't have him back, needless to say the people who were then, but Cav and Harry, Harry was a great fighter, he had many good qualities, and he just went off and made things like First Days and got into certain trouble for doing it. There was a man called Hyat who was a post office man who had been moved to the Ministry of Information and he fancied himself as another Grierson but he hadn't the slightest idea about anything except post offices. Literally for 6 or 8 months nothing happened at all.

SP: What about Realist.

JT: When I went to Realist it was in a fairly bad way financially, there was nothing else I could do, I could either close the unit down or sack every one, and I sacked everyone including myself. And the accountant was a great friend of mine called Bill Dixon, he was a proper accountant, I said Bill I'm sorry, he said that's alright, I know better than you do, we got in another accountant, a book keeper called Hawker and we kept it just ticking over. We picked up one or two odd jobs, I made one for the British Council called Island People. Then we had 3 films on food which Ruby Grierson made for the Gas Company.

SP: This was just before the war or at the beginning.

JT: After the start of the war.

SP: She went on one of the first ships or was it several months after the start of the war.

JT: No that was a year later. That was September 1940. That was a crazy scheme. She made 3 films, Green Food for Health, Chose Cheese, the usual kind of thing. Everybody was living, quite a lot of people departed, Donald Alexander and lived down in in the Ronda, somewhere there, people just went where they could live because there was no money around.

SP: When you say Realist was closed down in effect, were the offices maintained.

JT: No, I gave up the offices and moved into one room in Film Centre in Soho Sq. It was either that or pack it up. Then when things really started going wrong with the fall of France, all the people at the MOI were cleared out, practically everyone, Kenneth Clark took over, Brendan Bracken took over and they brought in Beddington who had been involved with films since 1932 and was a very exceptional man, tough character but very good indeed and he built up this staff here with Elton as his chief production controlling officer, and all these other strange people like Monty Slater, and Arthur Calder Marshall and Betcheman and Arlette Robinson, the woman writer, and Helen De Maulpied. And the people who'd been there were running down the non theatrical distribution, when Beddington went there they

brought Baird in who'd been running the GPO non theatrical, and Helen and they built it up into a very large organisation.

SP: What was it called.

JT: The Ministry of Information Films Division. And almost immediately things began to move. They started off by making 5 minuters, which you had to make in a week and cost £500.

SP: Were they farmed out to the small documentary groups.

JT: Crown, Realist, Strand, yes.

SP: So really this rejuvenated the documentary industry.

JT: Yes.

SP: Was it already a reserved occupation.

JT: No you had to apply through the Ministry, you filled in forms which went to the Ministry of Information and Crown had blanket ones. At Realist I think I was the only one who was reserved. Jeak was medically unfit, he had very bad eyesight.

ST: A cameraman, did he have to wear specs when he was

JT: Yes. I can't remember what it was, it didn't really affect him but he did wear specs. Sainsbury was medically unfit. Keen was called up into the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, Pat Moyner joined the RAF and became the head of the RAF Operational Film Unit, Phil was called up, it was on an age thing, Phil was younger than us and went fairly early on.

SP: Did some get called up and go immediately into the Army Kinematograph Film Unit, I can't remember what it was called.

JT: Harry Rignold did. I think he was the first army camera man and he was working at Anzio and killed, Keen was killed in Burma, and practically everyone we took on, we started doing a lot of work and a lot of women we had. We had about half a dozen women directors and all sorts of strange people like Len Lye, Alex Strasser who was a very good filmmaker.

SP: You said you had a lot of women directors at Realist, obviously because of war time conditions, did any of them go on making films for many years or were they just for the duration.

JT: Some of them did. Margaret Thomson was working in films beforehand. Most of them were trainees we took on, one of them was the telephonist at Film Centre, I think there were 5 or 6 women directors, the editor was a woman, it really worked very well as a unit. There was Alex Shaw and Frank Sainsbury, very much, he was a very strong influence on everything in his own kind of mad way. But it really worked as a unit. Everyone worked on the basic rate of pay, everyone had the same pay, cameramen, directors, producer.

SP: Was that the only documentary unit which worked in that way.

JT: Yes.

SP: Did people have a share of the profits.

JT: It was on the basis of the war, it was a thing that Frank and I believed in anyway, possibly the wages were too low, but everyone seemed to be satisfied. I think the basic rate for a qualified technician was £10 a week. And it worked very well indeed, anyone who is still alive is still friends, soon after we started making films at the Ministry we decided we wouldn't make propaganda films. There was a certain feeling we didn't want to make films gloryfying war so we concentrated on non war subjects.

SP: Did this mean you had to turn down some subjects which were offered to you.

JT: Not particularly because I knew Elton and De Moulpied and Betcheman and Beddinton very well.

SP: So they didn't offer them you. What did the union feel, or didn't they have any say on this business of everyone on the same rate of pay.

JT: It was above the union rate in any case. So some of the units were running awful rackets, it was working on this cost plus government contract thing. Merton Park Studios and so on were really milking the system. I think one of the reasons we got a lot of work they knew that our budgets were genuine. We also did a lot of work for outside people like ICI. Max Anderson made a very very good film called The Harvest Shall Come. Bas produced it actually and it was a four reeler on the history of farm labourers and what bad conditions they had and what bad pay, and it also was on the way agriculture had been treated in Britain over the past. Because before the war half of Britain was really desolate and the fields were overgrown with bushes and weeds and so on, and Bas had to go to Canada at one point during the war to see Grierson and I think he worked there for a while, and we had a big show at the Shaftesbury Ave, the Palace, they had a very nice Films Officer called Galvin Wright and he and I, it was a full cinema and Mr Hudson who was Minister of Agriculture was going to speak after the film, the film had been running about 10 minutes and Galvin Wright came down and tapped me on the shoulder and said come quickly, we're in terrible trouble, so I went down and the whole board of directors were in the bar with this tough character called McGowan, they were furious, and said what the hell do you think you're doing making socialist propaganda like this, this is not the sort of film you ought to be making, Galvin was for the chop, no question about this, it went on for a long time and I didn't say anything, I didn't dare with these tycoons like McGowan there, some one came rushing in and said Mr Hudson's going to speak, and they all trooped back into the theatre and Hudson came onto the stage and said ladies and gentlemen,

SP: You stopped the film did you.

JT: No, the film finished, it went on for a long while this row in the bar, it may have been half way through the film when we were called down, Hudson goes onto the stage and says I really

must congratulate ICI on really the most outstanding film I've seen since the start of the war, this is exactly the kind of film we want, we want films which tell the truth, and so on. We all go back into the bar again, Galvin Wright is the hero of the occasion and Sir Harry comes up to me and says I really must congratulate you Mr Taylor, on really understanding what's going on at the moment.

SP: They hadn't seen the film, or only half of it.

JT: They'd seen enough of it to know it wasn't the kind of film they wanted. But Hudson, I'll always remember his name, he saved our bacon, and after that we made a lot of films for them. We made The Techniques of Anaesthetics series in which everyone who was willing was paid £2 to have an anaesthetic, because you couldn't do it with real patients. And we had the top anaesthetist in the country, and we had a bombed theatre in Westminster Hospital, and some of the girls used to come down and play the parts of the nurses, and we all had anaesthetics. We made a lot of films for ICI and a lot of teaching films for them.

SP: On a list of films you directed, with Phil Leacock - Island People, Letter from Aldershot, Goodbye Yesterday.

JT: Goodbye Yesterday was quite an interesting film, it was banned. It was a film about the future and the past.

SP: If it was 41 it was too soon was it.

JT: Yes, 41 was it, I suppose it was, it was about an old man living alone, old and neglected, a young woman who worked in an office, there were five characters in it, and the film was built around them in a projection theatre, looking at the film and then discussing it afterwards and what the future of Britain should be. We took it out, they used to sneak preview the films, we took it out to the Campden Town Gaumont with Beddington and Elton and a man called Radcliffe and they slipped it into the programme and came out at the end of it. Radcliffe this film is never going to be shown as far as I'm concerned, he was one of the bosses, we argued, Elton and Beddington argued, and he said there's no question about it, and somebody burnt the negative.

SP: So it was ahead of its time, if it had been 1945 it might have been accepted.

JT: Probably.

SP: A Visit from Canada.

JT: That's a routine thing, the first Canadian division. There's a quite interesting one which Len Lye made called I think Work Party, it's working title was Factory Family and I think it was the first Cinema Verite film which was actually made.

SP: Len Lye. I didn't know he did any actuality shooting.

JT: He made about 6 films for Realist. He made Cameramen at War, Kill or be Killed which was about snipers, Vegetable Pie which was a crazy film about how to make a vegetable pie with



Louis Armstrong singing In my solitude, Newspaper Train, I shot some stuff on a film called Visit from Canada and we set up the camera up outside the window because we couldn't get it into the room and we shot 2 Canadian soldiers and 2 girls playing polka and they didn't know it was there. The girls were attractive girls and they were young men and they ignored the camera completely and they just went on and it was absolutely and completely natural.

SP: Did you have a microphone too.

JT: There was a microphone in there, it was sound, the dialogue was absolutely natural, it was most peculiar, two young men and two young women.

SP: There hadn't been much shooting done of that sort.

JT: I don't think any. Len came into the theatre when we were viewing the rushes and said this is wonderful, I must make a film like this. He realised what it was. I thought it was just interesting stuff. So we got a film for film from the MOI about a family of mother and 3 daughters who lived somewhere out at Wembley and worked in a factory. And Len set up the camera in the bedroom, the 3 daughters all slept in a double bed, set the camera up, sound camera with microphone and lights and at half past five in the morning they just turned it all on, and you get this awful sequence of these bedragled women waking up and saying oh christ what a day.

SP: Who turned it on.

JT: Len, down in the truck. They waited outside all night. And they did some more stuff at the factory with the camera hidden, and they did a Saturday night party which was somebody's 21st birthday party, they set a camera up in the room and just let the party go ahead, and it was a fairly wild party.

SP: It couldn't have been more than 10 minute takes then.

JT: No it was 10 minutes, they just ran them the magazine out. Len edited it into 7 minutes or something like that, and we took it to show to the COI and they were horrified, it wasn't the most attractive film. About a year ago I read the review Basil wrote in Documentary Newsletter, he said this is not the kind of film which should be made in wartime.

SP: Was there objection to it on the grounds of invasion of privacy.

JT: Oh no, they were a fairly ordinary looking lot of working class girls, they weren't glamour in any way, they looked ropey, they looked like 3 young women waking up in the morning and I wonder whether Len took the idea when he went to America, it was certainly an early cinema verite.

SP: But without an operator on the spot.

JT: Just the camera was fixed.

SP: And a wide angled lens. There's a whole lot of people

listed as directing films while you were producing films at Realist, Max Anderson, Halas and Bachelor, Pearl, Margaret Thomson, Rosanne Hunter, Alexander Shaw, Frank Sainsbury, Graham Wallace, Jill Graigie

JT: She didn't

SP: Children of the Ruins it says here. But they were all people who were brought in, they weren't on the staff.

JT: No, everybody was on the staff, everybody was permanent.

SP: Hans Niter, he was a very skilled filmmaker, he made, do you remember the Technicolor travelogue, Jack Cardiff photographed a lot of the prewar ones, Niter was the producer director of those, he was a very skilled film director. So you gathered round a good bunch of people.

JT: Very good.

SP: And did the directors follow the film right through from the original story and editing as well, either working with an editor or editing themselves.

JT: We had an editor called Gwen Bayley who edited a lot of films but some edited their own, Fred Sainsbury I would have expected edited his own.

SP: Margaret Thomson

JT: No, Gwen edited a lot of her films, and on the whole they were thrown onto their own resources, I didn't act as a heavy producer, that's the film make it and it was up to them. If they wanted advice, yes but it was very much, Len was fairly typical, he got a subject and made it,

SP: Did people have to produce a budget and work it out.

JT: We did the budgeting, Hawker and I, the young accountant we took on early before the war,

JOHN TAYLOR

SIDE 7, TAPE 4

SP: Of all the films you made for Realist during the war there were a few outstanding

TJ: Penicillin you think of is the official film of the discovery of penicillin, it was financed by ICI and directed by Alex Shaw and Kay Mander and was constructed around, Alex Shaw and Jeak went out to the front line in Holland, picked up an English soldier at a front line dressing station where they had the penicillin tab put on and the story of penicillin was told as he was brought back to England.

SP: Was the penicillin tab something which was put on someone who had had their first injection.

TJ: Yes, it was so crude in those days, they hadn't got it concentrated as they have now, and it got very very painful after the fifth injection, from what I remember, they had a card which they filled in every injection, about every 3 hours, but it had Fleming and the team at Oxford. It's always talked of as Flemming's invention but there was a team of 45 who worked on it trying to find the cure for gas gangrene, the thing in the first world war which killed so many men. And it wasn't a chance discovery by any means, they knew what they were looking for and they found it.

SP: So the chance discovery is yet another historical myth, is it, of the stuff that was growing on somebody's saucer on a window sill.

TJ: It is and it isn't, Fleming was a fairly haphazard scientist and one of his disks was contaminated with penicillin spore, and he did write a short paper saying there seems to be some antipathy between this mould and the bacteria and then 12 years went by and he didn't do anything about it. And they set up this team in I don't know what year, 1938, somewhere around there, purposely to discover a cure for gas gangrene.

SP: Was this encoded in the film.

TJ: Yes.

SP: But to go out to the front and pick up some person was a fairly innovative style of filmmaking.

TJ: Alex was a very good filmmaker.

SP: It's the kind of thing you would only consider now making with a video camera, or at least light weight equipment which they didn't have then.

TJ: But Alex was a very good filmmaker, very good indeed, very good scriptwriter, and Kay shot a lot of the stuff, she was a very good filmmaker too. Suschitsky shot a lot of it and Jeak photographed the other half. They lost reel two, the British film Institute, and after a certain amount of jumping up and down

they rediscovered it.

SP: Suschitsky was he a freelance cameraman working for you.

TJ: I don't know, we used to borrow sometimes people from other units, we borrowed Chick Fowle from Crown once or twice. He photographed Atlantic Trawler for Frank Sainsbury, Sue did one or two films. We could borrow equipment and so on from Crown, there was a lot of interchange, things were terribly easy. Nobody bothered about copyright of any kind, if you wanted music, you could get the London Symphony Orchestra, just take it off a disk and put it on, we didn't even ask permission. Everything was wide open after the first year, you could do practically anything you wanted to.

SP: What other notable films do you remember from the wartime.

TJ: The sort of thing we were doing wasn't the kind of work which would produce notable films. To me a notable film is one Margaret Thomson made called Clean Milk, which had tremendous effect on the Scottish dairy industry apparently, she got a newspaper cutting that it raised the standard of Scottish milk, that was the kind of thing we really were interested in.

SP: In fact you were following the business of films with a purpose which helped change society.

TJ: Almost entirely, we made a few odd things. When Alex Shaw first came there, he came with a film called Tinker Taylor which was a story about army and navy gunners on merchant ships of which he was going to make a feature out of, it was a feature length film, and it didn't really work, it wasn't our sort of film, and he settled down and he wrote the script of Your Children and You. Oh one very nice series we made was called Your Children and You, Your Children's Eyes, Your Children's Ears, Your Children's Teeth, Your Children's Sleep, and that from my point of view was the peak of our achievement. Alex Strasser made a beauty of Your Children's Eyes, Alex wrote it and a man called Bryan Smith had appeared by that time, he photographed and had been injured in Malta and medically discharged from the army, and it really was a very good series indeed, and we got positive results back on it. There was no national health service, and at that time there was quite a lot of children which had a squint which could be easily corrected by a minor operation, and we got quite a lot of letters back, saying I was so pleased your film, our child's had this operation and now her eyes are normal.

SP: These were theatrically shown.

TJ: No they were shown on the 160 mobile projection units, they went to schools factories and hospitals.

SP: Were they 16mm.

TJ: No they were all 35. Everything was 35 and reduced.

SP: I really meant were they reduced to 16 for showing on these mobiles.



TJ: Some mobiles were 16, some were 35. But the Anaesthetic series at that time early in the war there were very few specialist anaesthetists and on the whole anaesthetics were very badly given, and they very often gave very much more than they needed to give which had a very bad effect when they woke up. Old McGill who was the anaesthetist who used to give me anaesthetics, I'd wake up and be perfectly all right, and we'd say come on now, and we'd go round Westminster Hospital into surgeons' offices and he say tell everyone you had an anaesthetic, and I'd say I had an anaesthetic at 2 o'clock and it's now half past three. This is what I keep telling you, what they're suffering is post operative shock, not anaesthetic. But anaesthetics were very badly given. The films were very widely shown all over the world, I hope they saved people a lot of misery. Alfie Bass, he was in the Londoners and quite a few of our films early on, and he worked at the unity theatre, and I met Alfie in the Dog and Duck one lunch time, and I said how's things. And he said awful, I haven't any work, he said have you got anything. I said all we've got is an anaesthetic at 2 quid. So Alfie said I'm willing. He goes off with Yvonne Fletcher and Margaret Thomson who are making the film, and about 6 o'clock they ring me up and say you better come down here, Alfie hasn't come out of the anaesthetic, it's really true, everyone else who'd had them had come out of it as if they'd just woken up, with no after effect. There was this nice woman called Yvonne Fletcher who's film it was, and they'd taken Alfie and put him in one of the ward's, unconscious, this was hours and hours afterwards, and McGill kept coming in and saying he'll be alright, he has a low tolerance, about midnight Alfie woke up, the opened his eyes, he didn't move, he must have been conscious for some time I think, and the first words he said was where's my lawyer. They kept him in over night. Everyone else it worked on. They were 3 reelers and I think we made 11 of them on different types of anaesthetic.

SP: How did you come to meet Barbara Mullen, because this is part of the story.

TJ: She came over to go to drama school, she had been living in the States in America, and she came back and stayed with her father and brother in Aran. She was already a dancer, an Irish step dancer in America, and those are some of the cups she won, and she wanted to be an actress. And Pat had a lot of good friends so they fixed it for her to go to the Webber Douglas, and she came over here and automatically came to see me and that's how I got to know her. In the end we were married in 1941.

SP: When did she break into film acting.

TJ: Very quickly, she finished at the Webber Douglas and at one of the small theatres they did a production of Jeannie, a film about a Scots girl, with Eric Portman and he produced it and he was a very good actor and producer. It took off and they moved it straight into Wyndhams and she didn't look back after that for a long time, until we had children actually, she did Peter Pan and What every Woman Knows, she did a number of plays and a number of films like Thunder Rock, probably the best film she was in, then we had children and she stopped for I don't know how many years, 6 years.

SP: Did your paths ever cross professionally, you continued all the time in documentary work. You never worked together.

TJ: She made on film at Realist called Mother and Child which was a film for the Ministry of Health, Frank Sainsbury directed it.

SP: Was that your own child.

TJ: It was before we had children. She and I worked very much as a partnership later on. I'm completely illiterate and she used to correct everything I wrote, we worked together as a partnership as the years went by. For a time she worked with us when we had the children, she wrote quite a few commentaries, she was quite a good writer, and we worked as a partnership.

SP: As you were saying back to Realist. The war was coming to an end. Rotha was making these forward looking films. He didn't work for Realist with that,

TJ: No he had various units of his own.

SP: Were there residues of the pre war little units reforming or did they reform at the end of the war

TJ: During the war there were a number of units started, a lot of production started, Ralph Keen had a unit at Green Park, Hankinson had a unit, Sidney Box had a unit, Jay Lewis had a unit, and then towards the end of the war there were things like Data with Donald Alexander and Francis Gysing and Basic which was Kay Mander, Jill Craigie started up a unit, there were all sorts of people and I don't mean this unkindly came onto the band wagon, came into that sort of filmmaking and making very good films, socially progressive and useful stuff a lot of them.

SP: When did Guild start

TJ: Guild had been running long before the war.

SP: The same one.

TJ: They reformed and went broke and was sold to Western Electric and was then sold to RCA and then was sold to the advertising paper, it kept going. They were always slightly outside of it, they weren't inside the documentary thing but the other units were. There were a lot of good people. Then inevitably with the end of the war, the volume of production, Worldwide, that's still going, during the war there must have been 20 units working, all small but turning out 5 or 6 films, then at the end of the war the feature industry had been tightly controlled during the war, but there was immediately great expansion the minute the war finished and there was general exodus towards the studios, particularly from Crown.

SP: What happened to you personally at the end of the war.

TJ: I went on at Realist till the end of, Alex Shaw left at the beginning of 1946, and went as producer to Crown. And then at the end of that year he asked me if I'd go and I didn't want

to go but he said it was my duty to go, I didn't particularly want to leave REalist but in the end I went to Crown. 1st January 1947 as producer. They'd taken over Beaconsfield Studios which had been an aircraft factory and had no heating in it at all and was a ruin. The cutting rooms were at Denham, Pinewood and Ealing, I don't know where the sound people were and it was that winter when everything froze solid.

SP: And no transport.

TJ: Plenty of transport, masses of transport of their own. Big green army cars for production. Generator lorries. There were something like 250 people there. I always thought it was a great mistake that they went, just go back one minute. At the end of the war they had to decide what the future shape of the government film department would be. And Basil Wright was on the committee at the Ministry of Information with two or three high up civil servants deciding what shape it would be, and they decided they would set up a film department based on the Canadian National Film Board, which would be a department which would have it's own grant and decide which films were made, in consultation with the other departments, but they would be the authority.

SP: Did Grierson come in on this at all.

TJ: No, Grierson at this time was with UNESCO in Paris. And Basil was their adviser and it was all agreed, and one morning Basil picked up a paper and read that the Central Office of Information is the new body and this will have a film department. And this was really the beginning of the end because it didn't work very well. There's been scores of public relation officers appointed during the war. And after the war they poured out of the forces to become public relation officers and hadn't the vaguest idea of what they were doing. But wouldn't it be nice to have a film, what sort of film, oh a film, any film would do. There were a few who were good, and it was completely the wrong way of doing it unfortunately. The second mistake was to give Crown a Studio. The last thing Crown wanted was the plasterers department, the carpenters department, the art department and so on. What it wanted was two projection rooms, a dozen cutting rooms, a camera department and some offices.

SP: And some transport.

TJ: Yes, but you could hire the transport. But instead of that it was landed with this enormous overhead which controlled the whole of it's production. There was this very good chief executive there who was called Gordon Smith who was a very enthusiastic good character. The camera department was terrible, they couldn't do anything except put the camera 3 ft 6" from the ground, lock it firmly and put everylight they had onto whatever it was they were photographing. They were very nice people but they lost control of the situation.

SP: You landed up as producer in charge. What did you decide to do because this was not something to your liking.

TJ: When I went there they had things like the establishment which you couldn't break, that was 8 directors and 4 scripwriters.

SP: Had they been there during all the war.

TJ: One director had made a film, the other 7 hadn't.

SP: How had they managed to get there.

TJ: Alex had appointed them. All the people had left and gone into the studios. Humphrey Jennings, Pat Jackson, Jack Lee and so on. The four scriptwriters, I don't think any of them had written a script but they were all likely people to be trained. It took a year and a half to build the studio. We slowly got bits, everything was in short supply. You couldn't get switches for the cutting rooms so you couldn't use the cutting rooms.

SP: Was any production going on at all.

TJ: We used every conceivable method of getting films made. We made a lot of films. We converted the plasterers shop into a studio. We got Jack Holmes to come in and make a film. I tried to get Joris Ivens, Max Anderson came in, Terry Bishop, ultimately Phil Leacock and Margaret Thomson, but you were very strictly controlled on how many two could employ. The budget was enormous, about £2 a year, and 8 directors could never spend £2 million a year even if they were making features. You'd try and explain this to people, the establishment people and the finance people just wouldn't listen. I enjoyed it actually. It was quite a thing to do. After a while we really began to churn films out, all sorts of things, the kind of films I like to make anyway, The Diagnosis and Management of Poliomyelitis which was a five reeler. There was a very big outbreak of polio at that time and most people had never seen it.

SP: So this was a specific film for doctors.

TJ: Yes. All sorts.

SP: What make you decide some pictures rather than others. Did some of the directors who were sitting there that hadn't directed come up with subjects as well.

TJ: No, the snag was that you could only make films which had been requested by other government departments.

SP: It was all government departments was it.

TJ: Yes.

SP: It couldn't be anyone else, you were there to service the government as it were.

TJ: It depended. The chief secretary or someone they could bend the rules but you couldn't, if you see what I mean. Occasionally we made a film, one morning I read an article in the Times about a man called Chadwick who was a district officer in Nigeria, about fundamental education, I rang Helen Demoulpied who I got on very well with, we both believed in the same kind of things, I said have you seen that and she said yes, I said what about it, she said right, we had a thing for the Ministry of Information, Jaqua Hawks was the education officer, Ships and



Seafaring, and Helen and Jacquetta changed Ships and Seafaring into Daybreak in Udi. If the other end agreed you could do practically anything, there were two other ends, you could get Helen Demoulpied to do practically anything, but in this case there was Jacquetta Hawks who was quite good to. Half way through the production, the original budget was £15,000 and they were all out there with sound and everything, Terry Bishop was directing that and Max Anderson producing it, Monty Slater wrote the script, they were all out there, we'd spent the £15,000 and we couldn't get authority from the finance people to go on and finish the film, and I think they were held up two weeks before I could get permission. There were all sorts of things happened like that. During the war the Civil Service lost control of film production completely and Beddington and Elton and all the other controlling officers would say go and make a film. And then the budget people would groan and moan and say we shouldn't really pass this, they knew that they had to pass it but they would put up an objection. The minute the war was finished they got back in control again, they didn't say we shouldn't pass this, they'd say we won't pass this. And that made life difficult. But between us we got the unit going, we had a cricket team, a darts team, a sports club, everybody eat in the canteen, there were no posh lunches, I always ate in the canteen, we had dances and a magazine called Short Ends which Bob Angel edited, a lot of very enthusiastic people there as well.

SP: Was Daybreak at Udi a one off overseas production or were you making things on post war reconstruction or was that not your briefing.

TJ: The briefing covered anything which any government department wanted. We made films about road safety, teaching films for schools, we did a lot of secret work on the building of Harwell, a crazy business, secret work which I can't remember and I didn't know much about.

SP: Was that filming for the archives of the future

TJ: Yes. A record of the construction. God knows where the stuff is now. We did a lot of record stuff. We did the building of Braberson, we used to send a unit down there once a month. Other things like that. There was a Russian delegation came over here in 1947 which we recorded everything they did more or less. I felt there is no point of us making a film of it, so we made it into reels with shot number 1, this is so and so, and this is background Tower of London, we got about 10, 12 reels of this. We sent it to Russia to be edited by Moscow, and the bloody fools at the Russian Embassy ran it as a film in a cinema

SP: As it stood.

TJ: As it stood. Camera flashes in the lot. Alexander Berth was the Guardian correspondent and a friend of ours wrote back and said this is a disgrace, the Crown Film Unit's falling to pieces, which didn't help us very much I might say, it was fair old chaos one way or another. We made a film with Burgess Meredith called A Yank Coming Back which he directed and did fairly well really. It was quite an amusing film.

SP: How long did you stay there doing this.

TJ: Ultimately I fell out with Grierson

SP: He'd come back.

TJ: By that time in 1948 he came back to Britain and became a controller at the COI and he was in a very strange mood to say the least of it. And Alex Shaw was a very ingenious fellow and he'd drawn up a thing called the Crown Charter which made the Producer at Crown an accounting officer and I was the only one in the whole of the Central Office of Information who was an accounting officer which means you can be called before the bar of the House of Commons to account for your expenditure. One night I made the mistake of saying to Grierson that I was an accounting officer and you're not and this must have stuck and he was determined he was not going to have an accounting officer under him when he wasn't. That's just making things up, he decided to reorganise Crown. I thought Crown was working very well under this Crown Charter, it put Crown, it put the producer of Crown on the same level as the director of the films division which I thought was a sensible thing. Ronnie Treatan was the director of the film division. Grierson devised a new form of the thing, before that I'd broken the unit up with 5 producers. There was a producer of education, features, news, I had 5 specialised units. There was Stuart Legg, Donald Taylor, I can't remember the others. There were 5 subunits, each specialising which seemed a sensible thing to me and I was just the kind of general manager. Grierson decided to break it up and put in a business manager, a production manager, to have 3 heads to it. I said this is crazy. All you'll do is put it at the mercy of the COI because there's not one person who can stand up and say yes or no. And we fell out very badly on that and I left.

SP: Were you very glad to go, because you're not made to be an administrator but a filmmaker.

TJ: I was really. But I was sore about it at the time. I had about 2 years of really hard going. The building of the studio, which if you were running the place you were heavily involved in as well. And building up the unit.

SP: You left and Crown continued for a bit, when did Group 3 start.

TJ: Crown continued to 1952, another 4 or 5 years, I don't know how long Grierson stayed there. I think Group 3 started about 1950 but they weren't at Beaconsfield to start with they were at Southall. Then I went back to freelance filmmaking.

SP: And you felt happier.

TJ: Yes, it was where I belonged really.

SP: Did you freelance for different companies or one.

TJ: Anyone. I had quite a lot of unemployment at that time. No I went to the Colonial Film Unit after that for about a year.

SP: Were you offered the job.

TJ: No Grierson said go, I still spoke to him, although we'd had a row. He said you can really do a good job at the Colonial Film Unit but it was beyond me what they were trying to do.

SP: What is the Colonial Film Unit, had it started before the war.

TJ: I don't honestly know, when I was there they had the old GPO place at 21 Soho Sq and there was Sellars and George Pearson.

SP: I think it began around 1940 with the idea of training technicians and cameramen from the colonies.

TJ: I saw every film they made and I couldn't believe the line they were working on was the right line but I didn't have enough knowledge of the territories they were working in to say they were right or not.

SP: But they didn't go out to the territories. People came to London.

TJ: They made films there, they made many many films. I saw scores, I spent a long time.

SP: I beg your pardon, was this the Colonial Film Unit, not the training place in Soho Sq, they had two separate organisations.

TJ: Where I was there was no training, there was just a production unit that had made a large number of very simple films which I thought completely underestimated the audience they were made for. I could never really make head or tail of it to tell the truth. I did very little work there, I talked to Pearson, I talked to Sellers, and other people there, Sidney Samuelson was there as a boy, Bob Painter was there as a boy, but they seemed to do very little work and in the end I just wandered off and that was that and back into freelance.

SP: What as a director.

TJ: Yes.

SP: Did you do any more camerawork.

TJ: Not at that time, later on I did. I made odd films, I made one for Ford, called Opus 69 or something like that which was a strange film they'd written a musical score and the film was made to a musical score. Richard Arnell, I started to make one for Dalrymple and Korda about racing and Korda had got a racket going about getting double Eady money on shorts and they cancelled the double Eady money and they cancelled the film. I had rather a thing time for a long time.

SP: This list mentions the Heart is Highland.

TJ: That was later, 50. That was Transport. Edgar Anstey

SP Journey into HIstory.

TJ: That was Edgar also.



SP: England of Elizabeth.

TJ: They were all a bit later really. I did a few, Leon Clore and I started a company called Countryman Films, we had a contract with Columbia to produce 6 2 reelers a year for theatrical distribution, it was a kind of open air magazines of animals, anything to do with the countryside. The average issue started off with an item on young animals to sweeten the audience for two minutes, some of them were quite good, we did a very good one on seals. Graham did a very good one on that famous, animal behaviour man and it worked very well. They were very cheap. The budgets were £1,500 and we seemed to be able to do it relatively easy. And we started one or two sponsored films for Brook Bonds tea which Graham had a contract for. And towards the end of 1952 Adrian Dupoitier came along and said I'm sure they're going to climb Everest next year. And he'd worked it out on paper as well quite convincingly. Somehow we managed to get a contract from the RGS to make the film. Then we ran into real trouble. We went to the National Film Finance Corporation, we were getting money from them for something, I can't remember what but we had good contacts there, and said we want £8,000 to photograph the first part of the expedition to Everest, Jimmy Lawrie who was head of it said wonderful idea, wonderful idea. And we went ahead ordering the cameras and Tom STobart appeared on the scene and we got him. And I tried to phone Lawrie one day and he wouldn't speak to me, after phoning him 6 times I realised he wasn't speaking to me, and we couldn't make out what was happening. Finally we got through to him and he said I'm sorry we've had to withdraw the offer. I said for Christ sake we've got it all lined up. He said I'm sorry that's it. The secretary of the Royal Geographical Society, we rang him and said we're terribly sorry about this but the Film Finance Corporation have decided to cancel it but we'll do everything we can for whoever takes the job over and we'll give you all our research material and Adrian had done a magnificent job on the research material, about 50 or 60 pages of information, and he said just leave it with me. He rang us back and said can you come to a meeting tonight in Sloane St at Woodham Smith who was the Rank lawyer, so Graham and Leon and I turned up at this house and a man opened the door and I said good evening, the name's Taylor, and he said good evening sir, I'm the butler but you're very welcome. We went in and there were about 4 people there in the library, a very posh library with decanters, we were made very welcome, Woodham Smith who wrote Florence Nightingale and the Charge of the Light Brigade said tell us all about it. We said this is what acutually happened, we went to ... and they said yes, and then they wouldn't speak to us and said no. Woodham Smith said I can't remember who the President of the Board of Trade was who was in charge of the National Film Finance Corporation he said Joe's in charge of that, yes, forget it, we'll ring you in the morning. In the morning at about half past nine Jimmy Lawrie rings up and says could I come and see you, we had an office,

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He said I'm very sorry about all this, there's been a mix up and we'd be very pleased to put the money up. And what had actually happened was that Balcon at this time was running everything, he was head of the National Film Finance Corporation, head of Rank, head of Ealing, he was really running the whole film industry,



and when at their meeting they'd put up this proposition for £8,000 for a miserable little company, Countryman Films, he said certainly not, this film should be made by Rank Screen Services, then the President of the Board had rung Jimmy Lawrie and said do as you're told, give them the money. But it wasn't without strings. We were fools, they said we can't give it to you which was nonsense because they were giving vast sums of money to everyone, it can only be done through Group 3 and we want 75% of the profits. It was a crooked deal really. But we were so pleased to get the thing going we said anything you like so long as we get the money. Then Adrian was proved right, they did climb Everest. Then old Stobart was taken ill on it.

SP: There were two cameramen weren't there, one at lower level and one at higher level.

TJ: Stobart was taken ill at lower level, but luckily for us, and shot very little material actually, I think he brought back about 2,200 ft of 16mm.

SP: 16mm Kodachrome.

TJ: Yes.

SP: Who was the other man.

TJ: George Lowe. A New Zealander. And we gave George two Imos with complete sets of lenses with everything from a 1" to a 24".

SP: He wasn't an entirely experienced cameraman was he.

TJ: Not really. He was this charming beautiful young man, about 6 ft 2" and when he walked into the pub all the ladies swooned and amusing pleasant nice man, but he wasn't really a film technician. Anyway Stobart was taken ill, he had pneumonia. We also gave them four automatic cameras with preset focus and exposure and automatic loading. They were little tiny things about the size of a cigarette packet with an automatic magazine, you just pushed it in, you pressed a button and it popped out and you put another magazine in. And Tom gave one to Lowe and one to one of the other men. Lowe was the partner of Hilary and he was determined to give Hilary a fair crack of the whip, so he shot everything with it he possibly could, he came back with about a dozen magazines, all the high level stuff.

SP: What did they run. 50 ft

TJ: I suppose they were 50 ft, they may have been 70. But everything above the Western Combe was short by George and the other one and that saved our bacon. But when we got the material we shot everything all over the place to pad it out, we had to make an hour and a half of it, we put shots of the Coronation procession, Everest grave, anything we could think of to pad it out. Also we had to do it in something like 6 weeks and in that time, the minute the mountain was climbed everybody climbed onto the act Balcon, Korda, anyone you could think of it was their film, part of their empire.

SP: But you did quite well out of the 25% profits you got.

TJ: I didn't because by that time I'd left Countryman Films. I suppose Graham and Leon did.

SP: I met George Lowe a year or two later in the Highlander and he had strange stories of the two coming down from the peak and him with the camera filming them as they came down to the first camp which had people in extreme anger at that altitude, not wanting to be filmed because he hadn't done his hair or some extraordinary story of altitude sickness or something.

TJ: He was a very unusual man was our George, Tom wouldn't come down to the studio so we took on George as our, Tom was besieged by the Daily Express, the Times, Evening this, Ladies, he was feted all over London and he could never find time to come down to the studio and tell us what the material was. George though, had no money and it was all voluntary, and we took George on for a fee of £500 to come and tell us what it was about. So we got to know him very well indeed. He was always at Beaconsfield. He was the reason they managed to climb the mountain. He was a very independent sort of character. And I can't remember it in detail but in the final push Hunt was up on the South Cole and two sherpars and Hilary and Ten Sin, and George was down the Western Combe and George said sod this, I'm going up and I'm going to take some oxygen with me. They said you're not allowed to use the oxygen. George said I don't care what Hunt said I'm going to use the Oxygen. He took cylinders of oxygen and went up Face, this appalling cliff, got to the top and during the night a gale came up and they spent two nights in a tent. When they woke up on the day they were to start the climb one of the sherpars had got mountain sickness and couldn't move and it was George who carried something like 70 lb up to the final camp, if he hadn't been there they wouldn't have been able to do it. They were a very tough couple, physically tough. WE had a very short time. We cut it at Beaconsfield and I think we had four slash cutting copies, we had to cut the picture complete, for TEchnicolor to do the blow ups in something like three weeks, four weeks.

SP: And then you started working on the soundtrack while they were doing the commentary. Did they had a 35mm Technicolor blow up of it for cinema release

TJ: Yes. Muir went ahead with the music quite independently. Louis Macneice went ahead writing the commentary and so on. I didn't go home for about a month. I slept at the studio. It all worked out. I don't know how good or bad a film it is. It had a wonderful first night at the WARNERS and did very well on distribution I should imagine. Graham and Leon were now thinking of features. And it wasn't my field, I'd never worked in features,

SP: So you continued as a freelancer.

TJ: Yes I went back to freelancing. Yes Barbara and I started a company called Pilot Films and I've worked through that ever since, either as a freelance or making films of our own.

SP: Have you ever worked in commercials.

TJ: No.

SP: Or documentaries for television.

TJ: Only one which was the one I made for BBC Bristol.

SP: Was it a different kind of feeling. Did you work with a television crew.

TJ: No I worked alone. It was in black and white unfortunately. It was just at the change over period and they said they couldn't afford to make it in colour. Very early on I worked on second unit of The Private Life of the Gannet in 1934, 35.

SP: Who make that,

TJ: Korda, with Julian Huxley. I think it was the first short film which won an Academy award. Huxley we knew quite well, Grierson knew very well indeed, was the man behind it. Julian Huxley was behind a lot of films, he made a number of films for GBI and so on. And Grierson and I went out on a trawler from Grantham in Scotland, with 100 ft slow motion Newman with a 17" lens on it, that was one of the more impossible bloody jobs I've done, to get slow motion shots of gannets entering the water, because they had this theory that they fold their wings which they do but you couldn't really see it it was so quick. And Grierson and I went out for a week on a trawler.

SP: Was that steady enough. I don't suppose it matters if it's moving so long as you were able to follow the gannet.

TJ: But you only had 100 ft of film going through at 64 frames a minute.

SP: So it goes through rather fast.

TJ: We managed to get some of it. The shots are in the film, there are shots of gannets diving and closing their wings. Then I went with an assistant from London films to Skomer or whatever the island by Bristol, off the coast of Wales, where Lockley lived, the bird man, and we did all the filling in shots down there. I don't know if that started me on the natural history stuff, but I worked as a camera man on quite a few of the Strand Zoo Films, they were called Zoo films but they were also natural history some of them with James Fisher and people like that. Then we did the Countryman series were all natural history more or less. And in 1958 Ralph Keene and I made three half hour films about the environment for Julian Wintle, Independent Artists, they were very very cheap films. There was Sea Sanctuary which was Faroe Islands which was the one Edward Williams came on, River of Life which was about the Alaskan whales, and Winter Quarters which was about the East coast of Brittain in winter and from then on I stuck with conservation films for the rest of my life really.

SP: Easier than people.

TJ: Not entirely, it was the subject matter. One of the men I worked with was called John Clegg who was a great environmentalist, conservationist, he put me in touch with the nature conservancy, and I got on very well with Nicholson who was the head of the nature conservancy and I made their film, it was



partly that you could get them distributed in the cinemas, but it was mainly the subject appealed to me. I don't know how many I made, maybe 10 dozen.

SP: Did you shoot some of them yourself.

TJ: Quite a lot of them, not all of them. Some I shot.

SP: Some of that shooting needs an awful lot of patience and where it's easier your own patience, where when it's two of you you're both getting bored waiting and waiting.

TJ: A lot of it depends on who's your subject expert. I had a wonderful man called Stanley Cramp, one I made as a Pilot film production for Rank called Secret World, Stanley was the President of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds but he was also a customs officer in Soho. He used to go round all the sleazy joints doing whatever customs officers do there. But he was an absolute expert in birds, he ultimately left the customs service and became the editor of this fabulous series of books called Birds of the P Area which they've been writing for 20 years. The reviews of them are out of this world, he and Nicholson were involved in them. Stanley used to ring me up and say there's a black Redstart on the ruin which used to be no 32 Old St and the next is under the so and so. I just used to drive out, put the camera up, photograph it, drive back, it really was as simple as that. One day he rang me up and said there's an osprey fishing on the King George reservoir at Staines, go to the south east corner and if you get there between 6 and 8 in the morning or 4 and 6 in the afternoon you're bound to get a few shots of it. That was for that BBC film, I got into the car, drove down, I had a pass, drove up onto the bank of the reservoir, took the camera out and took it by the car, put a 17 " lens on, osprey comes down, I take him taking off. Most important were the people like that. Apart from anything else, it was very pleasant, I went to St Hilda and Inner Hebrides, Outer Hebrides, I saw more of Brittain than most people will ever see. We had very good sponsors as well, National Benzol, we made the Living Pattern which was a nature conservancy film. James Cameron wrote quite a lot of the commentaries on those. People Plus Leisure James did, The Vanishing Coast James did, I think James did one or two of The River of Life, my son in law did some of the music of some of them. They were usually subjects like vanishing coasts, changing forests, People Plus Leisure was about the strain on the countryside. One small interesting story about that one, the Duke of Edinburgh started a lot of the environmental stuff, he was behind the Countryside 1970 Committee, before that no one had really heard the word environment, he was the one who pushed it all through, so whenever we finished one of these films all you had to do was ring up Buckingham Palace and say would the Duke come and present it and the Duke was there before you knew what - come to the theatre and say this film is very worth while. Nicholson who was head of the Conservancy Association was very close to Edinburgh in some ways, we showed him People Plus Leisure which was right up his street, it was about people living in inner cities who couldn't see the countryside, and he said where's it going to be shown, we said mainly for schools, no they all went on television actually but then they were, National Benzole were really making them for schools, television was a bonus. We said



where's it going to be shown, and we said probably on television and schools. He said I'm going to the premiere of Born Free in two weeks time, I think we should show it there. So we said I don't suppose they would agree with it, he said what do you mean won't agree to it, of course they'll agree to it. So the premiere of Born Free opens with the premiere of People Plus Leisure, the Duke gets up and says you're going to see two good films tonight, the first one is particularly important, takes all the credit out of their show.

SP: How long was it.

TJ: 30 minutes. If he couldn't get there he used to send his son. It was most peculiar, Nicholson must have known him very very well indeed. That's really it.

SP: Note during pause John Taylor decided that was it and decided that was it. 18th March 1988