SIDE 1, TAPE 1

INTERVIEWER Stephen Peat

Recorded 14 March 1989

SP: When where were you born

[Higlams?]

AT: I was born on 13 May 1915 and I was born at home in Hyams Park in Chingford Essex, E4.

SP: What kid of parents did you have, were they professional people.

AT: No my father had come down from Lancashire just a little earlier and he ran his own firm. He had his own small firm up in Bishopsgate in the wood business. He did what they call turn wooden goods. What's an example of that - small wooden pepper pots. I think it originated because he was the manager of an American firm that was doing that sort of thing and I think he then took over London organisation.

SP: Were you an only child or was it big family.

AT: I had an elder brother and I had a twin brother. My elder brother, who's still alive now in Florida, in fact I saw him last year, he's 76, 77. And my twin brother is still working at RTE, Dublin. I've just retired. My elder brother was not in motion pictures or anything like that at all. When I was 21 he went out to South America where I had an uncle who had his own business, a conglomerate, quite a wealthy man. He was a slight ambassador in Cartagena. He was dreadful and my brother eventually left him and he finished up in Florida because he spoke so well he could look after all the Cuban labour and South American labour which was going into Florida during and after the war.

SP: Did you have ordinary schooling leaving at 14.

AT: We went to grammar schools. My elder brother went to Bancroft School in Woodford. It was a sort of walk over the hill near us and we really went to local schools but when we were about 11 the whole of us moved to Loughton in Essex which then was just a small town and we went to Loughton School. It was just an ordinary grammar school but now it's quite a big deal. Even then it was farmers and their sons and wealthy business people going. I went there from about the age of 11 until I was 16 and when I left - this dreadful school really - I suppose it's much better now - it was a very brutal sort of school. When we were 16 we left and we went to live in Kenton, North Kenton, near Sudbury. I was about 17, my twin brother went to Harrow Art School to do art. My elder brother went abroad. There was no money left for me for any further education. I said to my father I'd like to be a journalist, I'd like to go into Fleet St. He said I don't know anyone in Fleet St at all but I do know the man who runs the national cash register company in Tottenham Court Rd and there's a job in the mail department. I said you're joking. But I went there. One did what one fathers wanted. I went to this place which was quite extraordinary.

SP: What kind of wages was it, I bet it wasn't even as good as being a cub reporter.

AT: I thought it was dreadful. I was getting paid about £1 a week. The I went to what they call the service department. It was an American firm and it was the first instant I ever got what American salesmanship was really like and how you sell things. The sell was the big deal. You sold. They gave the utmost backing to all their travellers who went into pubs, who went into places with their cast registers, those lovely great brass things which are now going out of course. They're hiring computers and things that you put your card in and get your money. Anyway why I mention this salesmanship business is that to boost up the sales performance they had a small department with a man, a young lad who used to do cartoons and they gave prizes every month for the one who had won the most business. They used to put on little shows. I joined a little concert party in the organisation and we used to have some chap write up some funny words and we just used to do an old song and dance and it was to gee up these boys to go out and sell. And it was my first instance of what the Americans really mean by selling.

SP: If you were about 17 this would have been the early 30s.

AT: Yes. I don't know how it got round to this but we were all interested in films and films at this time were really silent and very formative. We weren't influenced an awful lot by Hollywood but we were influenced by Germany and UFA.

SP: When you say you were influenced by films do you mean you and your brother, you were still living at home.

AT: Yes I was still at home. And as I say we were all influenced by these German films. There was Metropolis and Caligari which had these wonderful settings.

SP: These weren't shown in ordinary cinemas, did you go to special shows or was Metropolis on release.

AT: No Metropolis was on release as far as I remember. There used to be a cinema I used to go to where I saw Man of Aran much later on. It was a cinema in Wembley not very far from the Lee Studios now, I think it was called the Capitol. We used to go there.

SP: You and your brother became very interested in films so what did you do.

AT: We started a film society. That was a collection of people who not only made film but also showed them as well. We were never very much, we never had a great membership but I think in some curious way

SP: Let's go back because of the fire bell. You and your brother were very interested in films and you started some organisation. Or you joined an organisation.

AT: No we started this organisation because we were all interested in films. We showed films and we made them.

SP: The Sudbury Film Society where you use 9.5. You had your own cameras, your own projectors, all this kind of thing. Presumably you had to hire films to show and somehow raise the money for raw stock for I suppose it was black and white reversal film. What sort of things did you do.

AT: We really did comedies and if I could give you some kind of illustration because it's always something which stands out in my mind. We were acting away and there's always chaps on punts with girls and if a chap fell in the water he would come up and a great big goldfish would go out of his mouth. It's that sort of idea. We didn't do an awful lot of these. I know my brother and I made one of our own later on which wasn't all that bad, I don't think. I've still got a copy if I can trace it down. What is interesting are the members. We weren't really a very big crowd of people but one of the first members was F. Maurice Speed who was a reporter from the Harrow Observer and he went on to start the first listings magazine which is What's on in London and by the time war broke out it was shipped to all the embassies in the world to know what was going on in London

SP: We was a member of the society just for fun.

AT: Just for fun. It was hoped he would give us nice scripts for our films. I don't really remember that he did that. To get the people together for shooting was an absolute nightmare sometimes. You'd grab a car for one or two shots and you couldn't grab it the next weekend to continue with the same shots because mother had taken it out for shopping and all that sort of thing and not a lot of people had cars in those days. it was trying to give a gloss to our films and often it was rather tricky.

SP: But working on 9.5 how did you edit. Presumably this was your first experience of editing. Did you have to do it by eye.

AT: Yes we did and I think we had a projector and we ran it on the projector and then just cut it together. Everything was lap joined and to do your opening credits was a nightmare because you'd like a little bit of writing across, a superimposition and that meant you'd go out and shot the background and wind the shot back and put the lettering in front of that. It was all a bit cumbersome. The camera itself was a small little camera. It was only a small thing made of bakerlite. The only professional man was this chap called Frank Midgeley and he was head of sound at the Welling Studios.

SP: Just before getting onto him didn't you do some things for Maurice Speed. That presumably would be evenings. Were you still working at the Cash Register place.

AT: I can't remember that. I suppose I must have been. I got to know London and the West End quite well and one of the pleasures with Maurice was that when his diary was very tight because he would go and see a lot of films. He would go the the pictures, go to trade shows, go to the theatre When he couldn't handle things he would say very kindly could I handle them for him. So I found myself writing up stage reviews, writing up film crits and that sort of thing and I always remember one occasion where I was asked to do a trade show at MGM in Wardour St or somewhere like that and I arrived at 9.00 in the morning and I was offered a glass of champagne. It took my breath away because I never drank or smoke or anything in those days.

SP: You must have been 18 or 19.

AT: Yes. He was nice. Strangely enough when I went later into things I

never saw Maurice again but he's still going because he publishes every year what is called a Film Review. He was doing one last year. My local library has a whole row of them which is a commentary on films. They've been going for a long time Maurice must now be rather old.

SP: Wasn't there on film you saw which was a bit startling in your youth about Casanova. Was that for Maurice Speed.

AT: No that was one of the films that were bought. I think Pathescope had a continental library and we bought for one Sunday showing

SP: For the Sudbury Film Society.

AT: Yes we showed this version of Casanova which had an actor in it who was terribly Mjouskine. He was a big romantic heavy in French films. Unfortunately the life of Casanova there were one or two scenes which today you wouldn't bat an eyelid but there was a bit of undressing and I know the elder members of the club were a bit upset about this. They thought it was a bit improper or that the Society should have a name for showing continental film in inverted commas.

SP: The professional who was a member of the society played a part in your future career. Who was this.

Welwyn!

AT: Frank Midgely was head of sound at Welling and he also handled our camera work.

SP: When you say head of sound at Welling what was its full name, was it Welling Garden City Studios.

AT: I don't remember what it was called. As far as I remember it was called Welling Studios and this was out in the country at Welling Garden City and it was in fact like a small aircraft hangar with a curved roof, and round the whole thing was built like cutting rooms, sound, mainten-ance, that sort of thing and he said to me why don't you come and work in films. We can offer you more money than £1 a week. I said how much would you offer me. He said £3 a week. I said done. I said look what have I got to do. He said I want you to be my boom operator whom I've just lost. I said what does a boom operator do. I'll tell you when you get there. But theoretically speaking you've got to do is get the microphone as near to the artist, favouring them properly. Just remember you cues, switch from one artist to another as they talk and we'll all be quite happy. So believe it or not I found myself going to Welling studios for £3 a week.

SP: Now did you still live at home and commute there. It was quite a way from where you lived.

AT: Originally Frank used to take me by car. Then I decided it was a better thing if I moved there so I just went into Welling Garden City and looked in the lists in the post office to the ladies who took in young gentlemen. And there were a lot in those days. It was very easy to move from one place to another and have a roof over your head. You just went down to the post office and looked in the ads in the paper where they all advertised people taken in, mostly widows. Mostly they were widows whose husbands had died, the family had all got married and gone away. She didn't want to give the house up so she had two or three bedrooms which she let out to young chaps who wanted to work and they were her sort of pension. Because in those days people didn't get pensions at all.

SP: What did your family think about your moving into the wicked world of films or didn't they have strong feelings.

AT: They had no strong feelings whatsoever. Indeed I think my father was father glad. No he thought it was rather good because we'd been wasting a lot of time sometimes with Frank Midgely being late and that sort of thing. We just thought it was a better thing. They were quite happy.

So I go there and what do I find. I find there are two studios there side by side. The power house, the electricity has a huge generating station next to it, it generates it's own juice and it was right next door to a building which still stands the Shreaded Wheat Building, a great big siloh there and we were next to it. I think the studios have been knocked down. They were taken over by another company and then destroyed.

Shredded

SP: What did the job consist of. Can you remember your first few days of work. All these things must have been very mysterious and strange. Because the equipment was heavy.

AT: I had huge boom and also the microphone was very heavy. It was like a shell out of a cannon because it had it's own condenser built in with it. This will astonish people nowadays because the recordist under whom I was working, I think there was a mixer called Stan Jolly who was ex BBC, and his recording room was right up at the top of the whole building, right in the apex of the roof. Next to him was another room where the camera operator loaded up with photographic film and the wires from the floor microphone went through a mirror galvanometer which flickered with the sound and he heard it not on headphones but with a loud speaker and if he wanted any comment on where I was making the boom or putting the microphone he would phone down to me. He would say I can't hear that artist or you're off mike when he turns his head. He sort of cued me through the whole performance.

SP: He phoned down between the takes. You didn't have a telephone with earphones and hearing it that way.

AT: I don't remember that we had earphones. There'd be rehearsals and he'd comment on the rehearsals and we'd proceed in that way.

SP: Could he see the floor or was he working in a room soundproofed.

AT: No it had glass so presumably he could look down and see what was happening.

SP: What kind of films were being made. What year was this approximately.

AT: I was there from '38 and then '39 and we got into the war and the war started late 39.

SP: Where any famous films being made there then.

AT: No It was very efficiently done because there was a system then what they call the quota quickie and this was by government law that if the Americans wanted to bring their films into England, and they'd been doing this from World War I when they were the only people producing films in England, so English people were very much brought up on American films and America wanted to bring their films into England and in order to do

that government over here said there must be an equivalent footage made over here which meant the Americans put aside money and these films were made. When you actually think of it, it wasn't a bad idea because it helped to train an awful lot of people not only technicians but also artists. What acting as far as artists were concerned what training did you get in front of the camera. It was not like it is today where you have television and all the apertinances of that. In those days there was no where where the artists could be trained in front of the camera and the quota quickie trained an awful lot of very good people.

I went there and in the first year we did about 8 of these and they all took three weeks to shoot, we had a week off where they rapidly tore down the sets and put up the new ones and we started again for another three weeks. Everything was cut to the bone. Nobody had much post syncing. You had to get everything. What shook me was that when I joined the BBC the BBC was making exactly that sort of film where's there's no messing about. You just go in and shoot, you get everything and you make it work and that's what they were doing at the BBC when I first joined them.

SP: These quota quickies who were the actors.

AT: The actors were very often rather dead people who were put in by the Americans, maybe an artist who had a reputation for drinking too much, had lost his public but they were given a chance to come down and work in this film. You had an American star. I remember one we did called Dark Eyes of London with Bela Lugosi, the Dracula man and there was an amazing situation. It was a horror film. The last thing he drowns himself in the marsh and there's a big close up of his head going under the water. I always remember this was left until the last shot in the film and we'd run into overtime something we never did. This was going to be shot on Saturday about lunchtime and they'd rigged up a set which was really a square, say 12 foot square of woods with canvas at the bottom so you could put a hole for a man's head in and we filled the rest up with vegetation, water slush, that sort of stuff and we all arrived on the Saturday to do this. At that time I was going to get half a crown for doing this and I was very pleased and there was as light air of jollity and I was wearing my plus fours which I never used to wear except on holidays so we were having quite a time. You won't believe this but Lugosi's head went in this thing and they started to light and it was getting nearest and dearest to 12.00 when we had pull break and the sparks were very quick on timing. It was they - we finished shooting when the sparks pulled the breakers and nobody else could do any work at all because they timed it very well. At night bank on 6.00 the breakers would be pulled and just gave them chance to whip over the railways lines to pick up the train going to King's cross, the Cambridge and Garden City Express. They used to get a pint of bear on it and bob's your uncle and the same was happening on the Saturday. Catch the 1.00 train and have a beer and be in London in half an hour. They had Bela Lugosi acting his head off in the last scene and just as he said the last line, Wally Thompson, the head spark shouted pull the break and everything crashed away and it was as black as ink and that was the end of the movie and poor old Bela Lugosi was left with his make-up and dresser to pull him out of this dreadful thing and dress him up and send him home. Meanwhile everyone had disappeared.

SP: If you had American actors was it an American company in charge.

AT: No they were English companies. There was one gentleman I met, one producer and to put it in perspective it was after I got back to the war

and we're really talking about the late 49s. But George King when I was doing some work for him and he told me that he'd been a great quota quicky maker and he made these films 8 a year or whatever it was and he got paid £8,000 and he sold them to MGM for £10,000 so he got £16,000 profit from the whole lot and this enabled him to make a few better first class features on his own. But what I was going to say about this chap he did tell me that he'd made these quota quickies for MGM and very often they were never even shown to the public. There was one I did which was shown at the Empire Leicester Sq nine in the morning till half past 10 when they're cleaning the place out but that was good enough for the legal side and there was nobody in the cinema. He said there was another film and right in the middle of making it the agent of other leading lady came to me and said if you don't pay her double the money I shall withdraw her from the production. George King turned round and said to the agent you go ahead and do it. I can fix you. He said right in the middle of production the agent withdrew the leading lady who was a blond and I immediately put in a brunette and we finished shooting and I never got any complaints from the audience saying the continuity wasn't right. You don't have to worry about continuity at all. I think this film was only shown Sunday nights in the Welsh valleys or something like that.

SP: Didn't some of these quota quickies have a second life after the war.

AT: I was working with George King in the 50s and he told me that an awful lot of these quota quickies, the copy right had reverted back to him so I could use them again. So I cut them down to half an hour episodes. I claimed certain stars were acting in them, it was probably James Mason in a walk on part or as a butler, that sort of thing, I then advertised them and American television was starting and steaming away for 24 hours television and they wanted a product so I cut my films down advertised them in an American trade paper, had an American come in and enquire about them and he said there I was with something I made my profit on and I was being offered quarter of a millions pounds for these things. I couldn't believe my luck. The man signed the deal and he was going out the door I said don't you want to see any of these films. He said no I don't No one's going to look at them at 3.00 in the morning in America and I don't see why I should waste my time now looking at any of them. It's terrible.

To revert to before the war. Who did I meet when I first went there. Ken Cameron, I met there. He wasn't with the firm. But he was there, like myself a young lad. He'd got himself a camera and he was taking shots of the films they were making.

SP: He wasn't a recordist.

AT: No he wasn't a recordist. He was later as you may remember to become a recordist. Can I just mention this. After the war there were no real recording studios in England and Ken who had become a recordist by then, it was Ken who originated going to town halls and testing the acoustics so they could use them for orchestral recording sessions and I remember Watford Town Hall was a great favourite place to record you orchestra in. Ken was there. We became friends. The film that was being made there was John Argyle's Mutiny of the Elsinore. John had done a very

SP: This was when you first went to Welling Studios in 1938 with a job as a book swinger and you hardly knew what a boom was and this was the film on the floor when you got there.

AT: When we got there the film was the Mutiny of the Elsinore and what John had done was acquire the rights of a French film and he was making an English version. He cast it and dressed all the speaking parts in the same as the French cast. Everytime you went into close up he used the English cast. In that way he was able to use the wreck the storm, you know that sort of thing. It was a very shrewd move. He later went on to make a musical called Kathleen Mavoureen which had about every Irish tune we all know. That was quite popular.

SP: Wasn't there a great influx of political and Jewish refugees through from Europe coming in then.

AT: They were starting to come through. There were really more of them after the war.

The very first film I worked on and the first lighting camera man I had to deal with was Friese Greene's son, Claude Friese Greene and he was rather fattish gentleman. I remember after lunch he was always rather drunk and a bit of tiresome customer. As far as the boom operator there was a constant war going on between the lighting operator and the boom assistant because the boom operator made nasty shadows on the wall some of which moved if you had to move the boom. And you had to assess what area the lens was taking in and you worked just above and outside that area. This after a time, it sound incredible, when I knew what lenses they were putting on I knew what areas they were covering. We were able to kept the arguing down to quite a good limit which helped things enormously. Because I do know that this has always has been a great arguing point and time wasting like mad and Claude Friese Greene didn't go much on this and there were one or two German cameramen I worked with later on after the war who were tough cookies. What they wanted was for the book operator to give way and never the lighting cameraman. I believe in American studios, certainly when talkies first started the sound department alway as came out second best and that's what lead to post synching. Certainly when you went out on location you post synched everything. it was just ridiculous. It wasn't until television came along and we had a different attitude to recording sound was all this sort of dreadful business put on one side.

The boom swinger was got at on both sides. There was the lighting cameraman saying there were shadows there and the man upstairs telephoning down telling you to bring the mike in closer. Absolutely and this sort of argument was going on all the time. And after a while it's very wearing to be on the set in those days.

SP: What was the sound system.

AT: It was a photographic system. In other words it was a system whereby photographic film was loaded up into a camera, the sound came through a galvanometer which made a photographic impression on the film.

SP: Was that the Ambiphone system.

AT: Yes We called it the Ambiphone which was really like the RCA system which was a variable area system as opposed to Western Electrics which was a variable density system. But it was different . The sound recordist was never on the floor. He was always upstairs talking to me on the telephone. I didn't know very much about him. I just had this solitary job on the floor really fighting everyone.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

SP: Just before the war you went off on another job and then back to Welling studios. That was where you met Warwick Ward. Can you remind people who he was.

AT: Warwick was the studio manager but he had a quite a big reputation as a romantic heavy in silent films, for instance I was told he was in Metropolis and I can't think what part he took. Certainly he made a reputation in the film called The Murder in the Red Barn where he was the letcherous squire. At the time he worked in Germany and they knew his and he worked in England and they knew him. Now he's packed all that up and he was the studio manager at Welling. When I went back to do another 8

SP: 8 quota quickies

AT: Yes 8 quotas. I thought myself £3 a week, I could probably get more money. They asked me if I'd like to go back and I said I'd like more money. They threw their hands up with horror but the people in the studios were very helpful, they called in the ACT which was quite anew thing.

SP: Had you joined already

AT: No I hadn't joined but I joined at the time and George Elvin was running it and Ralph Bond and my own number was 1733. Other people I worked with was 600 and things like that. They were very kind to me and eventually Warwick conceded.

SP: Did George Elvin come down.

AT: I think George came down. Had a jaw with him and that sort of thing. It was getting precious near the date when the film should get underway and it was better to pay me and get the unit underway then it was to not delay. And they liked me there. I never found this out till afterwards because I did save time on the arguing between the boom operator and the camera man. I kept that down to a minimum. That helped productivity and I think that was one of the reasons they wanted me back there. It certainly was after the war when I wanted to leave I discovered why they wanted me to be a boom operator because I saved them a lot of time. Anyway I go back for another 8 which lasted me till about war broke out. There were one or two camera man was it Ernie Stewart or Ernie Palmer who always wore plus fours, I think Ossie was there, Ossie Morris. There was a director called Thomas Bentley who went back to the silent days and he was quite a character Tommy. When he packed up and retired and went and bought a chemist shop in Brighton, he ran a chemist shop with photographic supplies. He was a nice old chap. I always remember, this may have been after the war, there was a terrific fight going on between him and Jack Buchanan and they were making a remake of The Smiling Lieutenant or whatever, about the navy, and Jack Buchanan used to think Tommy was an old fool and Tommy knew Jack thought he was an old fool. And do you know what he did. There was a comic in this film whose name I've forgotten and Tommy had his own revenge on Jack Buchanan because he gave all the close up to this comic and none to Jack Buchanan at all. He always turned round and said my films cut very quickly, I've a standard business. I shoot a scene and then I pick up the next scene on a shot nobody's seen before and it cuts beautifully. He was an incredible man. He thought a lot and he got the eyelines right. To get

the eyelines right very often the director would just stand the continuity girl in the way or an actor if he was around or an actress. He didn't do that. Tommy had his own gadget which was a music stand which he'd adapted leaving two of the strands at the top and these were two eyes, he'd stuck bits of paper on them and he'd say look at the eyes and the stand was by the camera and he was the only director I'd ever scene with this little gadget which was his own invention.

SP: Did the war start around this period. Was work in this period a reserved occupation.

AT: We'd stopped shooting but we weren't dismissed. They thought the sound department might do a small contract, subcontracting munitions parts like that for the war. Bet hat as it may we were kept on and I think we went back to shooting. I was still working with them as a boom operator until 1941 when I was 25 of age and I was called up and I volunteered for the navy. What we were doing up to that time, I think there was a film with Binkie Stuart and she was some revolting child who the British were putting up as the oppostion to Shirley Temple. And there was a Scotsman directing, a nice man. I remember we did a film with the same with Maureen O'Hara when she was called Maureen Fitzsimons as an actress.

To cut a long story short I volunteered for the navy and previous to that I was an air raid warden which I used to do after I finished work. Then I volunteered for the navy. Because I was in sound they said you can only be a wireless operator which I knew nothing about. Nevertheless I took a course and I became a wireless operator.

SP: Were you sent abroad.

AT: I was a sparks and I volunteered for the Royal Navy Patrol Service and that's on small ships which convoyed, anti submarine patrols with three trawlers. There were quite a lot of these fishing trawler converted. You won't believe this but we patrolled with the convoys from the Isle of Wight to the South of Wales, the south Wales ports and back again. We did it with the regularity of a train timetable for 8 months. Sometimes the E Boats came out from Jersey and had a bang at us but what happened was that where possible we used to pray for bad weather because in the bad weather the E boats couldn't operate. As I said it was quite extraordinary because we went regularly for 18 months. Then the last night I was with them we had a terrible night where the escorting destroyer got blown up by a torpedo and we were hospital ship that night and we went out afterwards, after we got the convoy into a harbour, Poole or somewhere like that, we went back to pick up these blokes. And I always remember there was no wind, full moon and the sea was like a lake and bobbing about in the water were 30 or 40 personnel from this destroyer with their lifeboats on, we went and collected all these chaps together and we could only get one lifeboat down because the other was absolutely riddled with fire from an earlier engagement. Nevertheless we took them home and it was sad. Some of them were dead by the time we got them on board and we had to undress them. Look after them and get them to shore. And then the skipper who was RNVR which meant in civilian life he was probably an insurance agent he said what a quick single for ambulances and when we came to operate the radio the signals weren't going out so I thought I'd find out what is wrong and I looked up and my aerial was perfectly alright. And eventually I climbed up on top, following the line through and just above the cabin and next to the

funnel I ran my finger down for the connecting line between the aerial and the set and I found that a bullet or something had gone through the connecting wire and disconnected it but it was still hold together by the rubber which covered the cable. I thought all I've got to do is join this up. So I whipped down below and got a knife and pliers joined the thing together and it worked again. We got the ambulance eventually.

When we got home to base there was a signal from the admiralty saying I was to attend a course in Aberdeen on maintenance of some special gear and I went up there and we had a great time. There were three schools of wrens up there learning signalling and myself and five other chaps didn'th ave to wear uniform at that time, we could wear civvies. We had a ball with all these Wrens. They were super. Eventually I finished the course. Just as we were nearly finished the course which I hoped we'd finished with my going down to some quiet little seaside place and see the war out doing maintenance. We had a chap come down, an officer, and tell us the whole course was being altered and we were to go on to air craft carriers and look after special gears on the aircraft. To cut a long story short I found myself on the Illustrious with half the fleet and we travelled for a long time through the Suez and all that. And we were based in Trinkamalee in Ceylon and we would raid the south Indian ocean looking for some mystical Japanese rader or something which we never found. In the course of this we were joined by the Americans on a ship called the Saratoga and Saratoga was one of the ships which went down when they tested the first atomic bomb at . There was ourselves and the fleet and I always remember this because we were on a bomber squadron on the Illustrious and when the Saratoga joined us she brought an awful lot of fighters so we were sent off the Illustrious, they put on the fighters.

They went on a raid to bomb the Japs and I was aboard at a RAF station at Trinkamalee and it was there just for one evening we were given a concert by Noel Coward who'd come down from the Burma road. When he was introduced he was accompanied by Norman Hackforth and the RAF officers who came out to introduce the programme were very macho and ha ha ha, these homos, oh you'll really laugh chaps. I thought Christ this is going to be really dreadful. But not at all. Noel and Norman came out and within ten minutes they s got the total male audience in their hands. He couldn't do a thing wrong. He was wonderful. A two hour show were every joke worked. He had us in histerics, dirty versions of his own poems. It was a great show and I suspect it was that sort of show which revived his fortunes when he went to Las Vagas much later after the end of the war. The was absolutely marvellous and at the end they wouldn't let him go.

SP: During the war did you hanker to get back to film work, to the naval film unit, did you know of it's existence.

AT: I didn't and I didn't know the Army Film Unit. I was a bit slow because when I came back I found that most of the people I was going to work with they'd all seen their time out with the Army Film Unit at Pinewood or something like that. That wasn't my thing at all. What I will say is when the European war ended we went very quickly to Rothside and we got put on another aircraft carrier and we went out to join the Americans in the Pacific who were just seeing their war out. And all our aircraft carriers went out to help them because their own aircraft carriers were susceptible for fires and for some reason or other ours weren't Nevertheless they had all these attacks by Kamikazi bombers, you know suicide Japanese and several of them went through quite back

through the life at the back and blew up.

We were stationed in the Admiralty houses and we used to listen to the American airforces Network from Manila. Al of a sudden one day they went absolutely haywire about a bomb being dropped in Japan. It was going to be atomic and you'd never be able to land on Japan for another forty years. Everything would be radioactive and goodness knows what. And they brought to the microphones every foolish idiot that could talk about them that they could. They didn't know what had happened. At 10.00 o'clock that night we tuned into the British Overseas Service and within three minutes we knew the whole bloody story and exactly what had happened. From that day on I've always had enormous admiration for the way the BBC handled things as compared with the way the Americans had handled the atomic bomb. It was a joke. We would never have done it like that. I then, what was it then, 46. I'd been five years in the navy and it was time to come home. Eventually I caught a ship but on the journey home it called in on Sidney and I'd been to Sidney before on the way out. But coming back I met an old friend of mine and he said are you going to stay with us. He said you can just walk off the boat and become the Australian and stay here. I looked round and thought wouldn't it be lovely to be here but then I looked round and thought where would I get a job in films. And there appeared to be only one company called Cinesound and I was hardly to make my mind up, I landed there and two days later I got my notice I was to catch the Warwick Castle and go home. The answer to whether I'd liked to have stayed there is yes if I could have found out some position in films because I still wanted to stay in films.

Or if I could have seen the future. I would have dashed off the surfers paradise and when their film boom started. Their film boom started out of their making their own commercials for the new television. That is when the boom in Australian films started. I was only there three days. The Warwick Castle was there, I came back to England. It was England of 47, cold miserable, no coal, nothing at all and I thought to myself what am I doing in England.

SP: I believe it was in Australia that you learnt what the war had been all about.

AT: Thank you for reminding me because that had been quite important. What I never understood was in the navy was that you were very badly informed about what was going on in England or Europe. We were never really told who was fighting who, how good certain people were, how bad certain people were. We were really told nothing. When I got to Australia there were what were called the news theatres. I went in to one of them to look at the news because they had something about German camps and I thought I'd better go and look at this. I remember it was a cinema where you couldn't smoke and I was having great difficulties with my pipe not working and the attendant kept coming up to me and saying you know you can't smoke in these cinemas. Nevertheless what developed on the screen as quite incredible. It was the first time I'd really understood what the war was all about and we were shown a whole film of the concentration camps in Germany, the holocaust, the freeing of all the camps, the Western people went in with cameras. I couldn't believe this because I'd never been told anything about the holocaust. It quite shook me. Later on when I saw Ken Cameron and told him this story. he said yes we made this film. I said you're joking. He said no, we compiled it as evidence to go to Nuremberg. Do you know we tried several musicians and none of them could stand looking at the film let alone writing music for it. He said the man who supplied everything and wrote the music for that film

was sir William Walton. He said he was the chap. In the last month coming back to England I learnt what the war was all about. I came to England and because I'd worked before I picked up my old job.

SP: Was the job held open for you.

AT: Yes I was able to walk straight back into it because it was Parliamentary law that your job was held over for you. Frank Midgely had disappeared. He'd left the department and gone with his father who was a very clever electronics man and they started a munitions firm which did electronics. He never came back and had his own electronics company and I think his son runs a small one today. He lives in the South of France. That was the end of Midgely. I had to get used to other sound recordists. There was a chap called Harold Beerson we didn't think much of. The recordists themselves were people like Bert Ross.

SP: Did you go back to being a boom swinger.

AT: Yes. The first thing I think we did was a film with Wilcox and Anna Neagle and Michael Wilding. What had happened is that Wilcox had spent most of the war in Hollywood and they came back to England and they made all those highly romantic films where Anna Neagle would be a wren and Michael Wilding would be a marine officer and they'd go in for a torrid love affair. Those sort of things. Bert Ross was the mixer at the time and he was having an affair with Pat Roc. Whenever he said you'd fix it all up. Whenever there was a rehearsal instead of phoning him up at the booth we had to phone up Pat Roc's dressing room.

SP: How long did you continue as a boom swinger or did you become a recordist.

AT: No I never became a recordist. I just want to mention before we get rid of it that when I came back I did a film with Anna Neagle and Wilcox, one of the film's that Lance Comfort directed down there was called Temptation Harbour and that was photographed by Otto Heller who like quite a number of Jewish German cameraman and quite a number of them came over from Germany, he did a lot of films, he was very good. I remember particularly that the principal actor, was a dreadful drunk and he came eventually, he went out and brought back a donkey into the studios and there was hell to play. His drinking was impossible and he said I want the unit to leave the set and I'll call you back in ten minutes times. I'll try and make sense out of this terrible drunk. Eventually it got so bad they called the agent onto the set. And said if you don't do something about this man we'll be in dreadful trouble. They told him to stop drinking and they allowed his dresser to supply tea in the afternoon and they found out that the tea was whisky. Eventually we finished the film and I don't think it's a bad film.

SP: There was a shop steward there, had you known him in the navy.

AT: No I got to know him because he was an ex navy man and in maintenance in sound.

SP: And what was his name.

AT: His name was Norman Cox. Norman had come into the department and he was the shop steward. I got talking to him as two ex naval people, I said I want to pack up being a boom operator, I've had it on the floor here. Right he said in that case I think I've got your job. He said what

do you want to do. I think it might be a good idea to go in the cutting rooms. Why I wanted to go into the cutting rooms I don't think I had anything fixed in my mind, I just wanted to get out into the cutting rooms, i think I thought it was nearer to decision making as to what the film would be like. So I said to Norman what can we do. He said you won't do anything in this place that 's really to your benefit unless you're a mason. I said you're joking. No he said I'm a mason. He said why don't you join the lodge, it's down the road. He said you must remember heads of department here are masons and you won't get anywhere unless you are a mason. I said I've got one religion I don't think I want another one. I thing that upset him a bit. But he was as good as his word and spoke to the bosses and I was allowed, I can think of now of the difficulties of getting me into the cutting rooms because as you can well imagine an awful lot of work in the cutting room was other companies, leasing companies coming to the place. So nevertheless he arranged it. He took over my job as boom operator and I went into a film, in the cutting rooms, called The Queen of Spades which Thorold Dickinson came in to direct. I say that when I originally went into the cutting rooms and it was all girls when I got into the cutting rooms, and I forget the producers name I do remember the script and the director was Rodney Ackland and after about three weeks the producers didn't think his work was any good so there was about a pause of about three weeks and the next director who came along was Thorold Dickinson who took over the film and took it right to the end. It was a lovely production. Once again Otto Heller was cameraman, I think Ronnie Anscomb was the operator and I was third assistant in the cutting rooms.

SP: This was your first experience of being in the cutting room.

AT: Yes and I really learned that cutting that cutting was the physical business of editing. It's so difficult from what it's like today because mag sound today and tape joining. When we were doing it in the Queen of Spades all joins were scrapped joins with heated foot joiners all photographic sound. Do you know when you went in for the dub in those days because it was photographic sound you sort of cleaned up your dialogue track and the dialogue track was then neg cut and new prints were struck of the dialogue track just to keep things quiet and that sort of thing. It was absolutely incredible.

SP: Why was it all women in the cutting rooms when the war was over for a year and a half. You would have thought a lot of editors would have come back to take up their jobs where they left off.

AT: I can't really answer that. Al that I can say is that they were there on this particular film.

SP: You met Carol Reisz. What was he doing there.

AT: I went on the set one day and Thorold turned round to me and said Alan can I introduce you to Carol Reisz, talk to him about editing. We turned round and there was Carol a young man but dressed in the continental worker's way with a huge flamboyant worker's cap. I can't explain it, it had a big brim and it was the sort of gear no Englishman in a thousand years would ever have worn and that was Carol. He subsequently went on to write a book about film editing and I thought it as a book quite excellent, very very good. Later on I got to know him more. At the time he was what you would call a film buff but his book about editing is enormously well informed.

SP: You met your wife at this point, was she working in the cutting room.

AT: She was first assistant to the editor who was Hazel Wilkinson. Hazel and I used to get on quite well together because Hazel was a Wren in the Naval Film Unit. I said Naval Film Unit I've never heard of it, what films did you make. She said I don't thing we made any films. We used to have Saturday's captain rounds. He used to waltz into the cutting room and tell me I wasn't displaying the spools as neatly as one should but I don't remember us ever making any films. Nevertheless when she came to edit and Audrey Bennett the lady I was to marry was her assistant. And Audrey, I regret knew much more than Hazel will ever know and it was really embarrassing because when it came to assembling the film with the director, Thorold, poor Hazel and he did nothing but argue. But it was the sort of experience which is awfully good for a young editor like myself because I could see all sorts of things going on and I think it taught me later on when you should argue and when you shouldn't. Certain things they argued about and I though myself why does she argue so much. Why doesn't she do it just very quickly and she'll see if it works or not. Those sort of thoughts, it was informative training.

AT: I ought to mention the assistant director was Jack Clayton who went on to do things in Hollywood, he did the Great Gatsby.

SP: As a third assistant what did that mean. Did you fetch and carry tins of film. did you have any actual work to do assembling the rushes.

AT: Yes virtually I was the dogsbody, there's no question. There was a girl there I lightly tagged onto and I wouldn't let her rest until she taught me things. I became quite a bore to her. What we did, Audrey the first assistant sunk up the rushes, they were then logged, they were then code numbered to keep sync. We did that ourselves on machines, I did an awful lot.

SP: Rubbered them.

AT: I did most of the rubber numbering and that was a nightmare because you had your own machines and if you didn't look after then the ink just jammed up all the numbers and you could see you'd done 500 ft and the number hadn't moved. You had to go back, wipe it all off and do it again. Nevertheless, there was synching up the rushes, numbering them and logging them and breaking them down and filing them and you filed them away under the slate number. Then Audrey would pull them out knowing what the editor was going to cut that day, scene something, Audrey would pull them out and hand them to the editor who'd run them through, cut the sequence and all the trims were wound up again and put back under their numbers. There were three of us doing this and we never stopped working at all, certainly why they were shooting we had to work quite hard.

SP: You didn't do your own neg cutting did you.

AT: No we didn't but don't forget - the neg cutting went to the lab - when Audrey subsequently became the sound editor and we had the business of assembling all the tracks for the sound editing side and so we followed the whole thing right through. It was quite interesting.

SP: When did you move on to another studio and why did this happen.

AT: What happened then, about the end of the forties, suddenly I was told that Elstree would be opened again. Elstree had been used as a store place during the war. Then when the war finished they had the whole place redecorated and suddenly we were told that everyone at Welling could go to Elstree if they wanted to and they were going to close Welling down. Everyone was going to go there, heads of departments and everyone.

SP: Was the new company ABPC

AT: Associated British Picture Corporation. It was started in the silent days by a chap called Maxwell, a Scotsman and it had gone on. They'd made some reputable films there, Blossom Time, that sort of thing.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

SP: Who went to Elstree

AT: Everyone from Welwyn. I think all those that wanted to, certainly all the heads of departments, props, carpenters, were all faces I had scene from Welling.

SP: You had new bosses were there any changes in wages.

AT: I can't remember that now. I don't think it was very different. But I was in a favoured position in some curious sort of way. They looked after me. Most of the editors and their staff and lots of people were taken on just for the film but they seemed to look after me and I did odd jobs. I could be put on a unit as third assistant or so something as a second assistant. They looked after me and I got to know everyone there.

SP: Who trained you or inspired you because there were no training schools for training editors or cameramen as far as I remember

AT: Yes you're quite right. I fought hard and I'd been told about this because somebody said to me that the best films all go to so and so and you're about 6th in line. Those films which so and so doesn't want to do he gives them over to K and what K doesn't want he gives them over to J. I didn't know how to organise myself and how do you learn to cut, you go permanently with some editor and learn from him and so on.

SP: You were still assembling rushes and some big things, Moby Dick was one.

SP: Yes I was put in there to organise the whaling stuff which had come from the Canaries which Ossie Morris was shooting and I thought I'll stay on this thing. No Ralph Kemplen came along with all his staff and said cherio Alan. I said ABC want me to go on something else so I can't really grumble. I then went on to Regie Mill's film and he was the principal cutter for the Archers, the Powell and Pressburger. The film was called Oh Rosalinda

SP: Were you second assistant

AT: Yes, I was the second assistant. But what my job really was, it was just at the time when mag tape was coming in and editors didn't like it. I remember Regie who is a very good editor said I can't cut magnetic tape, you can't see anything on the tape, whereas with the old photographic film you could see crescents and lows, and you could cut. He said I can't cut between the words, I can't see , so they were going to go into dub with magnetic sound because it was a musical and they wanted better sound and it was my job to get a rushes print on magnetic and see it was numbered exactly as the photographic film was being numbered so when it came to Noreen Ackland who was going to lay the tracks, When she came to do it she just had to match her numbers against my numbers so she could cut the magnetic film. That's how we went on.

SP: Did you write on the magnetic film with a Chinacraft pencil exact beginnings and ends of dialogue so that people who are used to seeing it could see what they were doing.

AT: Not totally.I think I did that once or twice. Be that as it may, I don't think I got on awfully well with Reggie. Yet when we finished the film, Regie was a very snooty sort of chap he used to talk like a senior

prefect talking to the junior fag and I used to think I'm not really making out on this thing at all although I was doing the job for him. Afterwards he said come to Pinewood with me Alan because we're going to make the Battle of the River Plate. Maybe I should have gone but I didn't. There are all sorts of other things which I must mention there. One of the jobs an assistant had or I had as an assistant, there were two jobs which were rotten but I did them. One was preparing all the material for making trailors and the other was the doing the musical cue sheets for the composer and they were both rotten jobs. The one on the trailer and they always seemed to have the same trailer people, an elderly lady used to be with one of the companies and wanted the material. I used to do that for all the films. You had to dup up the music and give them the material they asked for. It became so routine that in the end on the last two or three films she used to get me on the phone and say Alan will you just order up the stuff for the trailer and I did it for her. I knew exactly what she was wanting.

SP: All the time you were learning.

AT: There's no question about that. This other job about doing the music cue sheets. When you had shown the film to the musician he and it was decided we'll start the music under this line and we'll carry it right across these next two sequences and we'll finish with the last chord of music as the car crashes against the hedge. It was that sort of instruction. They'd decide where the music was to be put and in order to remind the composer you then did these cue sheets and that took quite a time to do.

SP: Did you do it with a stop watch or measuring on the film.

AT: No you measured it on the film, so many feet, it went from 200 to 450 and inbetween where all the cuts were and pertinent information. That all went by the footage measurement and they had cue sheets that would change tempo at the time. I don't think it's done nowadays because you can quickly bash off a video and give it to the music man and he can do it by himself. Nevertheless we had to do it which brings me to the awfully interesting man who was head of music at Elstree Louis Levy, who was quite a character. He and I got to know each other quite well. He was a London Cockney chap from the East End and his father used to play the violin and I think the whole family used to dress up as Zigeuner gypsies and do gipsy tunes. It was ridiculous. Here were half a dozen Jewish Cockneys doing gipsy tunes. Nevertheless he was on the music hall doing this and then he got this job as head of music.

SP: Was there a permanent orchestra.

AT: No they were all sessions men, all hired for the time but when they weren't working on the session they could be working in symphony orchestras, jazz bands, you name it. They did very well and I think they got paid in cash and it was always said they made a lot of money which the tax man didn't know anything about. What used to astonish me was the difference of approach to music then compared to now especially in the media. Now it's all desperately long haired and intense people. But in those days I knew all the musicians and they were the biggest rabble of people of people you've ever come across. An I always remember them as I was setting up the orchestra they would be wanting to flog me second hand cars and dirty postcards and when Louis would come on an conduct them, maybe a first run through, he didn't do a lot of conducting, he used to eff and blind at these people and they'd take it. They were quite

wonderful. They could look through the thing and Louis would say its better if it's a half a tone lower, take it half a tone lower from K and they just used to do it without batting an eyelid. They could do anything. I thought as musicians they were quite wonderful. Louis was a bit of a recording king. and he'd made quite a name through running his own orchestra and doing light jazz and it was called Louis Levy and his silver strings and his gimmick was to have 20 violinists all playing in unison the melody and it sounded at the time quite staggering. He was an interesting man. When he died all Wardour St came out and walked behind him. He was a nice chap I liked him.

SP: These years at Elstree were early 50s or late 40s.

AT: Late 40s, early 50s.

SP: You said you met your future wife at Welling. I suppose she moved to Elstree as well. Were you married by now.

AT: No we weren't married then and I can't remember where I put in in Elstree. At one point we were married and I remember having to come by train, I was living with her and her parents in Hampton Hill and I used to come over by train in the morning and I used to have to get up by 5.00 o'clock in order to be able to get to Elstree. There were quite a number of studios at Elstree, there was not only APBC, but there was also MGM just up the road. It no longer exists anymore, with a huge great big set of crusaders castle for some costume play. Then there was Joe Rocks which is now the studio where the BBC are. There was British National or was that Joe Rocks. What I ought to tell you is how did you start editing. There was no chance of editing at all except one area, when they did artists tests it was what they used to do with artists tests they used to shoot one scene with actors from the script and this was actually edited so you had a complete sequence. Not only did the director shoot a little scene but the actors had a chance to be in this scene and they could see how they acted. There was a producer there called Victor Skedetsky who too had left studios in Vienna and via Paris he had come to England and he was directing there and he gave me my first chance. There was a test coming up for a film and he said you come and cut.

SP: When you say a test you meant a whole lot of tests of the actors

AT: I remember they had all the artists together they wanted to consider into the one scene, it was a night club or something like that. I remember I got some music and it was quite extraordinary the dubbing theatre. The moment the music came on everything came to life and I always remember old Skedetsky turning round to me with his thumb up, saying great we're home and dry. Ever since then it's one of those great moments you have when you really make a film. From that time on I was given all sorts of jobs like assembly editor. I was put on a film as the film was being shot I did a quick assembly and say for instance Dickie Best or Max Benedict would then come on the scene and cut it as he went. I remember Max who was a Czechoslovakian and had a big career in films over here, it was funny there were quite a number of foreign people there. The producers sponsored people to get hem out of Europe. I remember the Boultings

SP: That would have been before the war

AT: I think it was after the war.

SP: They wouldn't have managed to survive the war in Germany.

AT: No I suppose not. Max is dead now. I helped him quite a lot.

SP: Did you ever go on location so that when the rushes came every night and you had to sync them up so the director could see them at the local cinema or were you always at the studio.

AT: No I was always in the studio but with the BBC in the 60s I did that sort of thing.

SP: Didn't you then go to Pinewood.

AT: I packed up here and then I just went freelance. It was an attempt, I thought I'd been long enough with BIP and anyway people offered jobs, that sort of thing. I don't remember much they were. I was at MGM for a film, what the hell the film was I don't know. Then all of a sudden a colleague of mine, a first assistant, Guy Howarth, said that Alan do you want to come with me, I've got a massive job. George King who was the quota quickie man, he's made a series of 12 films called the Gay Cavalier and he said they are for transmission with the new Rediffusion set up for television. You'll cut 7 and dub 6 and I'll dub 7 and cut 6, that sort of thing.

SP: That must have been after 54 when Rediffusion started. Did you then go to Pinewood after that.

AT: No I never went to Pinewood. But I went to MGM.

SP: When were you connected with anything to do with Hitchcock.

AT: That was at ABPC. That is an interesting story.

SP: That was well before Rediffusion, you were still a first assistant with Ted Jarvis.

AT: I must tell you about Ted Jarvis. Ted I liked because his experience. He was a long established editor and his experience went back to the silent days and he was still working for ABPC. They sent him to UFA, he put in the English subtitles and BIP as I supposed it was distributed it in England. I always remember asking him what was the one which gave him the most trouble. He said Pabst Pandora's Box. It didn't matter where we were sending this to, they always wanted something cut out which was offensive. With silent films it wasn't too much of a worry because you could cut out a sequence and then you'd manufacture a subtitle which would be your bridge. Nobody would ever know the film had been cut down for censorship or things like that. When you got to talkies you were running in trouble. Films suddenly became a national thing. Previously where you got artists like Chaplin, Chaplin was known all over the world for his silent films, China it didn't matter where but with talking films it was a different story. Nevertheless ted himself I don't think ever go quite familiar with the technique of talking pictures.

I do remember he was on a film called Stagefright which Hitchcock had come from American for. Hitchcock had had quite a time with the early BIP films and he was asked to come over to do this film with Dietrich and people like that, see the new Elstree studios and Ted was going to be his editor. Ted was his editor and Hitch was brought over and he shot the film and conducted a running battle with management as to how bad they

were. He used to complain like mad if his film wasn't serviced properly. He said if I ask for a doorknob in Hollywood they bring a truck along with a million of them, now I can't get a doorknob, that sort of thing. He then had a system whereby, to shoot was a bore for him, he'd worked everything out in his mind and it was such a bore, nevertheless he used to ask Ted, Ted Jarvis his cutter, to supply a frame of a certain scene, scene 1, 42, give me the end frame, that sort of stuff. Ted's assistant used to go . .

SP: Was this you.

AT: No I was working on the cutting room next door. Eve Catchpole and Ted Jarvis were in the cutting room servicing it, they were asked for a frame and Eva took it on the set. That was fine and then on one occasion she brought the wrong frame on and Hitchy gave her what for and this delighted him because he had this dreadful habit of denigrating women and upsetting them. It got quite a thing he would ask for a frame, she would bring one out and he'd always declare it was the wrong frame, she'd burst into tears and he'd just love every golden moment of making a girl cry and it was awful. She was telling me about this. I said is there anything I could do like go on the set and punch him on the nose. She said you can't do that Alan. I said you know what I mean. Alas she stuck it out. Ted never got to know about film. What she did tell me is absolutely incredible. She said he cut Stagefright and lip read all the dialogue and more or less cut by lip reading the scenes, by lip reading the scenes he more or less cut them together. Then she took over the scene and put the actual sound with it and maybe just extended or reduced a frame because he'd slightly misread the thing. What a way to make the movie.

SP: Extraordinary because she would have to lip sync.

AT: She was doing it with numbers. She put the edge numbers together. There was a director called J Lee Thompson and he did quite good films. He did a farce with Max Benedict and Max wasn't there. Max had assembled it and had an arrangement whereby he had three weeks holiday. Lee came around and said Alan whilst Max isn't there we'll handle that film and we'll really do it. We went through this film and I said for God's sake, if Max comes in, do square him and say you did it. We went through this film and took miles out, we made people go up and down stairs through doors, we made them go so fast it wasn't true. When Max came down he didn't bat an eyelid. Quite extraordinary, he just accepted it.

SP: You were gaining a lot of editing skills and experience. Had you become a full editor by now.

AT: Not quite.

SP: Did you watch a lot of tv.

AT: No. I never finished the story about George King.

SP: We're leading back to that, this is George King around 54/55.

AT: As I say Guy, and Guy was an interesting assistant,

SP: Guy

AT: Guy Howarth. I knew him as an assistant with Dickie Best but he

must have left Associated British and phoned me up and said will you come and join me and do the Gay Cavalier. I said I think I will. He said we're doing it at Clapham Studios.

SP: Clapham Studios, where's that.

AT: It was some little set up in Clapham where they had dubbing theatre and cutting rooms. What he'd been doing was, he said I've had a terrible time Alan, he'd been in Paris cutting a film of Orson Welles. What a bugger he was. I never got paid. I had to sue him in England afterwards and I kept him out of England and he still didn't pay and he couldn't come into England because they'd clobber him for this debt. He was dreadful. Whilst we were in Paris he'd say meet Rita, that's Hayworth his wife, and we'll all go and have lunch at the Hotel, a very expensive place. Half way through the lunch he said he had the head waiter come up, ask him to go on the telephone, he'd leave the table and he never come back and that would leave me who hand't been paid to pay the bill with Rita and pay Rita's fare and his. So he said I asked Rita what was it like to be married to a famous man like Orson Welles and she turned round and said oh it's absolutely dreadful. When he gets up in the morning he always expects a round of applause.

SP: You were busy all the time late into the evening probably, did you have time for a television set in where you were living. Did you know about television, Not that many people had sets in the early 50s.

AT: I don't think we did. When we went to Hampton Hill, we bought a house there at Hampton, that was about a year after we got married and we got two children and I went into the house when they were about two years of age when they joined the BBC, that was 57, that works out about right.

SP: Did you watch television much.

AT: We had a set and we did watch television.

SP: Just for relaxation.

AT: Yes we didn't think much about it. I moved with my wife and we had two children in a house in Hampton Hill and we acquired a television and I seemed to look at it but it wasn't much I thought about really. There was only one channel BBC.

SP: Until 1954 when ITV started.

AT: Yes, I suppose we must have watched a bit of ITV. Nevertheless Guy who I was talking about Guy suddenly said to me do you want to work on this Gay Cavalier thing. I said yes I will. I did this. It was at Clapham Studios which I think is now closed. And the dubbing mixer was the worse mixer I've ever come across.

SP: This was a series or series being made for Associated Redifusion.

AT: Yes 1955/56. And it was 12 episodes, costume play and it had been originally been shot in Pinewood by Lance Comfort and rough edited but not very well. George King who was the producer and was also a quota quickie man had taken the whole thing over and wanted us to really give it polish and do things properly. That was where I met George and told me what it was like for quota quickies and how he had made a fortune from American television. We did that and they were liked and accepted. Then

Guy said to me would you just work in commercials for six months and hold the job down. I think he was going out to see Austen again, and when I come back I'll take it over from you. I said absolutely marvellous and I did this and I went to come firm in the strand who were making commercials and I didn't know a thing about commercials. In fact I didn't do the job very well. I have to admit I was a total failure when it came to cutting commercials. The advertising people used to drive me bonkers and I used to hate them but to cut a long story short and I discussed this with my wife, if I didn't get out fast, they'd sack me and my great horror was I didn't get out fast enough and they sacked me after a fortnight. I was out of work over Christmas. It must have been Christmas 56 and I went round looking for a little work. And just after Christmas I had Alan Lawson, suddenly phone me. Alan said I hear you're out of work. I didn't know any of these people, and they said will you come over. I went over there and went to Ealing Studios and met the people.

SP: The BBC hadn't been very long in the ex Ealing Studios had they.

AT: No. I tried to find out precisely when Ealing was sold to the BBC but it could only have been two years at the most and then it had been Ealing

SP: Because the offices were in the front lodge.

AT: They were still there when I went there. You should have a board and they took me into the up of things, rustled up a board quickly of about 5 people and before I could say Jack Robinson I was home and dried.

SP: What were you employed as and were you on contract.

AT: I was employed on a three monthly contract as a film editor. When I told my old friends, one studio manager in particular at Elstree that I'd gone into television he couldn't believe it. He said you haven't Alan have you, they're just a bunch of amateurs, they're hopeless. Do you know the general feeling was for feature people that the BBC was a bunch of amateurs and the less feature people had to do with them the better for them. Nevertheless, I got there and liked it enormously. The atmosphere I liked.

SP: This was all in the narrow little cutting rooms at Ealing above the studios and all 35mm with optical sound. Shortly afterwards it was mag sound. We were still foot joining, lap joins and what used to worry me enormously a lot of transmitted stuff would go out in cutting copies and if the joins were badly made on transmission you used to see them jump. It was really too much - I could understand what the feature people thought. Nevertheless I tried my hardest and eventually I got them to neg cut and to get decent prints and gradually I think we improved an awful lot of things. I did two versions of ~~Dickson~~ Dixon of Dock Green with I remember mag recording had just come in and I was talking to the producer and he said I hate this magnetic, artists knowing you're recording will not give their best performances, I hate it. In those days to make any cuts you had physically to cut the tape and join it together. Old Douglas Moody who was directing Dixon of Dock Green

SP: You mean you didn't have tape joins.

AT: No. There was a different air about making films. There wasn't as much hoodo as in feature films and I remember talking to a couple of

cameraman and sound recordist and I said to them what have you done today. They said we've been out on a bus, we've shot a whole scene on the top of a bus and its come out very well. I said what, in the features you'd never have gone out on a bus and shoot. In features, it would be a rocking set, you would have to discuss with the cameraman and the director, BP plates, general background one, another change for different angles, you'd have all the business of back projection, an enormous technical side to record indoors and here were the BBC, a couple a young chaps and they were getting sound by just going on the top of a bus and I said to myself this is a place that's really getting it right. I worked there for a year and when I got to the end the head of editing said don't worry Alan we'll just keep renewing it and I thought I'll go for a permanent job here. Less money than I was earning but I was a father with a house and all that sort of thing and I thought let's have a permanent job. So I put in to be permanently at the BBC to have a job and at the end of Christmas 57 I worked on Handel's Messiah when I couldn't believe what they asked us to do. I had to supply film for certain sequences and the man expected me to do this by just humming the tune. I said please let me have a recording and I said we can do this really well. The film wasn't people singing, it was shots of religious artefacts and pictures, I remember they had a rehearsal and I got some very nice film and I was able to cut it to a large section to this track he'd taken off a gramophone. We had a rehearsal

SP: For transmission, was there going to be a live orchestra.

AT: Yes it was life transmission in those days. What was happening was the orchestra was coming from some studio and telecine and television cameras were in another studio, Lime Grove or somewhere like that, it was all going to go out live. After the first rehearsal, let's say Sunday afternoon and the transmission was in the evening, we had a rehearsal and he turned round to his conductor and said we're two and a half minutes slow you better knock off two and a half minutes off it. The conductor said that's great, we'll knock off two and a half minutes. On transmission they knocked off two and a half minutes off.

SP: They just played it faster.

AT: Yes they just played it faster and it was bloody marvellous.

SP: Did the conductor see the film as it was running through.

AT: I think he had a monitor. What I was going to say just to give a cutting point. The cameraman whose name I've forgotten said after transmission, said we've got some good reviews for this Alan, smart editing and all that sort of business. It was all a joke, just pictures. Nevertheless the cameraman and I got very good reviews and the front office turned round and said to me in January Grace Wyndham Goldie wants to start a programme on the arts called Monitor, do you want to be on that. I said myself better that than nothing and you won't believe this, the first tranmission was on the Sunday, on the Monday I went up to Portland Place for my appointment and as I opened up the door to go in there David Dunhill who was the chairman said to me Alan we all loved you film on Monitor last night, so I thought I've got the job so I just sat there for quarter an hour and talked and I got the job.

SP: So you were on the staff.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

SP: ...When we left you you had just done your first Messiah performance and had just been for your board.

AT: It was my first Monitor, perhaps I should backtrack.

SP: So you worked on Monitor just before you worked on the staff. How did that come about.

AT: What happened was that I'd made quite successful film on the Messiah which which went out over Christmas and I was phoned up by the front office to say that Grace Wyndham Goldie who was the big documentary film producer at the time and they said Grace wants to start a programme about the arts and they called it Monitor.

SP: Did they call it Monitor from the start.

AT: Right from the start. I suspect that title came from Cathy Dove. Cathy Dove was the original producer of Monitor. I remember her coming into my cutting room with a collection of young children's faces, 35mm black and white, looking questioning in the air for answers from arts programmes and things like that. In fact they were never used. I roughly cut them for her, she took them away, broke her leg and low and behold resigned from the programme. She left Huw Wheldon and Peter Newington both producers to argue out among themselves who was going to be top.

SP: Was Huw Wheldon already on the programme working under her or was he appointed when she left. I think he was on children's programmes.

AT: I believe he was. I was working at Ealing and all this was taking place at Lime Grove and this little detail I wouldn't know.

SP: Just as a foot not Cathy Dove became Mrs. John Freeman. I met her years later after I finished with the BBC and was independently editing. Thames Television wasn't it and she was doing their afternoon's women's programmes.

AT: Cathy disappeared and that left Huw Wheldon and Peter Newington both arguing as far as I know as to who was to become producer. It was a curious state of affairs because with them was Jack Ashley who was later to become well known as the deaf member of Parliament, a charming man, he was in the running but looking always totally out of place and I rather suspect he had originally come under Grace to go onto Panorama which she's set up two year's previously or go on to a very well known magazine programme which went out every night called I thing Tonight and that's where people like Mike Tuckner, Jack Gold were editors for wonderful people like Alan Whicker and James Cameron and Cliff Mitchelmore. Grace had started these programmes and she now wanted to do this thing about the arts and she was setting up the whole business. It was called Monitor and Wheldon, I always remember, who'd been on Children's programmes, and Wheldon himself was very very keen on making the programme successful. There's no doubt about this because after his children's programmes he did a couple of others, one with Lustgarten and his red headed girlfriend, viewer's problems answered, like an aunt annie column and that wasn't successful at all. He was really keen that they became very successful. But he was on the arts programme but his problems was that he didn't know a thing about the arts but he had Peter Newington coming up behind him helping him in that direction.

SP: Were you the only film editor.

AT: Yes I was the only film editor on the whole thing.

SP: Was it mostly studio. It was a fortnightly programme you must have had a lot of work to do.

AT: I had a lot of work, I don't think I ever stopped. For seven years I never stopped. And we did lots of big things. If I couldn't quite cope I let my assistant who was very shrewd. I had some very nice assistants and she would do them. There was a film about Durrell for instance which was being shot in Niehms. Huw didn't want to do Durrell. He was convinced he ought to do Durrell because he'd come to the fourth book of the quartet, a curious thing happened on that one because David Jones went out to shoot Durrell and David had convinced him it should be done as a good literary thing and Huw didn't want to do because he thought Durrell was a dirty book writer, pornographic and didn't want to do it. So he went out there and I saw him back at the Ealing Studios on the Monday and I said Huw I can't believe this, what did it go like. He said oh it was terrible. Durrell did nothing else but talk about things like time continuum and we didn't know where we were. Cut it down to ten minutes. On the Wednesday David turned up with the rushes which we sunk up we looked at Wednesday afternoon and I thought they were terrific. I phoned Huw up and said I'm terribly sorry but we can't cut this down to ten minutes, it's very good. It's one of the best things you've done. He said alright do whatever David says. Don't forget it was going to go out the following Sunday. What I was going to say I didn't cut it myself because I was busy with something else but my assistant, thingamabe MacDougell, she was the Ealing scriptwriters daughter. She now cuts for the United Nations. She cut it. And of all the things which went out over the weekend and all the articles that were written about Durrell we came out on top which I thought rather good because I'd proved my judgement was correrct.

SP: Over the years Monitor changed in style. It had become more and more on film or was it a mixture of film and studio except for special programmes.

AT: Yes. Huw was always determined that it would be really a film programme, but what he didn't want was what they do so such of today, a journalist coming along, punishing a microphone under a chaps chin and asking him a series of questions which the chap answer as best he could. Huw wanted the questions in voice only and no microphone every to be in front of the camera

SP: So that was something new in style.

AT: Yes in itself was something new in style. So what happened was that we got into the habit of sort of film stories on an artistic theme. It didn't sort of start like that but it gradually evolved like that and they were doing a system which Grace Wyndham-Goldie had invented for her magazine programme today. Which is we were working on 35mm black and white, each reel was 10 minutes and directors were supposed to go out with half an hour's film, three reels of 35mm from which they would shoot their story, this would be shipped to their chief editor at Lime Grove who would take out 8 minutes and make and 8 minute story out of half an hour material. Tonight did that all the time and their directors very often wouldn't come into Lime Grove for 6 months. It was all shipped to

Lime Grove, Tony Essex chief editor assigned an editor to it, they cut it it was put up on the shelf, when Baverstock wanted to bring it out and produce that's how it was done. I have a shrewd suspicion that that method was to a certain degree adopted by Monitor. So what we had was short 8 minute items on any subject that a director sell Huw on.

SP: You established a style between 3:1 ratio which was remarkable because other BBC departments weren't working in that way. Documentary departments generally recognised a ratio of 14:1 which was totally different.

AT: On 35mm.

SP: I'm talking about 16mm.

AT: We were always on 35 at that time. Working under that system was a director called Schlesinger and he had come down from university to get a job with Grace and his film at university was about the black death and it was rather horrendous, nevertheless he gripped Grace. She gave him a job on Tonight and he never got on with Tony Essex, supervising editor because Tony did not want directors coming into the cutting room and Schlesinger was saying but nobody can cut my films unless I am there to put the shots. And he would shoot the sort of thing like the flower show at little Ebdon or some sort of fete and right in the middle of the Vicar saying I now declare this fete open right in the middle of all that country stuff he'd cut to a shot of a man picking his bottom or his nose, this was what Schlesinger wanted to go into the cutting rooms and tell his editor where to put these. But Tony Essex didn't want it and John Schlesinger pulled out and got the reputation of being very difficult to work with. Nevertheless he turned up.

SP: Was he a freelancer.

AT: Yes he was a freelancer. He turned up on Monitor and it was always said that it changed his life because all of a sudden he could do the kind of things he wanted in the way that he wanted to do them and he made his own reputation and that of the programme as well. Then he left. He did a wonderful film on Waterloo Station

SP: Terminus

AT: Yes and he left to make Darling or something like that. But I think the last one he did for Monitor was the biography of Benjamin Britten, beautifully shot at Aldborough and that was where he was joined by Humphrey Burton. I always remember Humphrey had come down from I think BBC Sheffield, he was sound .

SP: Can I while I think about it.

SP: Schlesinger obviously when he worked with Monitor, you were the editor which brings me to these other people, the relationship, your relationship with directors, how did you go about it. Here for instance was Schlesinger with a very definite ideas, Did you find this invigorating. Did you each improve on each other's ideas. How did you operate.

AT: That's interesting because you've reminded me of something. He came to to Monitor and he shot for his first item on Monitor I want to got up to the circus at Olympia and shoot small circus, when I got onto the programme

I was called to the front office and told the first material you're going to work on is Schlesinger and you have to be careful with Schlesinger, he's a bit dangerous. Now look at this material of the circus he's done. Now telecine can't accept all this lights flashing in front of the camera while acrobats are doing high wire stuff, we can't have this, you better go very easy on this. I said golly if we cut that out we're not going to get anywhere, we haven't got a movie. We'll leave this to you Alan. Schlesinger turns up and he turns out to be totally charming. He told me what to do, he sat down besides me, he cracked jokes, we assembled the stuff, I never told him he might have problems with telecine. I thought to myself somehow I think we can take a chance on this. Indeed we did take a chance and it was perfectly alright. From that day on I thought I'll just take it very cooly if the expert tells me whats happening and it was the same with an awful lot of people.

Can I just rush on. So the relationship with Schlesinger was a great relief on his part because it wasn't a bit like with Tony Essex. We got on very well together. And the last thing he did was this wonderful film about Benjamin Britten and who should join him on that but Humphrey Burton and when Schlesinger came back really Humphrey had virtually taken the whole thing over. Even though he was a sound man, he totally understood what you do with film and that sort of thing and from being an assistant he finished off as associate producer and he helped us with that. Then Schlesinger left us to go into features. Darling was one of his early ones and he asked me to come and to it. He said just think you'll be in a film studio. I said I'm not awfully interested. Not interested in making a feature. No. I had had ten years of being on the boom and being a editor and I thought it's not on. I'm liking what I'm doing with the new television. If I go back into features, you'll cut Schlesinger's and then you'll never do another thing for four years. I'll be cutting bloody Dracula up on Wardour St lucky to have the job. I couldn't see it as a future. He could see it as a future because Wardour St was going to be Hollywood. Nevertheless I didn't do Darling and it took Schlesinger 4 years to do his next film and I was quite right. So Humphrey joined us.

SP: What was Humphrey's background.

AT: As far as I know it was sound, Radio Sheffield, doing mostly opera, classical pieces. Because Schlesinger left us Wheldon had to hire another chap. So he hired Russell. I was talking to Huw one day and said what did you see of Russell's work, tell me what he's done. He told me that he had done one film about Lourdes on 16mm and he'd done another film, something angel,

SP: It was done with a child, as an amateur

AT: both amateur films, I looked at these films. Ken Russell said nothing but I had a feeling that this chap had got the eye. So I hired him. Now he said he's doing the first one, he's doing this film about Betchamin's poem's. There was some reason for this, some republishing of Betchamin's poem or books or things. He made quite a nice little item. We knocked up an item of about 8 minutes out of this stuff. And what was so disconcerting for me was that all the way through it apart from just the oddest of comments, Russell said absolutely nothing. I was very worried. I thought what is going on here. I could see after I worked with him on other stuff he was just quite wise. he saw how we did it here and what was expected from him and what he was expected to do. Their again we had a great relationship. I don't remember having a row with anyone. I

had a great relationship with Ken and we did some lovely movies together.

SP: I've just remembered it was Amelia and the Angels.

AT: Yes it was Amelia and the Angels. I think you can still get them from Contemporary films.

SP: They were the three directors you mainly worked with on Monitor.

AT: Yes

SP: And then after that

AT: I tell you what happened with Russell because he and I got on awfully well together. And we did in fact 21 short films with Russell which lasted 8 minutes in between making a lot of big long ones. Before we started the four musicals, the four musicals for which he is well know.

SP: Were these Monitor programmes.

AT: Yes They were all to go into a programme. Mainly the programme was one big item. That could be a studio interview, it could be a filmed interview. I remember at one time we did a lovely one, Nancy Thomas directed interviewing Jean Renoir or his son who was the Hollywood film director talking about his father in the home in France. A lovely film. The programme went out once a fortnight, just an hour. Maybe if it had to be extended it was extended. And about an hour. Wheldon fronted it and the items could either be a studio item or filmed item. And in the end he was very keen on filmed items. So very often it was one big filmed item and one small filmed item. In fact in the very first programme there were about five quite short items and his one about the circus isn't very long, I think its about five minutes. Those sort of things had not been done on television on before and they developed. Having done all these short films, then Ken wanted to do some longer musical ones. By that time he had quite a say because people could see from an eye point of view he had a bloody good visual eye. People were waiting for his films to come onto television. And the whole programme by then had become quite a programme.

SP: He teamed up with a certain cameraman or did he always use different ones.

AT: He teamed up with whoever was available. He himself had experience as a cameraman, stills, when he worked for Picture Post. And so he told one or two of his cameramen what he wanted. In those days he was not like the ageing Delius he looks now. Every appearance he makes on television now he diminishes himself. In those days he was a young chap. Not very much to say, not very fluent commentaries, Wheldon told him how to write commentaries, not a bit like you see him now. He was a different person. He was only about 30 at the time. He was just a nice guy. No pretentions But he obviously had a hell of a good eye when it came to the visual. Can I make this point he wanted to go ahead with these musicals and they were musical biographies and Grace Wyndham Goldie and Huw Wheldon were very worried that he was dramatising people's life. They'd seen the Hollywood films about Chopin, where the man's head's over the keys and the blood drips over the keys, all that sort of stuff. They were very worried indeed that people should try and tell a man's biography like that. As far as they were concerned if you hadn't got a bit of grainy old

archive you hadn't got a movie. Nevertheless he went ahead and said I'm going to do Prokofiev and Wheldon and Grace went along with this. And the only way he could possibly get in just two shots of I think it's hands writing the score of music and the actor standing beside a pool and his reflection is in the water, that is the first one he got actors in and they accepted that and I always remember the dub of that because at that time the programme was becoming very fashionable and all sorts of people wanted to join it. One of the people at the time who wanted to join it was Armstrong Jones the photographer and I remember Huw telling me I don't know whether I really like this chaps work. Look at these books he's had. Tell me what you think of him. I think it's a bit dicey. I said all I know about the chap is that he's got the best colour printer in London for the Observer to print his colour stuff. Nevertheless on the dub of Prokofiev who should come along not just Armstrong Jones in the morning but in the afternoon he was joined by his fiance who was Princess Margaret. After that and after the engagement Wheldon was able to withdraw the offer for Armstrong Jones to work for Monitor. I think it was a good idea, if not we would have had the paparazzi all over, while they were trying to film a film. Nevertheless that went out.

The next one we did
was Elgar which turned out to be enormously successful but at the time it was quite a worry. We cut Elgar, or I cut Elgar and he actually got actors into it. They'd allowed him the young Elgar and they'd allowed him the aging Elgar. In fact I think they'd allowed him four different Elgars in the film. And he shot this and it all went together. And Humphrey was his associate producer and we showed it to Huw Wheldon on the Wednesday and it was supposed to go out on the Sunday. We showed him Elgar at Ealing, and he hated it. He said what's going on here. Ken, he said, explosions in the kitchen, flying a kite, and all those sort of things, jumping out of trees what are you going on about. And Ken said but it's all perfectly true Huw. He did these, and he flew the kite because he was very keen about the weather and all this kind of thing. Wheldon said well alright then. He then disappeared with Humphrey to work out some sort of commentary. We then went into the dub on Friday, so it was Wednesday look at it, determine some sort of commentary on the editing machine, go into the theatre on Friday and dub it.

SP: But surely you still had to neg cut it before transmission.

AT: Yes. So we go into the theatre and dub it. It's quite extraordinary what you could do in those days. Huw just said his commentary to the screen. We just had a red light, press the red light and Huw would blurp and carry on. And you'd hold you breath because there was no rock and roll system in those days.

SP: It was 10 minutes at a time.

AT: And it was 10 minutes at a time. You'd hold your breath. Anyway it was decided we wouldn't put the film out on the Wednesday. I had a print. I'd still have had a print by Sunday if I had to, what I used to do was send the cutting copy away. Have a dup to dub with, send the cutting copy away for neg cutting so everything would come together for the Sunday viewing. I made it all work. So Huw decided it wouldn't go out, he was still a bit worried about it

SP: Did this mean they weren't billed in advance, it was just the Monitor programme.

AT: Well what happened with this he suddenly had a huge amount of luck. We made it about the summer time and he held it back until, he suddenly realised the 100th Anniversary was going to be on Sunday 11th November which was the Remembrance Day. In those days it was a very big deal. People used to stand still together for three minutes in the road. It was a revered sort of thing. Huw suddenly thought I'll put it out that night and he never looked back after that because it worked awfully well. There were some marvellous - he was very worried about World War I stuff where there were blind people and we suped it up quite a bit. Humphrey Burton and people say that was all cut down but in fact it wasn't cut down and it just remained and the whole thing was a very big succes. Afterwards I was told it was the most repeated BBC documentary of all times for quite a number of years afterwards.

SP: It can hardly be called a documentary can it.

AT: Dramatised.

SP: It was something new.

AT: Then he did another one which was Bartok which I think was one of the best things he did. That too, there again Bartok was an ageing actor thinking about the past. I remember Ken because I was fractionally responsible for him getting this under way because I remember Ken telling me that he wanted to make Bartok but I'm in dead trouble Alan I cannot find anywhere any documentary of Hungary where Bartok lived. He said do you know of any. I said there's one film I can think of but I don't know quite where it is. It's called Hortobagy by a Hungarian director I've now forgotten. See if you can get a copy of this. Do you know he had terrific luck. He found out that the man who directed it was running the Academy Theatre in Oxford St which was the place where foreign films used to be shown and I can't remember the chaps name but he went to see him and the bloke said I'll show you a copy and you can use it if you like. So we took that home, I sent it to the labs and had the whole bloody thing dupped.

SP: That was a copy of the Hungarian film.

AT: Hortobagy. You could do things like that. Nobody seemed to bother. We treated it as rushes and we made the film and there are some lovely sequences with this Hortobagy in it which was about gypsies who looked after horses on a big plane in Hungary. And lovely stuff and we just cut it into the film and I still think to this day it was one of the best Ken did. But that again had more of the artist in.

The last one which I cut which was totally artist all the way, totally dramatised and Melvyn Bragg wrote the script. It was the most confusing script I've ever come across in my life and I accused Melvyn, Melvyn you've made such a confusing script here we just don't know where we are and he just laughed. At that time he was writing and making quite a bit of money from writing film scripts.

SP: He was on the staff of Monitor.

AT: And he was shooting some literary things. He shot one which I didn't think was very good - Tennyson and Hallam, about Victorian poets. He did one towards the end of the programme. All in all it became quite a thing.

SP: Did he become a director on the programme directing films.

AT: Just but I don't remember many that he did. I remember this one thing about Tennyson which I didn't think was terribly good. The programme going for six years and Huw left us to go to the corridors of power and he chose Jonathan Miller to see the last year out. Somebody told me that he wanted somebody like Ustinov, the comic, the humorous man, but in the end he got Miller.

SP: Was this before Miller had made the Alice in Wonderland.

AT: No he'd just made this thing. And I hated it. I thought Alice was dreadful. He and I and he knew that I didn't really like his films which was a bit embarrassing. I wanted to leave the programme when Huw did but Huw said no you've got to sit still and see the thing through.

SP: It must have been a bit difficult having Jonathan Miller after seeing Alice in Wonderland which was shot with no idea of how you edited a film. Who edited that, I remember someone telling me the difficulties they had trying to put it together.

AT: I don't know. Miller and I didn't really get on together although we liked each other alright. They brought another bloke onto the programme whose name I've forgotten, his name doesn't cut anymore. He cut several of Miller's American films, Miller's Andy Warhol in America. All the programme was being given a new look which I was so out of sympathy with I asked if I could resign. I was told no. Nancy and I saw the year out. Finished up all the stuff which was on the shelf. In fact the last programme we were wrap it up and Nancy and I in the last programme, there were still four architectural items which she and other people had shot and they were all stuck together. It was absolutely dreadful.

SP: You hadn't switched to 16mm by then.

AT: No, when was it coming in.

SP: The middle of the 60s it was coming in.

AT: I'm trying to remember when I did Civilization. I know when it came in because I did Civilization with 35mm colour and at the same time 68 Channel Two started and that's when colour started.

SP: Channel Two started before that but colour came in the end of 67.

AT: Civilization was the kind of presentation of colour. 625 lines coming in. 35 didn't last because everybody went onto 16mm which English labs do. When we get to America I'll tell you some interesting stories about how good 16mm was from the labs.

SP: There are a few minutes left on this can I just ask you a couple of things about Monitor. You said and I find it hard to believe that you got on well with all the directors and you never had any fights. Surely you had what you might call creative arguing. To go with that, my own personal memories of you are the extraordinary speed you edited which I learnt in these days in Monitor and didn't go through the painful process that most of us do of making a long assembly and slowing wittering it down. You somehow managed to start at the beginning and start with something only 3 minutes too long at the end. How do you do that.

AT: I can't tell you but it's funny you should say that but I could do it in some curious way. I was once told by one director that you're the only editor who knows how the film is going to end. I almost knew immediately that every film should have a beginning a middle and an end, and I seemed to acquire that pretty quickly. What I used to like to do when I cut documentaries asking the director to give me a rough cut of everything you want leave me alone for a fortnight. And when a director comes back from a long shoot he's tired out and only too happy to stay at home while I do a fortnights editing and bash the whole thing together. And that's how I did it. I was able to work fast. And only just very recently I had Jenny Rourkes saying about this feature film I'm going to say on Thursday, you know the editor was so slow. I'm only used to working with you and Bill Diver and I didn't know where I was and he didn't start till 11.00 o'clock and then wanted to work overtime. She said he wasn't half as fast as you. I was just able to do that. I could very quickly assemble things together and given a few hints, in fact I used to ask my directors all of them, also I had a thing too, I'd seen directors furious because the editor had made changes before they'd seen their rough cut. I used to ask my director, I'd say give me a rough cut of how you want the thing cut. As I was going through it I'd think this is not right, we ought to drop this. This isn't in the right place but as the director had given me this cut, if I'd changed it he would be furious. Also somehow it loses his confidence. I think doing it that way, just saying give me your ideas, I'll give you your version and then after that it's everyone for hiss own. I knew when I went in to show him the thing, he'd look at it and I knew what I'd like to drop or what could be extended, but he'd seen his cut and I hadn't cheated him. That's how I got on and did it fast.

SIDE 5, TAPE 3

16 January 1989

SP: Before we continue with your career at the BBC you wanted to harp back to your career at Elstree and ABPC just for another story.

AT: That's quite correct. I suddenly thought about really the pay off to the Louis Levy section and he was head of music at ABPC and he used to have, it didn't seem to matter if it was Stanley Black, Spoliansky or one or two other people who got the credit for writing the music. It all seemed in the end to rest on a man called Wally Stott and I wasn't aware of this until Wally phone me up and he said I've been looking on your notes on the music sections which we had to supply and he said I've never seen the film, can you tell me what happens and I then suddenly realised that he was the man writing music which would later go on under the name of Spoliansky or Stanley Black and he was writing music for film sequences he'd never seen. So there we had a person and as far as I know he's become t he very best arranger for British screen music we've had for a very long time because I heard him on the television on the radio talking about writing material for American films made in Britain whereby there was a big argument, somebody else got the credit for the film but they said Wally we want to keep that melody that you wrote over such and such a sequences. I'm reminded of Mr Wally Stott because I can see now when I was at a music recording session Wally would arrive in a huge great big grey fur coast which was always loosing its fur and he'd sweep up onto the box and he'd rehearse the musicians through which he'd written. The great thing about Wally I never saw him after that but later on he'd changed to being a woman. He'd had an operation and he turned out to be a woman and he's now known as Angela XXX, I can't remember the name but he's still going today, Wally. I always remember doing a film much later on for Naim Attulah and Naim Attulah of Quartet Books and we were making a film of Bert Chapel and when we got on the film we got talking about odd things and he'd just with David Frost produced a film called something like the Princess and the Rose, it was a sort of Christmas Panto film and he told me Angela had done the music for this and after the preview everybody rushed down and they were kissing Angela all over in the foyer saying I loved your music darling and all that sort of thing. But Naim said to me I know I just couldn't go up and kiss a man.

SP: There was another thing you wanted to hark back to and that was a small item of Ken Russell's. I suppose that was before he made the music films.

AT: Yes it was the one about Marie Rambert.

SP: Was this about in the middle of Monitor.

AT: Yes it was. It was a major item for Marie which Russell like all the producers did, he offered things to the programme and it was coming up that it was an anniversary and they wanted to do an item for the programme and Hugh said I'll accept that go and make the item

SP: You mean Huw Wheldon.

AT: Yes. That's what used to happen all the time. In fact if they couldn't be successful in how shall I put this, if they appeared they weren't strongly committed to the item Huw didn't want to know about

them but if they said Huw we've simply go to do an item about so and so he said I'll buy that. Russell had done this film about Marie Rambert and technically in one of the dance sequences there should have been a lot of dissolves. At that time dissolves weren't done in the printing as they are now done in 16mm, they had to be ordered separately so it was quite a drama

SP: This was all on 35mm black and white.

AT: Yes 35mm black and white. You had in fact go by key numbers. You had to detail precisely what you wanted, dup from this number, go on start dissolving into the next. The next starts from so and so and it was quite a complicated affair. You could very often go wrong and when you got them back you just couldn't cut them in without, because they wouldn't match. I had the most extraordinary situation which I'd never come across before. My assistant, who shall be nameless, in fact he's now left the BBC and may be dead now, we won't bother but he thought I'll do a very fast thing. I'll order my dissolves as I join up all the joins which had then to be done with heated foot operated joiners, scraped overlapped joined with glue. As he was winding from the centre of the reel to the start of the reel, he started to order these dissolves. When he got to the top he sent the page of dissolves to the lab and then for the next week, and I never realised this, enormous telephone calls between himself and the labs. Then at the end of the week I got the dissolves from the laboratory, started to cut them in and discovered to my horror they were nothing like I ordered. When I looked into it I suddenly realised that instead of his dissolves going from A to B what in fact because he ordered them going backwards on his rewind, he went from B to A totally impossible to cut in. So I phoned up Humphrey Burton, I should have phoned up Ken Russell but he was out in the country somewhere, I phoned up Humphrey who was seeing the item through and said Humphrey it's out of the question, the're no dissolves so every thing is going to jump. He said don't worry there's nothing we can do about it. And do you know nobody queries a thing at all, that they were all jump cuts. I always remember Huw Wheldon himself where another similar situation arose and I couldn't get the dissolves and Huw turning around to me and saying Alan your great trouble as a film editor is that you try and make things so smooth, I just love it where it jumps about and you don't know where you are. I thought to myself you can't really win. Do you know he said to me at that time you don't want to worry Alan because anyone will accept anything you do and so being encouraged like that I was able to experiment. I remember on one particular occasion where I cut a whole load of stuff together and I got no cutaways and it was terrible material, I just cut away. It went out that night on a Sunday and I was very worried about the thing.

SP: It was full of jump cuts.

AT: Yes it was dreadful stuff. I think it was an interview of Tortelier the cellist. Do you know I had a producer phone me up the next day and say I loved all those jump cuts which you did. I've been trying to get my editor for weeks to do something like it and he won't do it. He said I've seen it work and it's alright. You just throw up your hands.

SP: You created a new style

AT: It's quite ridiculous

SP: Just one personal note if I can ask you here. Did your wife go on working as an editor. I know she became ill around this period.

AT: When did she die. I do know I had just finished something by Ken Russell and I was told at the hospital where she was that she had terminal cancer. I thought I've simply got to tell the programme about this and I told Huw about this and they were all super. They really were. Because it was a very difficult situation at home as you may well imagine. She was - we went to the crematorium and do you know that Huw and Humphrey and the Reverend Spoxton, the BBC religious man, all dressed up in his church things, Huw and Humphrey had been there choosing all the music and Spoxton had specially got a sermon from Ecclesiastes. It was very, very moving. I think I cried all the way through it. My stepmother was looking after us then. I'm always thankful of Huw and Humphrey who were just kind and looked after you. I then went back.

SP: Who looked after the children, you only had young children the.

AT: Oh yes. I was quite lucky.

AT: The boys were born in 56 and she died in 61 and it was terribly sad.

SP: At the end of your very long stint on Monitor. You left that, did one or two documentaries and then did your first big series, Civilization. Can you remind us, it was something like 20 years ago.

AT: Yes it's now 89 and this was 69.

SP: Presumably it took two years in the shooting.

AT: Yes two and a half years.

SP: There were two directors, what was the subject matter.

AT: I tell you why, I finished Monitor and saw it through right through to the very end, for 7 years I was their film editor. The last years I said was Jonathan Miller. Huw had disappeared to the corridors of power. I then went back to doing straight documentaries. I found that most interesting. I wanted to do that. I didn't want to do any more art films. Documentaries were very interesting at that time. Cameramen and everybody were going onto 16mm. Cameras could be hand held and just two people could make a movie, a sound mixer and a cameraman. And I'll tell you who was awfully good at that, Peter Bartlett. It didn't matter how hand held the stuff was he always gave me wonderful cutting points. So I did a number of documentaries, I can't remember how many.

SP: Could you chose which ones you worked on or decline if you didn't like the subject matter.

AT: No But I always remember on one occasion.

SP: Was this for the documentary department.

AT: Yes I hardly did any drama at all

SP: And Dick was head of the department.

AT: Yes. By golly yes. Dick was head of the documentary and I did nothing else but documentary but when Channel 2 started, David Attenborough was appointed head of Channel 2 and I think we must have been on 625 lines which brought in the colour situation. I remember Attenborough put out a project whereby it was almost a tribute to colour, lovely images and this evolved into a series of 12 or 13 with Kenneth Clark which they called Civilization. They were just a situation which was a wonderful example of man't progress in the arts from 1066 say onwards.

SP: And there were two directors.

AT: Yes this was the people actively concerned with it. Michael Gill and Peter Montagnon and also they had other people like Ann Turner was on it, she shot a lot of stuff.

SP: Were you supervising editor or did you physically edit the whole lot.

AT: I didn't want to go on a series when I remember, one of the foms phones me up,

SP: I can just interprete, fom is film operational manager.

AT: Yes, I've forgotten his name. I said to him I don't want to work on it, I've been 7 years on art films, I do not want to go on another art film. He said I think you ought to go on it but there were about three editors and he kept pressing me to go on Civilization and eventually I went on to it and I was given episode 8 to edit which had some wonderful stuff. I'd never seen a film with such lovely visuals, they had a couple of cameramen who were so good, Tubby Englender, I think and MacMillan, and I was given episode 8.

SP: Although the BBC were busy switching to 16mm about that time, this was shot on 35mm

AT: Yes

SP: Eastmancolor negative.

AT: Yes I don't remember after that anything else was shot. After that all television companies, throughout the world had all standardised on 16mm because I was told that 35mm was two and a half times more expensive than 16mm. Anyway this great celebration of colour which was Civilization was done in colour. Denham Labs

SP: Just as a matter of historical accuracy, not the whole world switched to 16mm, some countries including the Soviet Union still use 35mm for television.

AT: Oh thank you for that. I didn't know that.

SP: I think England was in the vanguard

AT: All I do know about colour was that the BBC could have gone onto colour two years earlier than they did but they waited until the European regulation whereby everyone in Europe would go onto the same system. What happened is that England is on Pal and 625 lines and France and Russia were on different ones. In despair the BBC decided we won't

wait for these guys, we'll pushout our own colour system which is very good.

SP: To bring you back from this diversion you were on number 8. Did you just cut 8.

AT: When I got on the production, I must have been working at the Centre because I remember going back to Ealing to cut this. When I got on there, I cut 8 and I thought, although I say it myself I thought it was a bloody knockout and I had the sense the whole unit in some way had lost their morale. They were worried when they shouldn't have been. They didn't realise they were on to something bloody good series. I went to them and said I don't understand this, have a look at programme out, it's bloody marvellous.

SP: What was the subject matter if you remember.

AT: No. All I do remember is that there were some wonderful church stuff from the churches in Bavaria or Germany or something. I remember now it was the music. We had Mozart, we had Haydn and that sort of thing on these wonderful images. I just told them I don't know why everybody is so depressed about the series they are terrific. Do you know I was quite right about that they were terrific, there's no question about it. When they had been finished.

SP: You just did the one.

AT: I did the one and then I did several others. What I think happened is that I did four and other editors did the rest. I certainly did four but what they were I'd have to look and find out. If if I might mention this point up to that time there had been no, how shall I put this because I think it's very important, up to about that time everything, music, you name it had come from America into England. My own youth had been brought up on American films, American music. That sort of thing. There were two films which brought English culture back into America after 30 years. One was Civilization and the other was that drama in black and white called the Forsyte Saga. From that moment onwards there has been a terrific exchange of English drama into America. It stopped in some curious way - the Beetles started to push things into America. Civilization pushed documentaries into America. The Forsyth Saga pushed drama back into America. Al of a sudden there was a total reverse of cultural exchange which I know throughout my life had always been the other way, America to England.

There was just one little thing I must tell you about which is very amusing.

SP: About Civilization.

AT: Yes. I found that as you know there comes a point when you've edited a film you've too much material for the slot and you have to contract it. In the act of contracting you loose certain scenes and you want certain commentary rewritten. Michael and myself, Michael Gill the producer, used to find this going on and what we used to do, he used to write up what should be the new link and I would go and record this new link on mag

SP: Who spoke the words.

AT: I spoke the words. Michael wrote them. Then we showed it to Clark who understood what we were doing and said OK I'll just rewrite this in my own style and he said I'll accept this. I'll always remember Lady Clark came in one day, who's always drunk of course, dreadful drunk, she said who is that new chap they've got on the movie and there was poor Kenneth having to explain to her precisely the technicalities so there was a new voice on the version she was looking at but would be on the final, it was so awful it wasn't so true.

SP: After Civilization did you edit a few more documentaries for a bit.

AT: Yes I did. What they were I don't remember.

SP: No dramas.

AT: No I did very few dramas. There was one thing I did which was Fellow Townsman which was a Hardy thing to give all the poor old documentary chaps who never moved out of their cutting rooms a treat they were all sent down into the West Country to cut in a caravan for all these other seven or 8 films. What was the woman's name who did it, she was such a nice woman.

SP: This was what. The early 70s.

AT: Something like that. I just remember we worked in this caravan. There is just one little story I'll mention it very quickly. Nothing to do whatsoever with film editing but it does arise out of Civilization. I went to a party that John Murray, the publishers had in Dover St., a lovely old Georgian house, and I went there for when Kenneth's book on Civilization was published, Murray's had published a lot of his books. It's marvellous because Murrays published Byron, they go quite far back. You will not believe this. I arrived at this lovely Georgian house at Dover St or somewhere when I waltz into the hallway, there's lots of coast hanging on racks, places empty. Then suddenly out of these clothes appears a man who looked quite frightened. I thought what's a matter. Then I suddenly recognised who it was. It was the poet laureate, C D Lewis. The reason I recognised him is that I'd cut some previous item with this man in it. He looked at me, I introduced myself. He said what happens now, where do we go. I said it's perfectly alright. Just follow me, we go up the stairs and just join the party. When we get to the top of the stairs, nothing surprises me more is there 's wide and low arch and on wither side of the arch were a couple of fully dressed flunkies with wigs on, patent leather shoes, knee britches, This slightly took me by surprise. I thought what do I do now, I'd never seen a footman in my life. And there was C Day Lewis way behind me quivering a little. One of the footman turned round to me and said sir, and I very quickly said to him it is the poet laureate and Alan Tyrer, he turned round and spoke very loudly, the poet laureate and Alan Tyrer. We went through the room and there right at the end was Sir Kenneth, John Murray and everybody saying my dear chap do come in and we sort of got into the party in that way. I was really so surprised to be faced with this situation. Later on it developed very nicely. I got talking with John Murray and he showed me the fireplace. He said you see this fireplace which was an old Victorian fireplace, he said this is where Lady Byron burnt all his papers an hour or two after he died. And if you come along here and they had sort of show cases like they have in museums and he said look, this is a cutting from Byron's hair, a curl from Byron's hair. We've got it all here this sort of stuff.

SP: When was the America series. The middle 60s

AT: What happens in between I'm awfully sorry my memory's fading. What happens in between, one's just working. That's the problem with the BBC, you just go on working. If it's not one thing it's the next.

SP: There's one thing I meant to ask you about drama. It must be rather strange when you've been a documentary editor where the creative work starts in the cutting room when all the stuff has been gathered, if you're editing drama you're working to a script and the creative process isn't quite the same because you can't easily re-edit the shape of the drama.

AT: I found it. This really is quite extraordinary. You won't believe this but Barry Davies was cutting it, nicely shot

SP: The drama director.

AT: Yes called Fellow Townsmen and it's quite interesting I did not know with a sure feel whether I was doing it correctly or not. All the way through cutting the film I felt that in fact it was going too slowly. Eventually when I finished it I asked Ken Morse who's a very good BBC drama chap, I said Ken I'm sure this is too bloody slow. How shall I speed it up. If I might say so there was one scene where I thought they were so slow on the dialogue I cut out all the pauses, joined it together, realised I'd wrecked the scene so put it back to what it was and thought it's still slow. I asked Ken Morse.

SP: Do you mean Ken Morse, the master of rostrum camera.

AT: No not Ken Morse, Ken, I asked this fellow. I said what's wrong with this it's so slow. He turned round to me and said it's not slow. I've got no comment it's perfectly alright. Which just shows how I was very uncertain about speeds and things like that which are almost the number one idea on editing, what speed is the right speed. He said it was alright. At the time I found it - if it had been a documentary I'd have known exactly what I was doing which is what I did most of my time and I like doing documentaries better than I liked drama.

SP: Which brings us to another series called The Mighty Continent.

No what I'd like to talk about if I may is just a few words about America. That was quite a big one.

SP: I'm sorry.

AT: It was pushed out by the same people. It was Michael Gill and Peter Montagnon. They, yes it was Michael because he said he always wanted to do this film about America but he always felt there was enough historical buildings he could put up ideas about. But when he went to America at the end of Civilization with Clark he found quite a number of things, sufficient artefacts, buildings, places, rocks to make quite a good story of it. He thought who should front this, and it was one of those sort of things you get a blockage and it was right at the end he suddenly saw Alistair Cooke, or heard Alistair Cooke, and thought why on earth am I not using Alistair Cooke and that's how the series got underway.

SP: When you say right at the end you mean right at the end of his

preparation.

AT: Yes right at the end of his preparation. I was on this with another editor, Dave Thomas. Dave cut 6 and dubbed them and I cut 6 and dubbed them. And there was one just editor that did episode 9. That's how we did it. And we had great fun Dave and I. We used to have a race as to who would turn out the quickest rough cut. In the end we got it down and Dave won. He said he got an episode down to 12 days rough cut and I think mine in at 13. Just one of those things.

SP: Surely a thing of that size. Wasn't a certain amount of shooting done for material for several different episodes to save travelling round the State each time just for one episode. Did material come in film by film.

AT: I can't help but think it came in film by film. I remember there was on thing, a sequence in a chapel, a revivalist chapel and I thought it was too jumpily cut. In other words the camera man hand't held the shots long enough to make a nice sequence. And I tried all one morning to get through to them in America to say if you're going to shoot any more stuff like that for goodness sake shoot it slower in a more dignified way and I've got a chance of cutting it. But always when I'd phoned them they'd moved on to another place. They really moved very fast in America and I could never kept up with them. Eventually the stuff came. Just thinking back a bit we seemed to have enough material to do all the sequences.

SP: Did Alistair Cooke come across to Britain for the dubbing.

AT: We did the same thing we did as in Civilization. If we had any reduction of material and stuff like that, Michael Gill wrote up what the new text was and I recorded it and stuck it into the film. And Alistair who used to come into my cutting room at Ealing, he just accepted it and he rewrote his own stuff. He knew he could only use the amount of stuff I had indicated with my trial commentary. So he did that. He was very professional. He always used to come in at lunch time just as I was breaking for lunch. I would say to him would you like a drink, would you like some food. He said no I'll start straight away. He had a typewriter there. I'd go off for lunch, come back at 2 o'clock and the whole thing was done. Then we went into the dubbing theatre and recorded the commentary which gets laid against the film ready to dub it. What was nice was the right at the very end of the film, about episode 12, Michael was with Time Life, the American distributors and he arranged that I should go over to America for the end of them and then proceed with them to Washington where there was a promotional gathering on publicity just before they went out. I took over episode 12 in a trailer and I took them over to Time Life Building in America. We'd been having absolutely wonderful prints by Kay's Labs and when I got to Time Life I said how are the prints and they said bloody marvellous, they said they've been so good we wondered how you got them. One of them you sent us was so good we phoned up the Kodak representative of New York and said come and look at this print the English have sent us it's so marvellous they must have a secret process. This Kodak man went along and said I just don't believe how good it is. It must be secret. It was Kodak stock, we were doing it with.

SP: 16mm

Yes and the prints they were doing on 16mm were better than anything the

Americans could turn up on 16mm.

SP: This was Kays.

AT: Yes. Denham did Civilization. I was thinking they might do America but they didn't. They got Kays to do it. They were wonderful. They turned out lovely prints. The Americas were astonished how good you could do 16mm. There is a point if I might just digress because it's technical. That is as people probably know in England we have 25 fps for television films, in America it's always 24 frames. This is tied to a 60 cycle mains in America and a 50 cycle mains in England. Hollywood's always been 24 frames. And it had always annoyed me. It annoyed me with Civilization that we shoot it at 25, when we go over to America I always feel it slightly drags a bit.

SP: Probably this doesn't arise any more, nearly everything being shot on tape or transferred to tape then the change doesn't happen.

AT: You're quite right. They've got over the problem but in those days I knew this was bound to happen. So when we started America I turned round to Michael and said let's get this speed thing right. If you're shooting in America what you ought to do is shoot at 24 frames which is what the Americans are used to and you get the right tones and everything like that. In England when you show 24 frames at 25 it improves it very often. I said but what you musn't do, you improve by speeding it up slightingly but you denigrate by playing it slower. Do you know we'll find out about this and in fact we went down to the National Film Theatre where we found the projectors doing 24, 25 and I proved my point. When they started to shoot in America they did in fact shoot at 24 frames. Now Alistair was terribly worried that in England they'd be slightly faster and he might be a half tone

SIDE 6, TAPE 3

SP: ..You were talking about Alistair Cooke's worry about his voice recorded at 24 frames.

AT: Yes he was terribly worried about this and the next time he came to England I always remember he said can I look at episode so and so. I said yes and I played it to him and 25 frames and he said to me it's better than at 24 frames. I said yes I think it is. I said do you know what happens in England - it doesn't happen now because tapes cured the whole thing. I said early on in England all your comedies were so much better because they were run faster in England than anything else. If you look some of the early Cagney Lacey things I thought this must be transmitted on film because all of a sudden one of the characters were just gabbling away. I thought golly this must be film and it's 24 frame stuff shown at 25. No one bothers, it's faster, it's got a zip and they just accept it.

SP: The only people who bother are musicians with perfect pitch.

AT: Quite right and Alan Tyrer who happens to have perfect pitch, it used to drive me bonkers when I heard stuff at 24 frames produced at 25. But lots of people it doesn't worry a scrap.

SP: I didn't know you had perfect pitch.

AT: I didn't know until this happened and the answer is I have.

We then went to Ford's Theater.

SP: This is to do with publicising America.

AT: This was very good and I was invited and Michael really did it as just a little perk for me. I was invited over to the first showing in America, a publicity showing of the series called America,

SP: Was it America or Alistair Cooke's America.

AT: I think it's probably called Alistair Cooke's America. I was invited to the first viewing sponsored by the historical society of America in Washington. I remember we all went to New York and then got on Henry Lewis III's private jet to Washington. I always remember these very rich women in fur coasts and junky jewelry whilst Michael Gill, the chap from Time Life and myself were all swigging whiskies in the back of the plane. Anyway we go there. The next day there was a tea party at a lovely Georgian house, in the garden, in Washington, the Historic Society's head office where a chap called Biddle, a wealthy American was president, suddenly around 5.00 I looked round and realised the place was getting empty. I said what's happened. He said the coach is going off to the Ford Theater where we're showing programme 8, was it 8, 7 or 8, and I dashed away, got into a bus and it was all ladies, blue rinse ladies, that sort of thing, and suddenly another man joined me and I got talking to this guy and it returned out he was the minister from the British Embassy. I said come with me. We arrived at Ford's Theatre which had just been done up by the historical Society and I remember the lovely gold chairs with the lovely gold cushions and it was just like you see in England, old variety theatres, it rather reminded me of the old variety theatre at Richmond which was just the same in gas and that sort of stuff. We got inside. He said where will we sit. I said

there's bound to be reserved seats and we went over and I found I was near Mrs Alistair Cooke who I'd written to before and got some fags for on the plane, she liked Players and English cigarettes. We saw the film through which was a big success because the Historic Society had refurbished some Mississippi showboats and these feature in the films. After the show I went upstairs into the balcony where they had two projectors, thanked the people for the projection and the man said do you know where we are, I said no. He said we're in the theatre where Lincoln was assassinated . I said you're joking, he said no come with me. He took me down by the side of the theatre into the box there which is about 20 ft above the stage and there is the original chair that he sat in and all those kind of things and I then understood how Booth after he did this terrible thing, jumped over onto the stagey and broke his let. I went quite understood this but when I saw it I could see it was 20 ft above the stage. We went back and I saw the minister who said come and have a beer and cigar. So I went back to the Embassy.

Relates the events of the rest of the evening.

The third big series I worked on was The Mighty Continent with Ustinov, directing. Wasn't that, I was in the documentary department then and I would place it about 1972, early 70s. 73 I think. This never really worked. The story was the history of Europe. From 1900.

SP: Before that surely.

AT: No from 1900. It worried me enormously - I did the first four of them, no one else. I'll tell you what happened about it. I was called up into Mewet's office, Mewitt was head of film, and he said Alan you've got to go on this film because I can't crew up anyone. No one wants to know because there is such an enormous amount of vintage stuff which has all got to go to the laboratories to be stretched and step printed to make it the right speed and nobody wants to do it. But he said if I say you're on it, you''ll probably get a number of people joining you. I sage OK. I couldn't think anything worse to do but I said OK. What happened was that there I was and eventually we had four or five editors and I did the first four and the first four were the ones which had all the vintage stuff, the archive film. I thought how are we going to get over this because I was talking to Bob Mole one of the contacts at Denham Labs and we both realised we had enormous amount of vintage film which had to be treated.

SP: Black and white to become 16mm negative.

AT: Not only that but in those days but to assimilate the right speed, because a lot of this stuff was shot at 18 fps or variable, and you had to send this material to the laboratories. They would double print every third frame, double print every second frame, that sort of thing, and when it came back it wouldn't work so you'd say in that case double print every other,

SP: That was very expensive.

AT: It was very expensive. Do you know what happened. I had enormous stroke of luck because I spoke to an editor and he said do you know Alan, they've got a variable telecine at Lime Grove on which you can alter the speed. They'll take it off onto 16mm black and white. I

couldn't believe what this man was telling me. So I went down and saw the engineer involved. The BBC is an amazing place because there is always a marvellous, very well informed technical bod, all working in quiet and odd corners doing all sorts of wonderful things, and he got this variable speed telecine and I could put my 35mm on it, we could monitor it, there was a monitor with which you could see what was happening,

SP: You could rack it

AT: Yes rack it, alter the speed, the result you suddenly got and in the end it came out on 16mm running at 25 frames. I couldn't believe it.

SP: Also you could span the whole original shot area without sound track cut off.

AT: You're right. The things you could do which were so useful and there I was. I had all this film. We had sessions down there. We used to take it down there. You've no idea what hell.

SP: Did you get permission to run nitrate so you didn't take it off a non nitrate print when nitrate was available.

AT: I think most of the stuff we were using was put onto safety stock so we were alright.

SP: But purely for the record they were willing to run nitrate on that machine so long as there was only that one can in the room at the time

SP: That I didn't know.

SP: Maybe it was a later arrangement.

AT: What actually got me was the results I suddenly got. There is a wonderful set of shots of the death of Carl Josef, the Emperor before World War I of the Austro Hungarian Empire and his death. I took it down there. When we put it on the telecine we went right down to 12 frames per second. I couldn't believe that you were shooting stuff at 12 frames per second.

SP: You mean you went down to that speed and it looked correct.

AT: That was the only way you could judge was just by looking at it. We'd look at the stuff and say is the man riding enough, is the nice stuff from the cloaks. You could do other things. You could crop the film right left. Oh it was wonderful and as you say you could use old silent ratio. We just all of a sudden, the whole series had taken on a new aspect and we had no longer to worry about sending the material to the laboratory. I told Bob Mole. He said right Alan, just let me check it. I sent him a print and he said it's absolutely wonderful. It's all on the same density. It actually improved their grading processes.

SP: There's one thing you've forgotten to describe about that. If you had men marching or a funeral march, you could watch and get it at the right speed but if you had music of the period, military band playing, you could take that to the role while you were testing you speed of projection, play the music and get the men marching in step to the music. Did you ever do that.

AT: No.

SP: I thought there was one sequence for that series. Perhaps it wasn't one you were working on. And the quality looked so good people began to doubt this and said it can't possibly be old newsreel film, it looks like something out of an old feature film.

AT: I can well understand that. I don't remember that I had problems on the sound side.

SP: This isn't problems, it lack of problems.

AT: But there was one shot I'll never forget and that's the battle of Shushimo where the Russians beat the Japanese fleet. I think we must be in 1909, prewar. There was this shot they'd given me a print of and when you look at the print it was just a pan across a lot of ships and it looked as if they were all at anchor. When in fact I got it on the telecine and got up the right speed, we got the density right which was another great thing about it. I could see it was all these ships firing at one another with guns working. Just one shot of the Battle of Shushima and I think it's the first time the shot's been shown was within this series.

SP: What was this machine called. I can't remember the name of it.

AT: It was Brown's. Bluepoint

SP: It was a word something like Polygon. That was the only one which existed

AT: I was told a great story about those. The German people were shipping a blue spot to England just as War broke out so they stuck it in a warehouse in Ostend or somewhere like that. It was stuck there all during the war and after the War they picked it up again and it was delivered to Lime Grove or somewhere like that and it worked. Blue spot, Blaupunkt. They do car radios.

SP: I believe Thames' Hollywood series transferred all their stuff on the same machine.

AT: You know how that happened, due to me. I was at home in Teddington when Mike Wooller phoned me up from Thames Television which is just down the road from me and said I've got Kevin Brownlow here doing this Hollywood thing, can you come and tell him about the Blue Spot thing at Ealing, no Lime Grove. I said I'll do better than that, I'll bring along a film. I got hold of a film where this was demonstrated on and I took it to them and they decided they too would be using this system but instead of them taking it off onto 16mm black and white as I had done, they took it off onto video. So all their American thinks like Chaplin which were all shot on 18 frames or thereabout where properly shot and properly transmitted so you got the right speed. I remember just before I retired I heard the BBC were going to get rid of this thing so I wrote and impassioned letter to whoever was in charge as it was quite the most useful thing.

SP: I was there at the time and they were going to get rig of it because it wasn't being used full time.

AT: Quite extraordinary, because it saves so much time. Do you know if

they hadn't have sold it I would have tried to have raise the money and used it as the nucleus of a new business, it would have been very good. I used it for a whole lot of black and white inserts into a colour film which were not archive film but black and white film which I'd made a few years before and we just from the transmission copy took a black and white copy and used that and inserted in the other film. I know why, because it had to be graded, you know the difficulty of intercutting black and white into colour and this came out as you say, the labs loved it. Easy to grade.

Always the one density. On what I look back as a dreadful series it was the one little success. I didn't think it was terribly successful. But some of the sequences from Ustinov, I think five is awfully good, odd things are good. 5 is where Ustinov explains how all the countries were divided up after World War I.

SP: We're talking about the series The Mighty Continent.

AT: Yes but it wasn't terribly good.

SP: It can't have been many years later that you retired from the BBC because you hit the magic age of 60 which rings a death knoll and you have to go on the day of your birthday almost.

AT: Yes and I did that.

SP: Was it a bit of a wrench leaving.

AT: Terribly really and I haven't quite got over it. But we had a party and they were awfully kind. They actually made a film. I didn't know this was going to happen. They told me to turn up at Ealing where we were going to have the party and I just couldn't believe what was going on. There was everybody there down from the DG to the security officers. We had the most wonderful party and right in the middle of it they put a film on of me which had everything in it from Lord Clark. Alistair Cook, Huw Wheldon, everybody who had worked with me was kind enough to contribute to this film and it was a very moving occasion. I think in a very curious way I had the feeling, it was weird, and so it other people, it was the end of an era, and it was just very curious. Nevertheless this did not old me back.

SP: This was 1970, 14 years ago. And you haven't go over it yet. Did you have a bit of a holiday or did you go straight on to freelance work.

AT: I more or less went onto freelance. The first year or so when I was looking at houses in the country, whether I should retire. Slowly the BBC asked me to go back and I worked on exterior contracts with them.

SP: Editing.

AT: Yes always editing and I did quite a lot until I was 70. A curious thing happened which has only been altered in the budget this week. When I was working, if you went out and did work for which you got paid you had to return you old age pension and this incensed me and that was one of the things which made me work after I was 70 because when you were over 70 they wouldn't do it. I mean the Government was so cynical about this. They thought after 70 you'd either be dead or you didn't want to do it. I thought sod you so I worked two or three years after I was seventy which

brings us up to now.

SP: Your first outside job unless I was wrong you got a call from David Frost.

AT: This was quite extraordinary. I tell you what happened was that Michael Gill said to me

SP: About 76

AT: Probably. I've been talking to Davis Frost and he's been setting up a film crew and editing crew, you may have to go to Teheran where he's making a 8 part, 12 part series on the Shah of Persia. Do you want to know about it. I went to see David and got on the thing. And as it developed, they hadn't started shooting but so many things kept altering. Some times we were going to shoot it on 35mm in Teheran, then we were going to shoot it on 16 in London and then the 16 was going to go. In the end I thought what will this film be about.

SP: Was it a drama.

AT: No it was a documentary, a series of documentaries which in the end just promotted the shah on the peacock throne, it was promo for the sure. In fact I pulled out and somebody else got the job. They never even started cutting though I do believe David had gone to Teheran and shot some stuff. It was going to be very spectacular. The whole Iranian army was going to dress up with chariots and horses and be Darius conquering the world, you know, through Turkey and across the Hellis-pont, dreadful.

SP: Was it a private company.

AT: I don't know what the set up was but David had sold them and I don't doubt if it eventually had been finished it would have been quite impressive, visually impressive. But I never saw anything. It was just a commercial. And I thought to myself this is not on I'm not going to be a publicist for the Shah. And do you know virtually 6 months after I pulled out the whole thing came to a halt because the Shah had resigned.

SP: He pulled out too.

AT: Yes he abdicated. Forget it. The end of that.

SP: Did you work for ITV companies.

AT: Yes but what I'd like to mention for a brief moment. During this time I worked , Peter Buckley who works Films which I'd known for years suddenly phoned me up and said I've got Tony Penrose, the son of Sir Roland, the art critic, I've got him here, he's a private filmmaker, would you come and give him a hand. He's frightfully stuck on one of his films here. I went down to Athos, met Tony Penrose and said Tony whether you know it or not i've briefly met your father, when he was on Monitor days. From that time onwards we had a very nice relationship of making just fun films if you like. It was very relaxing for me. He fitted me up with a cutting room in his lovely farmhouse, nearly Chidding Lie, Golden Cross, a lovely William and Mary house. He used to set me up a cutting room. There were lots of rooms in the house. And all round the rooms were Surrealist pictures of his father which I didn't like very much. I used to cut there. And during the weekends I used to go to the

farm across the way and there was his father still alive and the house that his father had was unbelievable. It had Picassos, Chagalls, you name it. All the modern artists and we used to sit out on the veranda talking about art and one thing and another and there is this lovely story he told me. Roland Penrose was in fact the son of some banker, I think the bank became the Midland eventually, but when he was young he came from a wealthy banking family and he said I want to be a painter, his father gave him £200 a month which was a lot in the 20s and he goes to Paris and becomes a painter or tries. From the work I had to work with in the room I didn't think he was all that hot. but we won't go any further. But in the act of going to Paris he met all of the Surrealists, people like Picasso, and he bought Picassos for about £300 and they're now worth millions of pounds. He finished up with about 5 left over which he bequeathed to the Tate Gallery. You know what happens now. If you have works of arts which are worth millions of pounds you can never insure them if you keep them in your own home, so what you've got to do is put them in a bank vault where no one looks at them. The whole things quite impossible. So what he did was lend his art work, Picasso and things to the Tate and they looked after them. I always remember he had all the Surrealists, Picasso, Dali, they were all there and they put on an exhibition in London, it must have been in the 30s, no one in England wanted to know about Surrealism. He told me they put on that exhibition and they put it on for three weeks, a month and Picasso arrived there and gave an opening speech dressed in a diving suit where nobody could hear what he said, it was ha ha ha, very funny with these eccentric artists. Sir Roland told me after this exhibition, they hadn't sold a thing. No one in England wanted to know. He said you could have walked into the exhibition and bought the whole thing lock stock and barrel for £300,000 and if you'd done that you'd have about £300 million pounds worth of investment on you. It's really remarkable. What I am going to say because it works up to a film I was making.

SP: Just one thing were these 16mm films

AT: Yes they were.

SP: What were they for, for the cinema.

AT: Yes they were for the cinema. They were put out in the cinema. They were shorts about country life. Cutting trees down, Greenpeace and all that sort of thing.

SP: Had he shot them himself.

AT: Yes Tony, he was very clever, he could shoot and he could cut. The only reason he got me on the first film was that he didn't know whether he was coming or going. He had done some film and his neighbour had sent 1000 sheep and he did a film on 100 sheep over a year. He got so confused that he didn't know how to tell his story. So I just went in there and told the story properly for him.

The last film I did for him was a film about his mother who was called Lee Miller. Lee Miller was an American and he'd worked for Vogue and in america she was quite a photographer, fashion models and that sort of thing. After she died in England, Lady Penrose, Vogue phoned up Tony Penrose and said we're clearing out some of the rooms here and we've go about 30,000 of you mother's negatives, are you interested in accepting them or shall we just burn them. He said don't burn them I'll accept them and he accepted about 30,000 of his mother's negatives. He never

got on very well with his mother so there was a n awful lot of his life he never knew about, just sort of implied. Nevertheless when he got these things he hired a girl who started to print all his mother's negatives and he suddenly some of them were very good archival stuff of people who were now dead, of the War and D Day and all that sort of thing. So from those, it sounds extraordinary, he not only printed up a lot of the stuff, he wrote his mother's life story and it was published as a lovely coffee table book with her photographs and did very very well. I was there because he wanted to do a film about this. So using here photographs which Ivor Richardson, the rostrum man, photographed them all and we put them in the film, she turned out, and I'd forgotten this. When D Day started she was in England and she joined the American forces and she was the first woman to go through into Europe and she went right through afterwards, right through into Hungary and places like that. She wrote report back and suddenly Vogue found they had a first class war correspondent on their hands, to expand on that sort of stuff we suddenly found we have a very good movie. And to this day, indeed as I talk now, the book did very well in America, she's American, and at this precise moment he's in America lecturing and putting on exhibitions about his mother and taking my film with him to show.

SP: Could you tell me about the series you worked on for Thames, the series called Palestine around the end of the 70s the early 80s.

AT: I suppose it was. There were two editors going to work on it, myself and another editor.

SP: When you say the film there were three long films

AT: Yes there were. There was a documentary called Palestine and each episode ran to an hour and a half, all of a sudden of the two editors who had been working on it one of them got the sack because they found out he'd been fiddling the cab drivers or something like that so they asked me to fill in on the chap that got sacked and I did the middle episode. It was very interesting indeed because for the first time I didn't know, I began to realise the pressures which can be put on documentary film editors. For instance, when Richard Broad started to find people to talk about Palestine, if it was a Jew the Arabs immediately said he was unreliable. If it was an Arab, the Jews immediately said he was unreliable, if you use that guy we're not going to be in it. So there was this war going on all the time.

SP: Was he the producer of the series.

AT: Richard Broad was, the producer and director. When we came in and we were cutting it in Wardour St I found that I could do the middle on, an hour and half leading up to the war in 48 and I always remember the end of that episode I'd cut what I thought was rather a good montage of barbed wire, sandbags, tanks and all that kind of thing, building up to Jerusalem being protected against the war. It was then taken away one to Jeremy Isaacs who I think was head of documentaries and Mike Waller whoever he was. I always remember this, they liked the film but when it came back Richard said to me, Jeremy said that the style in which you cut the very last sequence is not in the same style as the rest of the film and I suggest it be re-edited in the style of the rest of the film and I remember my heart went out to Jeremy because how shrewd and how good he was at assessing material like that. And naturally we altered it, he was absolutely right. The end style wasn't what the rest of the film was about so we recut it.

SIDE 7, TAPE 4

SP: Throughout the time from leaving the BBC you did various patches of time at the National film school teaching editing

AT: That's absolutely true. I don't know how I got there in the first instance but I suspect the second in command there used to be an editor who used to work under me. By that time I was chief film editor at the BBC and in addition to editing I had about 12 editors who I just kept my eye on. I believe chief film editor now is a much more complicated job but in those days - and the only reason I became chief editor I remember them asking me and turning it down and then suddenly I thought I better accept the job as politically it's better I become a senior or otherwise some other bloke will be coming along and telling me how to do things. So I became chief editor. The chap at the film school was a hell of a good editor, I wish I could remember his name. He edited Ken Russell's Delius and he told me that when he went to the Board to get the job on which there were one or two feature editors, feature producers and things saying what have you done and when he told them they said you know you've done more work before you're 30 than a feature editor gets all his life. I think it's probably through him I got the job. I liked it. I got on awfully well with the students and I always remember they would as I walked down the corridor - may I but in here what happened was that the school was very good indeed and when they accepted people there they had to make one documentary and one feature and the students were given a budget. the director of the thing was given a budget and they had to determine how much film they could shoot with this budget and if they had any money over they could hire an editor to cut the film at the end professionally. This is what used to happen and this is how I got taken up by the film school. I loved it by the end. I would be walking down a corridor and suddenly a door would open and a chap would say Alan come and look at this. You go and look at absolutely marvellous filmmaking and assembling but you never knew what they were trying to tell you. I used to have virtually a standard opening gimmick which was I like the way you're doing it but I don't understand a word of what you're saying. Now tell me what you're trying to do. It's the old business when it comes down to film making how do you convert ideas onto film and put it across to other people, what are you really trying to say and how are you saying. There were all sorts of rough cuts and it was dazzling the stuff but you never knew what the hell they were talking about and that was the fun of the thing. I got on very well and at one time there was a crisis there and they asked me to take over for the October term which I did.

SP: Teaching editing.

AT: Yes as head of editing. And when I did this they said you're going to carry on with us aren't you and I said no I'm not. And I got to a stage in life where I didn't want a permanent job. I didn't mind working hard for three weeks and then disappear.

SP: You were in your late 60s by then.

AT: That's right and I thought to myself I don't know if I want a permanent job, getting in my car and going up from Teddington up to Beaconsfield. But altogether I liked it and what was interesting was that on one week I was asked to sit on the board for the new term's

students of whom we were going to see about 50 students who's applied and we were going to chose 20 of those and five others were going to come from abroad, there were 20 English, 25 a year. David Puttnam was on the board and Ossie Morris the cameraman, a couple of students, Jenny Howarth was with me. We just chose and spoke to these people and do you know the very interesting thing which Ossie supported me on, I asked the people by this time having worked on 9.5 myself back in the 20s I could never understand why certain students hadn't done 8mm, I'd been shooting on 8mm for years, I used to ask these students why don't you show me some stuff on 8mm and some of them used to turn round to me and say what is 8mm and others were so contemptuous, Christ we can't use amateur stuff, I just could not believe the attitude yet those which came along with a little example on 8mm had more chance of being chosen into the school and of all the schools throughout the world it's got an enormously good, it's got a very high reputation.

SP: I should imagine you met various up and coming directors.

AT: Yes I met Terry Davies whose had a big success with his latest film, something Distant Voices, from my point of view I found the film dreadfully dull but didn't like to tell him that because he was the sort of man who used to burst into tears if he had bad criticism of his films. But the reviews he got on this film you'd thing it was Michaelangelo who was making. Jenny Wilks, Jenny Howarth, this chap that did Scandal recently, he was there just after I left. But as a film school it's been better than I thought it would ever be. I thought it was a waste of time when I went there but it has turned out very good people who have come into the business and become good directors, good scriptwriters, it's been better than I ever thought.

SP: Other work you've done since BBC retirement is Channel 4 or working for people making films for Channel 4.

AT: This Channel 4 when it started I did 8 films.

SP: For various independent companies.

AT: It was a series there were going to be 6 films and they said we've got 2 more and we'll make it 8. It was called Stand You Ground. It was about women's defence and parts of it were very good. An American was in the lead telling us all about it and she was so laid back really it was very difficult to understand what she was talking about but when I looked at the film I got them on tape and I looked at them quite recently, I was astonished they are quite subtle. It was interesting because who should be one of the bosses OKing the stuff was someone I had met at Thames and he was Jeremy Isaacs who was a very shrewd cookie. We did 6 of these which they liked and then we did 2 more. After this I did a couple of other ones I can't remember and my final thing was Pottery Ladies which I did with Jenny Wilks, all the people at Channel 4 and the BFI were people from the film school. People asked me to edit there films which gave them confidence. Pottery Ladies we had a big success with. Channel 4 very often say write up for this colour brochure about the film with more information and they sold out so quickly on the Pottery Ladies they had to reprint and they repeated it at a better time than they had originally put out. I did 12 things for Channel 4. The last things I did was quite an extraordinary story and it just shows if you live long enough everything comes your way. You won't believe this but I was out

in the country and Tony Cash they producer of Men and Music phones me and says Alan I'm in a big emergency will you come and cut 3 films for us. I say of course what are they and he says they're three films with Georgian connection, with Bamber Gascoigne when he was doing the thing. I said what's gone wrong. He said my film editor who I contracted had just fallen down dead. I thought you must be joking. I said you is it and they said Arthur Solomon and I knew Arthur and he's not dead it he, it made me think if you hand on long enough you get all the jobs coming your way. I cut three films and we had a lot of problems with them. It really drove us bonkers. When the dubbing editor came to say the stereo sound to opera sequences and that sort of thing it just wouldn't stay in sync and we couldn't understand why this was so and I had to recut them to get them in sync with the final stereo. Then to make matters worse I just nearly got to the end of this when I slipped over and broke my left arm and that totally put me out of joint. I couldn't operate my car, I couldn't cut. I thought this is the writing on the wall chaps and so I packed up and I haven't done anything since.

SP: You've come up almost into the late 80s still working. Had you had to make the transition from cutting film to cutting video tape.

AT: It's a good question, I'll tell you why it's a good question because I myself have never gone in as some editors I know into editing video. I've never done that process but like on this last Man and Music where the rushes were handled by pneumatic what I did find they were doing was that they took off a video version of you cutting copy, matched you cutting copy against the video, added to the cut video the dubbed sound and it was that version which was in fact transmitted. It seems nowadays there is quite a considerable extra video component in what had previously been a totally film thing. I was surprised. And if I might just say this to totally sum up everything. Just on of the things which faces us today, the television companies seem to like to transmit video more than they do film and it did seem to me that there was a trend that you didn't cut the negative you just did your transfer onto video and that was good enough for them. Nevertheless in my life time and when you think I've been going from the early 30s right up to now and that must be 50 years

SP: A bit more

AT: I have in the cutting room seem a vast a mount of improvements, not a lot, but they have made such a big difference to film editing that I really must mention them. The first one I think which made an awful lot of film editing physically was in fact the invention by the Italians of taped joined film. The Italians invented this and they had little joiners and all you did was put your film in, cut it and then you could join it together with tape. That was wonderful because in the old days whenever you did a join and it was 35mm you lost a frame in the act of making any joins and if you wanted to put everything back you had to put in black frames to take up the measurement the same was the negative . It sounds complicated but actually when you did it it just took time but you knew what you was happening and it din't worry you to much. But when you got to the tape joining it was all quite different you could remake up your tape and nothing appeared to have altered at all, you could just go on cutting. It was really quite wonderful. The other big invention was magnetic film. I always thought magnetic film was a good improvement. The editors of the time didn't like cutting magnetic. They preferred the old photographic system because you could see something. With magnetic

you can't see anything. The other thing unquestionably made so much difference was a French invention, they rock and roll system of dubbing. In the old days on 35 you had to do the whole reel in 10 minutes, every cue had to be perfect, if you stopped you had to go right back to the start and do it all again. This obviously happened 2 minutes from the end of a ten minute reel and you had to go right back. To a large degree you were holding your breath hoping your dubbing mixer would accomplish all the alterations you wanted. With rock and roll you hardly need rehearse the thing, you could just start running your film recording and when you came to problems mix, A to B and C to D, you could just go through it and if it was wrong wind back and start again. As I say really any other system of dubbing is terrible. Would you mind if I just mention this because it was a story I was told on good authority and I never quite knew if it was true. But when I was in digs in Welling Garden City, stopping with me just a little bit up the road

SP: This was in the 30s

AT: No I'm thinking now just after I came back from the War. There was a man about two or three doors down who was the head of live Plastics which was at Welling Garden City and I remember talking to him one day and he said we've just gone magnetic with film, we're going to start making it. Do you know the system was acquired form the Germans as loot and Government over here have it us to make, they said it's absolutely secret, no one's to know about this and the man and CIC said they're always making it in America and selling it in the shop. The Government had suddenly to realised the stuff would have to be made up. The other thing we acquired from the Germans was the car process, anyway the Americans acquired as loot the photographic colour system and they gave it to Kodak and it was the system we know as Kodacolor, Kodachrome, it would be Agfacolor. The Americans acquired this as loot as they did with the tape.

SP: Can I ask you three short questions.

AT: Yes

SP: Did you ever wish to be a director.

AT: No never, the point being I never felt I had anything to say. Also they curious thing was that we already had a director in the family, my brother was directing commercials.

SP: This is your twin brother.

AT: He always said he directed the first commercials that went on television. He was interesting. after the war he joined Disney's animation place at Cookham because during the war these places built up because they couldn't get the money out of the country so they invested it in stuff locally and Disney had this place in Cookham and my brother went there. When he left there he went into London, one woman came to the BBC and worked the rostrum camera, she came from the same place as my brother. He originally got onto doing sets art director. he was on the first season of armchair theatre at Didsbury, one a week. He did a whole season.

SP: What's you brother's name.

AT: Bertram, Bertram Tyrer. he did a whole season of Armchair Theatre. The next season was every fortnight and the next series was every three weeks and Timmy O'Brien took over. Then my brother did sets for advertising and then went out to direct things. Eventually he just packed up. He told me a great story, he did and awful lot on the Continent, in France and the Mediterranean Islands and Italy. He directed a lot out there. And then like often happens in advertising they all broke up and new firms get started. he tells this lovely story of doing some commercials in that park in Rome where the fountains are, is it the Trevoli Gardens, anyway the Villa D'Esti I think it is, they said you go down there while we shoot this commercial with all these dames and that sort of stuff. They said Monday all the fountains will be on. He gets down there and there are no bloody fountains on at all. They suddenly find an old gardener there who says it can be arranged sir with the palm going out and he found that all the time. It didn't matter what happened or how well arranged it was, when you actually got on the job in Italy some local person always wanted dropsy. When they went up into the mountains to do shooting he said his assistant director always went up there with cash in his pocket because they knew the minute they started shooting, cops would be along on their motor bike saying permission stopped. And he'd say we've got the letters here. It doesn't matter, it's all altered now sir. He said the assistant director got very used to dropping them a few lira. Strangely enough Peter Mentagnon told me the same story when he was shooting in Rome on Civilization. You couldn't shoot across the road, if you went across the road they said that comes under someone else but it can be arranged.

SP: If you had your working life over again, you career over again is there any point you would like to change course or did it all go nice and smoothly on from one thing to another.

AT: I think it did really. I just enjoyed myself. I enjoyed editing. I don't really think of altering which way I was going. I liked the BBC. It was a nicer atmosphere than features. Much nicer and when I got to the BBC I liked it and thought I'd like to stay here. It's difficult to say that but I remember when I started to cut at the studios they spike you all the time. They just don't want a newcomer coming a long who might take the job away from them. The law of survival whereas in the BBC there was no law of survival, if no one was any good they moved sideways but they never lost their job with he consequence all was a lot calmer. When I got to the BBC, the first week I was there I got all the editors in the corridor come into my cutting room and say if we can help you Alan and there's a lot of technicalities on this job and we can help you at all, don't hesitate to come along and ask me. In features you must be joking, that would never never happen at all and I just liked it in the BBC so I stayed. I was very sorry to leave when I did.

SP: What piece of editing work gave you the greatest satisfaction. Have you one favourite thing you really look back on.

AT: There are all sorts of things I'd like to look back on but do you know the film I really enjoyed which I've never mentioned was one which Patsy Miller and I did called The World turned Upside Down about the Russian Revolution and that was a film I liked. Black and white and I always remember that. There were two films, 16mm that Malcolm Brown did with Fitzroy Maclean, about modern Russia, the one's which Patsy and I did, the historical one about the start of the Revolution, The World

Turned Upside Down. The day came and we were to show it to the Russians.

SP: When was this the end of the 60s.

AT: Should we say it was an anniversary.

SP: 67. The anniversary of 1917.

AT: And there was a tie up with Novotny of Moscow, Novotny News Service whereby these two films were done. I always remember Malcolm was very good at this, he laid on some vodka and all this kind of stuff and the chaps themselves cried throughout our film. I remember a Russian who was terribly home sick when he spoke to me. He'd been five years in America and hoped he was going to Russia and found himself stuck in the Russian Embassy here and he wanted to go home. He didn't care what it was like in Moscow, whether the phones didn't work or this didn't work, he just wanted to get home. It was very sad really. They turned round to us and said we would have made these films ourselves but we can't make them as well as you do. What happened to them, I think they went back to Moscow, a lot of people saw them and then they were put on the shelf. Whether they were shown or not I don't know.

SP: They were shown on the BBC.

AT: Yes and I remember Wheldon was terribly pleased about them because Granada had put on a very big thing by Norman Swallow, cameraman of the Russians, they got a Russian cameraman who had done all sorts of things and they put these on for a week all these Russian classic, Potemkin, and all that. I was very pleased that what we were doing was equally good as anything the Russians did.

SP: If you ask me what I liked more than anything else it was that, the World turned Upside Down.

End of Interview