19th December 1990, Maurice Carter, art director, interviewed by Roy Fowler

SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

Roy Fowler: When and where were you born

Maurice Carter: I was born in the London, in 1913, and I had the normal sort of schooling, Gladstone, and I eventually went to an art school when I was 15.

Roy Fowler: That was always part of

Maurice Carter: I suppose I always had, my father was in charge of work on for instance the Titanic, interior work, and my brother was an architect, and my other brother was in publicity, in artwork in publicity. So there was a sort of basic interest there.

Roy Fowler: Was your father's work entirely on ships

Maurice Carter: Yes, entirely on ships. He was really connected with Harlan and Wolfe, that is the connection with the Titanic. I still have pieces of the carving, which is an interesting story. He was working on the Titanic, they were racing against time. They were out on the trials and they were still fitting bits of this giant staircase, which he had drawn and built, the main staircase going through five or six decks. They hadn't finished by the time even when it was going to sail. So the theory was that at night time, they fitted the final bits at night, kept out of the way of the passengers. But the chairman of the White Star, on the eve of sailing, said oh we can't have this. If it gets publicity that the boats not finished before it sales, it's a disaster. So my father was put ashore and took these bits of carving, I still have two of the pieces and came ashore. So that is the reason how I came to be born.

Roy Fowler: That was all hand-carved

Maurice Carter : Yes, it was actually from a smoking room which wasn't quite finished, minor pieces, anyway he was put ashore and his life was saved, presumably.

And then I went to art school and eventually I spend a year in art school. And then I went to Harrods in their Interior Design department, they used to run a department, which was basically there for restoring old houses and putting them back, and decoration of any sort, as a draughtsman.

Then I went into furniture, into furniture designing for a bit more experience

Roy Fowler: At the store

Maurice Carter: No. In Curtain Road, a dreadful place at that time and age, and full of carthorses, it was that period

And Roy Fowler: You were in your late teens

Maurice Carter: I suppose I was 17 or 18. Then for a year or more I went into illustrating catalogues, at that time, it was the period of the Great Depression of course. After a year of the Labour Exchange I decided I'd better do some thing else and I got a job illustrating catalogues, next door to the Palladium.

Then my brother, the architect, was working with Alfred Junge at Shepherd's Bush and the connection between that and Islington was that they were both Gainsborough Studios at that time, with the Ostrers, Isidore running Shepherd's Bush and Maurice Ostrer running Lime Grove. And Vetchinsky, the art director, at Lime Grove, needed, this was the year of 1934, needed a draughtsman. So through my brother I went and got the job

Roy Fowler: How did your brother connect with Alfred Junge

Maurice Carter: He was assistant to Alfred Junge on films like xxx

Roy Fowler: Although trained as an architect he was in the film industry

Maurice Carter: He was a draughtsman, and the need was for / draftsmen

Roy Fowler: Did you later have any connection with Junge

Up Maurice Carter: Yes I did but considerably later. Anyway I went to Islington, got the job, Vetch took me on. The very first film I worked on, they were actually into the film, making the film, was Nine Days A Queen and of course it was in the very early days of sound. There was a sound booth on castors, there was a camera booth with glass windows so everything had to., there were no tracking shots or panning shots of course. The panning shots were within the limits of the window of the booth

Roy Fowler: That late, I thought they were onto blimps by that time

Maurice Carter: Very quickly after that I suppose but at that time everybody was in the booth

Roy Fowler: Was that the Nova Pilbeam film

Maurice Carter: It was the original 9 Days a Queen, I forget what it was called when it was issued.

Roy Fowler: I thought it came a little later in terms development of technique but you were there

Maurice Carter: Because we, there was no trade union at that time except for the electricians. So everybody was called when there was a changeover, you had to rush down and help shift all the booths around, apart from shifting the set around, you had to move the booths around

Roy Fowler: No demarcation at all.

Maurice Carter: No, nothing if props needed shifting I rushed down and pushed them around together with the prop boys.

Roy Fowler: Can I ask your entry into the film industry, would you say that was usually the way people usually came in, through contacts, knowing somebody.

Maurice Carter: Very much so. There was a good deal of the old

Roy Fowler: And no formal training. It was always learning on the job.

Maurice Carter: The only formal training for the art department was experience. But the advantage of that time was that youngsters used to start much, much younger, come in as perhaps a teaboy into the art department at 14 and learn from that.

Roy Fowler: Did they demonstrate any prowess

Maurice Carter: They wanted to see drawings. When I got the job I went to see Vetch, I took a whole load of my drawings.

Roy Fowler: Tell me about Islington.

Maurice Carter: It was a weird place, because you know it was an ex power station. I don't know if you've ever seen it, it has an enormous chimney, the inside was an extraordinary place because the ceilings in the corridors, the corridors 8 ft wide with 25 ft high ceilings and you went in the front door, where there was a very smart sergeant and a button boy, looking like a rather smart hotel, and inside immediately were great flanks of the clocks, because we all had to clock in with cards every morning, punch a card morning and night. Once inside, the art department was balanced on stilts above the green room immediately outside the doors of number one stage.

We were talking about sound, the problems of sound at that time were extraordinary because the microphone seemed to be incredibly sensitive. And there was Leslie Wilde sitting in his little booth and the director would have what he have what he considered a perfect take and then the door of the booth would bounce open, and Les bounce out with his spectacles gleaming saying cut it, cut it. And it was some sparrow twittering up the road. Quite extraordinary, all the arcs had to be shut down, because the whistling arc, it went on for ages, even we were made to cut the holes in the flaps of the set and put gauze

over them to reduce the resonance. But now days that is all very extraordinary. But filming was much much harder in those days because the limit of the day was limitless.

Roy Fowler: What time did you have to clock in

Maurice Carter: 7.30. But Marcel Varnel, that was the art department, I think we were half an hour earlier than the unit and the unit came on at 8. But of course there was no limit at night, it was only when Marcel Varnel would say that's it. Directors was total and of course there was no overtime paid, you were paid a salary and the salary was the job. But the quality was that it was rather like a repertory theatre, everybody just mucked in when there was a change over and everyone was interested in getting the film finished.

But the budgets for those early films, we went onto the Will Hay, the famous Will Hay pictures we made there, we made so many of them and the budgets for those were £75,000.

Roy Fowler: That is what we would call above and below the line

Maurice Carter: Yes.Maurice Ostrer was producing, Ted Black was producing and Maurice Ostrer was head man of the studio. And Marcel Varnel was our normal director there. Once, I think we made after 9 Days a Queen, the next one was Good Morning Boys, as far as I can remember. It is very difficult to remember the sequence of pictures there.

Roy Carter: Do you remember how much they paid you when you started.

Maurice Carter: I don't remember exactly on my entry, but later on when I became chief draughtsman I was paid £8/10. That was after a year, two years

Roy Carter: Can you guess what they might have paid you.

Maurice Carter: I think £5/10.

Roy Fowler: Not bad.

And Maurice Carter : No, as you know in that day £8.10 shillings was quite a big wage

And Roy Fowler: Was it that a jump from what you had been making before

Maurice Carter: No, it was about the same

Roy Fowler: And you were what age

Maurice Carter and: I was about 18

Roy Fowler: I would have thought that was a very healthy starting wage

Maurice Carter: I think I must have been older, I think I must have been virtually 20

Roy Fowler: Did you have the feeling that this was it, sudden revelation

And Maurice Carter: I absolutely loved it. The only trouble was the enormous travelling, I was living in Hounslow and travelling to to Islington, so it was travelling on the Underground and then a tram up the New North Road.

And Roy Fowler: How long did that take you on each morning

Maurice Carter: About an hour and a half to two hours

Roy Fowler: So you were up at the crack of dawn

: Maurice Carter: The worst was nights of course because when these extended days of working until about 10 o'clock, I don't remember going much beyond 10 o'clock, but to finish at 10 o'clock and then have a 2 1/2 journey home

Roy Fowler: A very short turnaround

Maurice Carter: Yes, and back again it

Roy Fowler and: You'd joined as a junior draughtsman, but you seem to have been on the floor almost immediate

Maurice Carter: No, only on changeovers that I really went down. Just on changeovers. And generally to get the set built, , because we had the big number one stage, and upstairs the second stage, there were only two stages

Roy Fowler: Was everything built on the stages

Maurice Carter: No, it was built as far as possible in the shop

Roy Fowler: There was a shop there

Maurice Carter: Quite a big shop, it had a big workshop, the Carpenter's shop and the pieces had to be moved out up in the lift up to the number it to stage

Roy Fowler: Everything was very solidly constructed in those days

Myers Carter: I think it was pretty much the same, I can't remember any very many big constructional differences at all

Rough Fowler: How about plaster work

Maurice Carter: We had a good plaster department and there was a yard at the back of the studio which contained the wood store and the plasterers department and publicity department was on stalks over the top of the timber store, and Les Fruin and Mae Murray were the main publicists of the time, she was a close friend of Maurice Ostrer

Roy Fowler: Is that in quote friends

Maurice Carter: Slightly, I think it's likely

Roy Fowler: Do you have any idea how many people worked at Islington, Because it seems to be very much a family, was it a happy family

Maurice Carter: Very. Albert Whitlock was then, a great technician in America, he used to mix the paint for the painters and do any sign writing, he was there officially as a sign writer

: Roy Fowler: Was he doing mattes then

Maurice Carter: He wasn't doing mattes then, well mattes we never did, we had a process called the Schufftan process, it was a 45 degree mirror, you partly scraped away a mirror

Roy Fowler: Was Schufftan at Islington

Maurice Carter: He used to come in and supervise when we needed a Schufftan shot, they were a separate company, which we employed to come in and do the special-effects. There was a little German chap he used pattern employ, I've forgotten his name now, but he supervised the work on the mirror. For instance that was used on the Crazy Gang picture about the battleship, what was that called, Alf's Button Afloat. There is a rather marvellous shot in it, I've seen it since, it's the shot down the length of the deck of the battleship and by the Schufftan process we just built the gun turret and the guns and the deck. And the whole of the superstructure was put on, plus smoke, with the Schufftan process, very, very good shot for that period

Roy Fowler: The other famous one usually pointed to is one of the Hitchcocks, the British Museum sequence in not Sabotage, I think it was Sabotage

Maurice Carter: Sabotage was made at the Bush, of course. Vetch and I worked on The 39 Steps of course. There was a great problem because what they call the big studio was 120 ft by 56 ft, and we had to put into that the railway station, and the train coming in, you can imagine, and that was the first time I'd used perspective building, we built the fore part of the train full-size and then diminished it in perspective and semi-painted mountains and built mountains, it's a very interesting shot. Now you'd shrieked at it. It would be unacceptable.

Roy Fowler: One side line about Schufftan, I once worked with a Hungarian cameraman in the States called Zolly Vidor and Schufftan to him was god, I don't know why but he always referred to him as the great man

Maurice Carter: He was a great technician

Roy Fowler: Going back to your start what exactly were your duties

Maurice Carter: Purely drafting set, Vetch never made a sketch that I can remember, but his favourite thing was to tear a page out of English Homes and give you a rough plan of how he saw the sets. And he was very ingenious, Vetch. His great quality was that he built his sets very loosely. He had very much the idea of regression of faces with an open set, very good for camera and very good for a director to move around freely. That was his great advantage and of course he was very keen on watching the money. For instance the chippies were only employed on a day to day basis, so Vetch used to say don't forget Percy, give them their notice at midnight, otherwise we will have to pay them another day.

Roy Fowler: What did the Department comprise and how did it operate, he was the head of the art department

Maurice Carter: Vetch was the art director. There was a guy called because Gus Kochs who was his assistant who had come from the same direction as I had in decoration, I think he came from Hamptons. Then there was John Howell, I think he was set decorator at that time as far as I can remember. He worked both ways, he was partly a draftsmen and partly set decorator, and myself, plus the buyer of course. So that was the whole complement of the art department

Roy found: And you were permanently employed

Maurice Carter: We were all permanently employed because we used to race from one to another, from one 7 week schedule to the next. We had the next picture in preparation art department wise and the only pause was clearing the studio, building the sets and restarting the new picture. We got through and enormous number of pictures a year

Roy Fowler: It's surprising how efficient the system was

Maurice Carter: Very, very and of course we had guys like Val Guest and the others staying up there writing scripts all the time

Roy Fowler: What sort of area did you work in

Maurice Carter: This one room, it was I suppose 20 ft long by 8ft to 10 feet deep and that was built, as I said on stilts over the top of the Green Room and that was in this big space

out side number-one stage, where the big doors were and they had a little wicket door in them, and so we could watch the red-light or the green light go on, we could dash down went the cut came and get on with changing the set around

Roy Fowler: What did you have to clamber up

Maurice Carter: A wooden staircase beside the Green Room. And the stairs opposite led up to somewhere I never saw , which was the place of the gods, that was Maurice Ostrer and Ted Black's area and Mae Murray, actually the stairs were carpeted which announced the importance and everybody was forbidden to climb that side. That was the only place that had windows, there were no other windows in the studio, except in the offices.

And Roy Fowler: Well it was a very hierarchical world

And Maurice Carter: Sure was

Roy Fowler: The way pictures went through, the process, there is the writing section, how early was the liaison between what they were working on and the production department and the art and department. How long the lead time

Maurice Carter: It couldn't be very much. I don't think we had a script much more than four weeks before we were into production with the next picture, as far as I can remember, but it is difficult at this time to remember exactly the spacing

Roy Fowler: And it was nearly always a seven week picture schedule

Maurice Carter: Yes, generally, the variations were pictures like Dr Syn when Arliss came over from America , and was considered a great star, that was allowed a longer schedule, I think we went 12 weeks on that as far as I remember, that was including the locations. I mean it was very unusual to do location, nothing was done on the location if it could possibly be avoided, if we could possibly build it in the studio that was it

Roy Fowler: The equipment and was so cumbersome and recording

Maurice Carter: Recording was the great problem

Roy Fowler: Robert Stephenson did Nine Days A Queen, any memories of him

Maurice Carter: He was a very nice fellow and one could recognise he was a good director and had great potential

Roy Fowler: Was that his first film

Maurice Carter: Could be, he had been at Shepherd's Bush of course, and there was a general transmission of people between Shepherd's Bush and Lime Grove under the Gainsborough banner

Roy Fowler: Was Poole St regarded as less important in terms of the pictures that it took

Maurice Carter: I think so, I think in general at that the Bush at that time was trying to break into the American market. They did a film called The Tunnel for instance, and Richard Dix was imported and various other pictures, they imported American stars for. But Arliss was the only American star that I can remember coming, which just gives you an idea of the hierarchy of the studios. We were mostly concerned with comedy

Roy Fowler: Had Ted Black arrived yet

Maurice Carter: Ted Black was there from the day I went there in 34

Roy Fowler: My memory of Nine Days A Queen is of very substantial sets. Did it you work on a the design or was it shooting when the you arrived

Maurice Carter: It was shooting, fully shooting, I mean the picture was virtually on its finishing stages when I got there, so I suppose it was in its last three weeks of shooting. And then as I say we were into Good Morning Boys with Hay and

Roy Fowler: Was that his first Gainsborough comedy.

Marice Carter: I think it must have been very near his first

Roy Fowler: It had a lot of his music hall stuff. First time you put pen to paper, any idea what it was.

Maurice Fowler: I think it was the classroom in Good Morning Boys. We didn't know at that time that several of his boys in his class room were to become quite famous people in the business.

Roy Fowler: Well legend certainly has it that Graham Moffatt was the button boy, as you called it.

Maurice Fowler: He was the button boy, it's quite true, he was the button boy at Lime Grove and Ted Black obviously saw some talent in him. But who actually conceived the general grouping of the Will Hay, the boy, the old man, Moore Marriott and Hay, I don't know. I presume it came out of the script writing.

Roy Fowler: That would have been Val Guest and Jock Orton.

Maurice Carter: That's right. Launder, I don't think was there yet.

Roy Fowler: I don't think they worked on the Will Hay pictures.

Maurice Carter: I don't think so.

Roy Fowler: Sidney around this time was at Islington, maybe a little later

Maurice Carter: I think he was there, I think it was mainly he and Val who were up there. They were stowed right up underneath the chimney in a little office way up, remote from everybody else, with a girl secretary and there were lots of giggles and jokes going on, always a very happy section.

Roy Fowler: Marriott Edgar was the other writer

Maurice Carter: Marriott Edgar, you're quite right it was Edgar and Val who wrote the Will Hay things.

Roy Fowler: Did you become mates with them at all.

Maurice Carter: We didn't, we were separated in that funny building, we were widely separated. The only communal place was the restaurant.

Roy Fowler: There was a restaurant

Maurice Carter: There was a restaurant and that again was through an underground passage where the cables used to run from the power station to a separate block and that again showed the hierarchy. All the bosses used to sit at a cross table at the top of the room, and the others were distributed on smaller tables around the room according to their station and you got nearer the door and there were the lower classes sitting, which included myself.

Roy Fowler: Could anyone go in, cast, extras

Maurice Carter: Everybody did, I don't know about extras. I think extras were excluded, it was only crew and staff, they had to go over to the pub on the opposite side of the road.

Roy Fowler: What did they serve you.

Maurice Carter: Bangers and mash and rolly pollies. Pretty basic stuff

Roy Fowler: Any bar

Maurice Carter: No, drink was strictly excluded. And for that reason the chief electrician, Stan, he had a secret way to get out of the studio, because otherwise to pass through the front door, you had to clock out and clock in again, black mark. So Stan who badly

needed a drink at midday, there was a secret tunnel he had where the cables actually ran down to supply the underground railway, with it's power which was the purpose of the power station and he used to go down this tunnel and arrive on the platform of the local station, go up the stairs to the pub and have a happy lunch and come back. Absolutely true, he used to dive down there.

Roy Fowler: Was that route known

Maurice Carter, Nobody except Stan, it was only leaked much later on, in strict confidence.

Roy Fowler: That would have driven Ostrer mad.

Maurice Carter: He was very anti alcohol. In fact the head, when the Crazy Gang were there, they sat lined up with Ted on the top table and you can imagine it became absolute chaos, because they had a great gag, Ted Black set the example by drinking milk, so they all had pint bottles of milk on the table. So the Crazy Gang got hold of these bottles before, they were painted white inside and they put a huge ball bearing in it, so they were all pre-opened ready for Ted to pour his glass, they were waiting for Ted to hold up his glass and he poured it and of course the ball bearing fell right through the bottom of the glass, took the bottom out. They were constantly playing gags like that.

On another occasion, working with them was a young Scottish lad and he was an absolute little devil and he responded to the Crazy Gang in good measure. So they got hold of him and took him into the make up room and right in the middle of the film, and he had this long bushy fair hair, they put a pair of hair clippers right across him, straight path and fixed him for the film, he had to have a little hair piece made.

Roy Fowler: Certainly one of the key figures at Islington was your boss Vetchinsky. Tell us about him.

Maurice Carter: Well Vetch was  a wonderful guy really. I think he used to spend as little time in the studio as he possibly could. He liked to go out with the buyer and see what he could pick up.

Roy Fowler: For the film

Maurice Carter: For himself and the film.

Roy Fowler: He did deals

Maurice Carter: He did dealing.

Roy Fowler He was from the East End of London

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think originally his father was a cantor and Vetch is reputed to have been the purist speaker of the Jeweish language, he was a great exponant of it, a great reputation apparently. I presume he was taught by his father. And he was such a character, he used to always carry his ham sandwich in a bag in his pocket so he could pull out this and have bite now and again

Roy Fowler: What was the ham sandwich, was it some kind of protest

Maurice Carter: I don't think so, I don't know it was ham, it was reputed to be ham, he always had a greasy bag in his pocket which used to come through the outside of his jacket. He wasn't a great dresser by any means.

Roy Fowler: Give us a thumb nail sketch of him. He never lost his East End origins.

Maurice Carter: No, he always used to speak like this, come here Carter, want to show you what we're going to do.

Roy Fowler: Was it that kind of Fagin accent.

Maurice Carter: It was more or less as I'm doing it, no it wasn't a Cockney accent, it was very Jewish accent. I think he did so much speaking in Yiddish it had transferred itself to his accent.

Roy Fowler: Was much of the industry Jewish then.

Maurice Carter: No, I don't think so, not amongst the technicians certainly.

Roy Fowler: Was there any awareness of people being a Jew or being a gentile.

Maurice Carter: I don't think so other than Vetch was considered to be a brilliant, amusing character, as you can imagine but great affection for him. Everybody was very fond of Vetch.

Roy Fowler: Do you know how he had come into the business.

Maurice Carter: Yes, he trained as an architect and then came in very much as myself as an assistant in Shepherd's Bush of course and then was transferred as art director to Islington.

Roy Fowler: When you said earlier he hated to make sketches, was he lazy in that way, or was it just his way of working.

Maurice Carter: I just don't think he was very competent at drawing but also combined with a certain laziness. But there was not the time or the need then.

Roy Fowler: So really you worked almost entirely from references

Maurice Carter: Absolutely and we added our bit to it

Roy Fowler: And made it practical

Maurice Carter: It all sort of worked out in a funny way, we knew what he wanted and of course while it was building you could always alter it about a bit.

Roy Fowler: So in what was the usual view of an art director, he didn't really operate that way, he was far more practical.

Maurice Carter: I think that's true. He was an extremely practical man.

Roy Fowler: Did he ever sit down with a sketch pad and design sets.

Maurice Carter: Yes in the sense that it was never more than the back of an envelope, it might be the back of a page of a script but never to do a prepared sketch to take to the director, he just used words, between he and the director

Roy Fowler: It must have been a very great training for you to take these vague references.

Maurice Carter: I think that's what advanced us very quickly all the chaps that worked with him because they were given so much scope really, between having a very loose sketch and plan. But all the thoughts of the practical side, the detail, the minutiae of the set, you had to think about, the size of the door, the number of panels, that sort of minutiae,

Roy Fowler: And fitting them into these rather strange shaped sound studios

Maurice Carter: It wasn't a particuarly strange shape, it was their restriction in size and you can imagine with only two stages operating what a problem it was, it was only by having, we had night gangs of course, the carpenters worked all night, the construction people, they had two gangs, they worked all night, they worked right through, so a gang came on at half past seven until the morning, and then the night gang went off and came on again at I think at 8 in the evening and worked through the night.

Roy Fowler: Where was the shop

Maurice Carter: It was quite close to the front door oddly enough

Roy Fowler: And was the first stage on the ground level

Maurice Carter: The general plan was the entrance door, and a very thin corridor, off to the right was the accountant's office and that corridor led to the open space where the green room was built with the art department over the top and doors to number one stage. And the stairs up to Ted Black and in the space behind that, in the square behind that, was the carpenter's shop, with the machinery, fairly well away from the stage because of the sound problem.

Roy Fowler: And the smaller stage was upstairs, was that a practical stage

Maurice Carter: It was quite a practical stage

Roy Fowler: But not as big as the main stage

Maurice Carter: No, it had a lift going up to it with gates about 10 ft wide and

Roy Fowler: Was it a bugger getting things from the shops onto the stages

Maurice Carter: Yes, because from the carpenter's shop to the lift was a passage no more than 8 ft wide. And unlimited height, so it was easy to carry flats through, but otherwise you had to think of the set in terms of the component parts, but it didn't seem to worry too much.

Roy Fowler: And it was all manual labour.

Maurice Carter: And the paint shop was down, where Albert Whitlock used to live, was down underneath the ground in the cellar, he used to pop up, we used to shout out from the art department, Albert, and Albert used to pop up the stairs, what do you want.

Roy Fowler: Was he a great scenic artist.

Maurice Carter: Yes, brilliant, but it is extraordinary because he developed the scenic artist part from his sign writing, originally he was a sign writer, but he didn't do any scenic work at Shepherd's Bush, he was purely a signwriter there. So all those talents developed later when he went to the Bush.

Roy Fowler: It's interesting because I always find sign writing in pictures at that time not very good, it never seemed to me to follow from the situation, it was always sign writing rather than in character.

Maurice Carter: He didn't do the actual titles on the picture,

Roy Fowler: I didn't mean that.

Maurice Carter: You mean sign writing on the set, I think you're probably right.

Roy Fowler: Anything else that occurs to you.

Maurice Carter: I think the interest was when Hitchcock came and we were doing The Lady Vanishes

Roy Fowler: That's a wee bit later

Maurice Carter: It is in the middle period as far as I was there, because my period at Islington stretches from 1934 to 1939 and after 1939 I was moved to Shepherd's Bush

Roy Fowler: Poole St closed

Maurice Carter: Poole St temporarily closed. It opened later after I left it

Foy Fowler: Before the war or during the war

Maurice Carter: During the war. But there was great panic at the outbreak of war, the whole of London was to be bombed, but that was the reason for the eventual move.

Roy Fowler: Your work in the department, Vetch has given you these very rough ideas to work on, what kind of working day did you have, you said earlier, not just when you had to stay for emergencies, a standard working day was from 7/30 in the morning

Maurice Carter: A normal day would be 7.30 to 6.

Roy Fowler: How often would you have to stay late into the night

Maurice Carter: Pretty often, I should say 50% of the time, 60% you would be late. Of course we had to come in on Saturday, remember it was a full six day week, a full 6 day week originally, and then at some period, I think it was at Islington, it became the half day Saturday, I think it was but I can't remember. But basically it was 6, and then often for us it was 7 because construction was almost 7 days a week.

Roy Fowler: Did that all get a bit much

Maurice Carter: You took it as a matter of necessity.

Roy Fowler: You were working for the company store

Maurice Carter: That is almost exactly what it was.

Roy Fowler: And almost no private life at all

Maurice Carter: No, and although we came in Saturday, Sunday, there was no extra pay for it.

Roy Fowler: Never any overtime whatsoever.

Maurice Carter: No, I think we used to get a travel allowance for coming in on Sunday.

Roy Fowler: Did they ever lay on cabs if you were late at night.

Maurice Carter, No,

Roy Fowler: Meal allowances

Maurice Carter: No

Roy Fowler: Fish and chips would they bring in

Maurice Carter: No, you went to the pub opposite, you would go over there and get it.

Roy Fowler: We're returning to those days now.

Maurice Carter: Yes, except you get paid now if you do a 12 hour day, we didn't,

Roy Fowler: When did you begin to get down on the floor, and start building your sets.

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Maurice Carter: That was if you drew the set up, then you were responsible for it and it was up to you to see to the building.

Roy Fowler: That seems to me really quite extraordinary that at your young age you would have that kind of responsibility, was that typical in the business generally, was it a young man's business to that extent

Maurice Carter: I think so

Roy Fowler: So one would find 20 year old people supervising crews.

Maurice Carter: I think very much, even today, or even my latter days in the studios that was still the basic thing, if the chap had drawn it, he went through with the contruction of it. You see there was no construction manager in those days so you were your own construction manager, I mean there was the chief of construction as such in the carpenter's shop but apart from that you had to unify the plasterer's shop for instance and take full sized details if necessary down to the plasterer's and say this is this and then if there was a necessary liaison between the carpenters they just went between each other and did it themselves

Roy Fowler: A minimum of paper work.

Maurice Carter: There was no construction manager as such to unify the whole paintwork and you just went and they went to the painters and said right the sets ready, you can get on and paint it and so forth.

Roy Fowler: What was the relationship between the art department people and the construction crews, were the crews deferential in that kind of old fashioned.

Maurice Carter: I think that's true, to a degree, it varied from character to character.

Roy Fowler: So the fact that you were 20 and the carpenter, chippy may have been 50.

Maurice Carter: No, you had to tell him what it was about.

Roy Fowler: And there was no resentment on his part

Maurice Carter: No, he wanted the drawing interpreted and you interpreted it for him. You were the man that had drawn it and so you ought to know, it was accepted.

Roy Fowler: When did you begin to have your own ideas about designing sets.

Maurice Carter: I think almost from the beginning. Once one had drawn up sets, virtually from the scribble on the back of an envelope to getting a set actually built, naturally you had your own ideas.

Roy Fowler: So in effect you are more than a draughtsman at this stage, you're actually designing the set.

Maurice Carter: To a degree, except the overall design was definitely Vetch's and the ultimate management of the set was Vetch's. He knew where the camera was to move to and where the master shot was. In those days always there was a great thing about the master shot on the set, where it was conceived to be drawn as the master shot, so you really built the set to that basically.

Roy Fowler: How were the sets finally arrived at, who had input into it, your drawings went to Vetch.

Maurice Carter: Yes, Vetch said that's ok, he gave me the ok finally. I would get the prints out, I'd distribute the prints to each department that needed them, the carpenters, plasterers, painters, drapes

Roy Fowler: Was Bob Stevenson, or Marcel Varnel involved at this stage or did they shoot what they were given.

Maurice Carter: Yes, they used to come up to the art department and discuss it. They often came up and looked at the drawings on the board.

Roy Fowler: Were they allowed input

Maurice Carter: Oh yes, Stevenson was the boss of course.

Roy Fowler: There were production meetings at which the set

Maurice Carter: We never had production meetings like later, in later years when everybody from every department there was there to discuss the whole thing. That never happened, it was broken down through, Vetch would chase upstairs to see Ted Black and presumably they would have a meeting upstairs, director, writers, and he would come back and give the message to us.

Roy Fowler: How did the set as built relate to the budget

Maurice Carter: Absolutely accurately

Roy Fowler: How did you arrive at a set based on a budgetary figure you'd been given.

Maurice Carter: That was Vetch's responsibility.

Roy Fowler: That was implicit in the scribble that he'd give you.

Maurice Carter: And he would watch it on the floor, for instance he would say to the plasterers don't stop anything over 12 ft, you'll never see it, that sort of instruction on the economy basis.

Roy Fowler: That was to some extent flying by the seat of his pants.

Maurice Carter: It always is, it's never been any different, there is no great genius who can say the set is going to cost this much, but Vetch would cut something out if he found, he had his budget returns, his cost returns and if he knew that he was sailing, like all of us we cut something out, something went.

Roy Fowler: Would they ever trim a complete set or was it

Maurice Carter: No, you couldn't

Roy Fowler: They didn't rewrite

Maurice Carter: No, that would be ultimate disgrace to knock out a set. It was to aim, I think in those days it was fairly forgiveable for a few pounds, if you were a couple of hundred pounds over budget for the entire set cost, but more than that you'd be deep in trouble.

Roy Fowler: You say the average budget was £75,000. That wasn't a bad budget for the 30s. Did you find it not generous

Maurice Carter: It was tight, it was very tight. Because everything had to come out of that, the artists, the script, everything

Roy Fowler:And overheads, did they charge a studio overhead.

Maurice Carter: I don't know exactly how that was worked. Vetch may have known, but I never did because he was responsible for the budget, that was his main responsibility.

Roy Fowler: I was thinking in relationship with Hollywood, given the dollar 4 to the pound in those days, that would be $300,000 dollars which was quite an adequate average for a programme picture.

Maurice Carter: But for a whole picture it was tightish, because they weren't quota quickies by any means. For instance a quota quickie would never allow Les Wilde to pop out and say I heard a sparrow squeaking. It took sometimes, he would take four or five takes of it, just on extraneous sounds.

Roy Fowler: Sound men have always been like that.

Maurice Carter: Marcel Varnel used to get desperate, he used to tear his hair out literally. He was a very apoleptic little man.

Roy Fowler: Any more to say about Vetch, you respected him obviously and liked him.

Maurice Carter: I think every body did, I haven't met anybody who didn't like Vetch, who disliked him, but he was a bit of a rascal between ourselves

Roy Fowler: He had a bit of a fiddle.

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: Was that typical, was there that kind of morality

Maurice Carter: I don't think so, I think nobody had time much for it

Roy Fowler: Or opportunity. It wasn't unknown. I remember once staying at Ed Willis' farm, who for years had been a senior member of the MGM art department and half of the Good Earth was there, the bridges, the dragons. We're going to talk about people. Mr Ostrer,

Maurice Carter: He was just like a god himself, the only time I saw him was in the cafeteria, or restaurant, or whatever it was called.

Roy Fowler: You had no direct dealings

Maurice Carter: Not at all

Roy Fowler: What was his reputation, was he just one of the brothers or was he respected as a talent in his own right.

Maurice Carter: No, just as a brother, he was a ghostly figure, the awful boss who might decide to sack us all.

Roy Fowler: Isidore was the brains.

Maurice Carter: He was indeed.

Roy Fowler: How about Bertie, was he there at that stage

Maurice Carter: No, he was at Lime Grove.

Roy Fowler: So really it was Ted Black running the place.

Maurice Carter: Ted was the absolute, the archetypal producer, budget wise and everything, artists, casting.

Roy Fowler: One of the best ever in England but now sadly not as well remembered as he should be

Maurice Carter: Sure, again I had very little contact with him, he was this towering figure who would come down and say why is the set not ready and what are we hanging about for and what is the hold up.

Roy Fowler: You didn't have much time to get to know

Maurice Carter: Exactly, it was draughting. Chasing around the shops to see

Roy Fowler: The writers

Maurice Carter: Again they were tucked away, they were a little colony on their own, they would only commute not with us, they would commute between Ted Black and most of the time they spent with their girl secretary up there having the giggles.

At that stage they were just strange figures who wrote the script, appeared in the restaurant at the top table and that was it.

Roy Fowler: How about the technicians

Maurice Carter: Most important was Jack Cox, the cameraman, he was the only man who could defy Varnel about time. And when, in fact everybody looked to Jack, when he said to the camera assistant, focus puller, go and fetch my hat and coat, we knew that was the end of the day, and Jack was a tough old character.

Roy Fowler:Was he a likable person

Maurice Carter: Yes very. In his tough way.

Roy Fowler: Who was on his crew, was there the one steady camera crew there

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: There was never a matter of two pictures in production simultaneously, it was always just the one

Maurice Carter: Only one, with two stages, you could only do one.

Roy Fowler:So really there wasn't that much turnover in personel.

Maurice Carter: No, pretty much the same personel, the only person who would change was the director and the artists.

Roy Fowler: :If people got fired what kind of cause would it be for.

Maurice Carter: Never knew of anybody being fired, only dishonesty would be the only possible reason, or misbehaviour of some sort.

Roy Fowler: I know Roy Baker was there

Maurice Carter: He was there a little later.

Roy Fowler: Marcel Varnel

Maurice Carter: Very excitable, but obviously a very competent director.

Roy Fowler: Maurice Elvey

Maurice Carter: He was before my time. He was Vetch's terror, Vetch was terrified of Maurice Elvey. There is a wonderful story about Vetch and Maurice Elvey. Apparently he came down on the set and found the door opened the wrong way, instead of opening into the set it opened out of the set. So he called Vetch on the stage, this great fierce man, look at this Vetchinsky, which way is this door supposed to open. Vetch said into the set of course, well try it, so Vetch goes up. Well what the hell is the explanation. So Vetch says there were two strange men in here last night. Roars of laughter from the unit of course. So always when any thing went wrong with Vetch, everybody said, well it was two strange men, never Vetch's responsibility.

Roy Fowler: One of the problems of looking at the historical aspects, really it was just work and one picture followed another and they don't really stand out one from another.

I should ask you about Will Hay

Maurice Carter: We saw a lot of Will, and all the tricks that were played on Will, he was such a miserable old bugger.

Roy Fowler: He was rather taciturn.

Maurice Carter: He was always a bit of a pain in the arse to be quite honest, he never raised a smile in his life

Maurice Carter: Was he devoid of humour

Maurice Carter: Totally. I never can honestly say , and I saw quite a lot of him, I never saw him raise even the ghost of a smile.

Roy Fowler: Did people used to play jokes on him.

Maurice Carter: For instance, in the Oh Mr Porter, he was supposed to go down, the idea was going down into a cave going down to the water, and the idea was that all three went down together and poor old Harbottle went down and only his little bowler hat was there floating on the water so the way it was fixed to do this was to build separate ramps for each of them and Will's was to keep him reasonably above the water, head above the water, but Harbottle was due to disappear over a drop. So the water was very cold and Bill had made a terrible fuss all about this and he had delayed shooting a whole half day and they put the heaters in and there was so much steam coming up you couldn't shoot it, so eventually they faked, they had the button boy putting a thermometer in and rushing up to his room with it. So they got the thermometer and stacked it up with hot hands in front of the radiator until it got up to an extraorindary temperature, and the buttons ran up to him, and it looked alright, it registered about 80. So Will condescended to come down and start the shot. But of course what we'd done was put him on the wrong ramp, so it was Will who went under water. We lost a whole day's shooting and there was a terrible row about that because he packed up and went home,. That was it.

Roy Fowler: How did he take all these

Maurice Carter: Badly, you mustn't joke with him.

Roy Fowler: Oh Mr Porter was 37

Maurice Carter: Yes, late 37. The whole series of Will Hay pictures went on almost one after another because they were so profitable, the whole profits of the two studios were turned around on Will Hay. We made one, he was a sea thing, Old Bill

Roy Fowler: Old Bones of the River

Maurice Carter: Old Bones of the River was later. That was a late one because we went over to Shepperton to make part of that, the river part. Then inbetween was another Stevenson film which was a very good one, Owd Bob, Will Fyffe, and we made a Harry Lauder film sliced in-between the Will Hay pictures

Roy Fowler: These are two legendary names from music hall, what do you remember about them

Maurice Carter: Will Fyffe was a very nice guy, I think he was a considerable actor, but Lauder was a pain in the arse. By that time his Victorian comedy was a bit outre.

Roy Fowler: Presumably there was an audience for it.

Maurice Carter: I think it was more nostalgia than anything.

Roy Fowler: Wasn't he notoriously mean.

Maurice Carter: I think so, I didn't have a lot of contact, just saw him as an artist who was working there.

Then we made Doctor Syn,

Roy Fowler: Vetch worked with you on that, what were the references.

Maurice Carter: Again, English Homes was invaluable

Roy Fowler: What did he do, tear pages out of library

Maurice Carter: You know the story which has gone round the world I think with Vetch and myself, Vetch had very bad flu and was in bed and I went to his home and his wife wouldn't have him in her bedroom, and he had to sleep separately in his little study. So I went there with the drawings of the set, and he said look here Carter, it's not right, get the English Homes out from there, and he had copies, I don't know if you've seen it, it was a magnificent book, full of photographs of every period property classified into volumes with illustrations, I mean a book worth even in those days £20 or £30 a volume. He said look go and fetch volume 2 English Homes, so I brought this book out and he laid it on his bed, and I opened up the pages and he had marked it with the back of a piece of bacon, a rasher of bacon. That story has gone round the world. It is absolutely true. Then he was jabbing the drawing and poked his finger through my drawing which had taken about a week to draw, so it couldn't be printed so I had to redraw it.

Roy Fowler: Mr Arliss was brought over at some considerable expense.

Maurice Carter: He was the great, the studio was repainted because he was coming, you could tell how highly respected he was, what a great man. But again I think he was a bit of a pain in the arse to everybody.

Roy Fowler: Doctor Syn was quite a big picture for the studio.

Maurice Carter: Yes, I mean importing an artist from the States was always considered to be a big deal.

Roy Fowler: Was that Ted Black.

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: So it was his idea to develop that property.

Maurice Carter: I think it was, again it was with an eye to the American market which they were very keen on trying to enter.

Roy Fowler: Michael Balcon was certainly pursuing that policy at Shepherd's Bush, did he have any authority over Ted Black at all.

Maurice Carter: No, entirely separate, it was very much a little island on its own, Islington.

Roy Fowler: Doctor Syn was quite unual in that it had quite a lot of location work, did you go down with the unit.

Maurice Carter: No, I was trying to get the sets built in the studio, Vetch went down with it but I was studio only.

Roy Fowler: Arliss, he was a very distant man

Maurice Carter: He had a great reputation at that time from his work in the States, and as I said the whole studio had to be painted and polished before he came, the floor was polished, it was that sort of recognition of his significance in the studio

Roy Fowler: Was he a pro.

Maurice Carter: Very much so.

Roy Fowler: No great temperament but rather stand-offish. He was old, and in effect he dated back to Victorian actorish times when they were rather grand.

What do you remember about The Lady Vanishes

Maurice Carter: The Lady Vanishes would be interesting. I started to tell you about the compression of the set and the first use of perspective. Another interesting side light on this is the working on back projection at that time, because you remember the train sequence in The Lady Vanishes, and back projection became very important. The projectionist there was Alf Davis; and I think we did more work between he and I to progress back projection in that period. We built this interesting thing of building a perspective section of the carriage and melting it into the continuation of the train on the plate.

Roy Fowler: Let me ask you, how did you achieve that, was it your original idea to do it that way

Maurice Carter: Yes, it had probably been done elsewhere

Roy Fowler: But you arrived at it independently.

Maurice Carter: I arrived at it quite independently

Roy Fowler: Did you get there finally by trial and error or was it all done on the drawing board.

Maurice Carter: It was very painful I can tell you, the painful part was obtaining the plates accurately shot so that you could make a join. And you had to dictate to the cameraman who was going to shoot the plates exactly the position his camera had to be in. For instance let's talk about the train, he had to have, for instance, a flat carriage between the locomotive before him and a flat bed, truck, to be on and the camera had to be rigged so many feet from the end of the actual train, the carriages, and to one side, the exact position had to be calculated. So you had to give the cameraman those directions before he went. Now cameramen were very individual characters in those days and never believed he could be dictated to like that, so he always came back with film which I couldn't make the join to, so we had a great number of battles over that. Until eventually the cameraman having seen it done, the miracle of this train apparently continuing with the carriage with the man climbing out, for instance you remember in 39 Steps he climbed out of the carriage and climbed along the train, in fact we did it that way, joining the train to a back projection plate

Roy Fowler: The other train approaching

Maurice Carter: You couldn't do it for reality, the bloke would have been killed.

Roy Fowler: Jack Cox was the cameraman

Maurice Carter: But he didn't shoot the plates, he didn't shoot location, I can't remember the name of the cameraman but he was a very good cameraman who used to go out and shoot the plates, but he was basically a location cameraman.

Roy Fowler: But he couldn't understand

Maurice Carter: There was mathematical precision about it, but they gradually became convinced but very often we would have to send them out to reshoot, which caused a great furore, they shot those plates in France, I think. And arranging the French railways for this flat bed truck and all the other paraphenalia was quite a deal, an expensive deal in those days. But Alf Davis was a very fine projectionist and had great knowledge of lens, projection lens. We had great trouble at that time with projection because there was always a hot spot because of the nature of the lens, the imperfection of the lens on the projector, the arc centre, there was always a hot spot and we struggled to get rid of this, we used, eventually we found the only cure was a very thin wire with a halfpenny soldered to the end which was held in front of the projector to break up the hot spot. It's unbelievable but it worked. And all those scenes with the train were shot in that way.

Roy Fowler: That would take some positioning presumably

Maurice Carter: You just set up the screen, doodle about with projector until you got it dead centre, but it was out of focus you see, and so it just blotted out the hot spot.

Roy Fowler: How much had back projection been used at Poole St

Maurice Carter: Not very much, in fact it was almost new and we just got the projectors then.

Roy Fowler: So it was the rig for the studio, you didn't bring it in specifically for the picture.

Maurice Carter: No, but we gradually built up and got bigger screens, what we needed was bigger screens, the problem always was we needed a bigger screen, and better screen.

Roy Fowler: It's very effective on that film

Maurice Carter: But we worked on it for years

Roy Fowler: Roy Baker said Hitch was marvellous about working on a train, he always got the sense of movement and the correct sense of movement, there was never any confusion in his mind about direction of travel.

Maurice Carter: You know he used to illustrate his script. That was such an advantage to us because he would already have made a little drawing beside each picture, all we simply had to do was take his drawing and translate it into the setting for him.

Roy Fowler: He came in through the art department originally

Maurice Carter: Sketch artist.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of Hitchcock

Maurice Carter: He was very quiet and as you know he never went to see his rushes, he knew what he'd got, that was rather extraordinary because we always sat in the theatre, we all went to see rushes and Hitchcock didn't bother to be there. He knew what he'd got and that was it.

Roy Fowler: Was he always right

Maurice Carter: It is quite an extraordinary thing, but he relied on his cameraman, relied on his eye, his eye was the camera and he knew what he'd got and where it tied up and how he cut

Roy Fowler: He and Cox had worked together quite a lot by that time

Maurice Carter: They knew each other well. They were a good partnership.

Roy Fowler: The original script was written for the American director Roy Neill something, I think he was scheduled to direct it and for some reason Hitchcock took it over and consequently didn't have as much input, it is said, as he normally would in a script. I wonder if you could vouch for that, when you first saw the script

Maurice Carter: No,

Roy Fowler: It was always a Hitchcock film as far as you knew

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: Did it come in suddenly in your recollection

Maurice Carter: Yes it did. It just sort of popped up.

Roy Fowler: How about Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, were they in evidence in the picture.

Maurice Carter: I think yes, they used to talk to Hitchcock, and I think if he wanted a change of dialogue he called them down. But of course little Maggie Lockwood, I don't know whether, was her second picture, she was a very naïve little girl

Roy Fowler: Not a very good actress

Maurice Carter: She always used to sit at my table in the café because she was terrified to be with the assistant director because he used to tell her filthy stories and make her blush. Quite sweet. Later on Maggie became a pretty tough buddy.

Roy Fowler: Apparently the first sequence in that film was cut, do you remember what that was

Maurice Carter: No

Roy Fowler: There was a scene that was on the front of that inn sequence, the sequence in the foreign inn.

Maurice Carter: I don't remember.

Roy Fowler: There were location shots, other than the plates

Maurice Carter: Yes, the location was at Basingstoke

Roy Fowler: The shootout

Maurice Carter: Yes, exactly, that was done on I think a military railway in the Basingstoke area as far as I can remember. Borden.

Roy Fowler: Anything you particularly remember about the film

Maurice Carter: It was just compressing the thing into the studio, the building the big station and that sort of thing in a tiny studio and getting the continuity to shoot along the train was the biggest problem

Roy Fowler: It was a bigger budget than usual

Maurice Carter: Yes it was, I didn't know what the budget was but I should think it was considerably above the £75,000 level.

Roy Fowler: A relatively painless picture in your memory.

Maurice Carter: Very much so, Hitch knew exactly what he wanted and once you have a director that knows exactly where he is going to put the camera, shot by shot, you've got an enormous advantage in set design. Usually it's us trying to get a compromise with the director where we're going to be shooting.

Roy Fowler: He was a masterful technician

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: Was there any sign of his infamous pranks

Maurice Carter: I don't' think so, not that I can remember. Did he appear in it. I think he did appear in one shot.

Roy Fowler: Roy Baker told me he humiliated Linden Travers in one scene, because she had morning and the afternoon she had switched positions in a shot, a better side or whatever it was and he was merciless with her which he could be, could he not.

Maurice Carter: Yes, he had a pretty sharp tongue, but he and Vetch got on very well.

Roy Fowler: Oh Mr Porter

Maurice Carter: As I told you the main incident was the joke with Will Hay

Roy Fowler: That was a very clever picture the way it's played, a very quiet little masterpiece.

Maurice Carter: We shot on a windmill in Norfolk for the windmill sequence. And that was a sequence on which a stuntman was killed. He was attached, when old Marriott was supposed to be whirled round on the sales, the first attempt at that, apparently his safety belt broke and he was whirled off the sales. It wasn't a very happy location. Generally it was quite a fun film to make.

Roy Fowler: The station was where

Maurice Carter: That I think was the railway at Borden

Roy Fowler: The same one

Maurice Carter: I think it was a section of track which was available at that time. We actually built the station. It was more or less my set, that was, because Vetch had just said draw up a station which was my instruction, so it was left to me to do it.

Roy Fowler: What did you have to begin with, a platform of any kind

Maurice Carter: Yes, a platform, there was an off loading platform there I presume for army purposes and we just built the building onto that and we built a little road coming up to it and the crossing gates and the signal box. That was all built

Roy Fowler: What did you do to the engine

Maurice Carter: I don't think we did anything, I think it was in its natural state, a lovely period engine. And the carriages were all there.

Roy Fowler: Did you destroy it in the film, or was it a model

Maurice Carter: It was a model shot. I can't think of that German who used to do the model work for us. But it may have been Guido Baldi at the Bush, we didn't do model work actually in Islington. If anything specialised like that it went to Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: But you would design it presumably

Maurice Carter: Sure

Roy Fowler: Were you there for the shoot or would you turn it over to whatever it was.

Maurice Carter: No turned it over, but Vetch was there.

Roy Fowler: There was a department specifically for shooting miniatures, at the Bush

Maurice Carter: Yes, there was a model department with Guido Baldi in charge

Roy Fowler: We're approaching the end of the 30s, what else sticks out in your mind

Maurice Carter: We're into the Crazy Gang period, the Crazy Gang series came and they were a pretty interesting crowd to have around the studio naturally. In between we did funny pictures like Hey Hey USA and things like that which I can hardly remember who the cast was, comedy. There was a whole series of Crazy Gang films, the one we've talked about, about the battleship, OK For Sound, which was the first one as far as I remember because I went to the Palladium to look at the stuff at the Palladium they had and I can't remember why exactly but that was the thing.

Roy Fowler: Will Hay was extremely profitable, the Crazy Gang too

Maurice Carter: Obviously, very popular films.

Roy Fowler: Actually it must have been quite a money spinning studio

Maurice Carter: With low overheads it must have been, I'm sure it kept Lime Grove going.

Roy Fowler: Lime Grove was certainly loosing money because Balcon trying to break into

Maurice Carter: Sure the American market was the great thing, very expensive and never really worked.

Roy Fowler: What was the attitude at Shepherd's Bush towards Islington

Maurice Carter: It was recognised as a rather superior branch of the business without doubt

Roy Fowler: You didn't feel inferior, that you were beavering away making profitable pictures and Mickey Balcon was just making some quite expensive duds.

Maurice Carter: I think we all recognised we had to try and break into the American market if we could, because the British market was so comparatively narrow, and so limiting to the budgets

Roy Fowler: You've been there for several years at Islington, did you ever get itchy feet at Islington after a number of years

Maurice Carter: No, I was very happy there.

Roy Fowler: You didn't think all this is going on at Denham or Pinewood

Maurice Carter: No

Roy Fowler: What was the image of those bigger, perhaps more glamorous studios.

Maurice Carter: Well I suppose one thought it would be nice to get onto bit pictures like that, I suppose so, but I don't remember thinking particularly I must get out into the other world. But towards, around 1939, for instance I was sent over to Lime Grove to work with Alfred Junge on Climbing High because he was short of an assistant, so I went over there for that, the Jessie Matthews picture

MAURICE CARTER

TAPE TWO, SIDE THREE

Maurice Carter: Junge was one of the greats. As you know he came from Germany. He had worked in UFA Studios and was the most experienced art director working in England at that time, without dub, he was a great artist, now he produced the most wonderful sketches to work from, so it was the very clear

Roy Fowler: A proper production designer.

Maurice Carter: And in his contract he had that the director had to shoot the long shot that he set, whether they used it in the film or not, he insisted that the establishing shot was his and because it had to be to his sketch, with the lighting. He was a great guy for painting in lighting on his sets. For instance if he wanted a shaft of light he would paint his set so the shaft of light was there so the lighting cameraman had no choice but to light it as he wanted it. He was a very strong character

Roy Fowler: Likeable man, very Teutonic

Maurice Carter: Very Teutonic but admirable man. Everybody admired him because, his assistant was Scotty who is a art director and now, I think he's just died in, poor Scotty, excellent art director, but what we admired very much was his competency to sketch, to have in his mind a sketch and illustrate the thing before he actually did it

And Roy Fowler: And he was a very practical man

For Maurice Carter: Very

Roy Fowler: Again like your perspective work he was marvellous at that sort of thing. Tell as about your experience on that picture with him

Maurice Carter: That is jumping out a bit and from the end of Islington, I think it would be a good idea to talk to the end of Islington

Roy Fowler: I thought that was an interim thing

Maurice Carter: It was in the latter period. Before that I was working on all the Crazy Gang films and Stinker Murdoch Pictures, comedies came the in. They were a pick up from the radio series.. I am trying to think of the last of the will Hay pictures we did there,

Roy Fowler: Old Bones

Maurice Carter: Old Bones that was much later, that was the one I was telling you, we had to go to Shepperton. We went to Shepperton for two films of will Hay, one was Old Bones Of The River, and the other one was he was playing the part of a fireman, Where's That Fire

Roy Fowler: That was when Twentieth-Century Fox was distributing the Islington product

Maurice Carter: And we went to Shepperton for that, it was a petrol station to catch up on fire. The idea was instead of delivering water, they would deliver petrol through their homes, they connected up to the petrol pump and flames came out of it. Will was very chary about that, you can imagine

Roy Fowler: I don't blame him, were you wary of special-effects

Maurice Carter: Yes, very much, but to hose with a 7 ft flame coming out of it, I guess he had reason. And after the incident of the ducking he was doubly suspicious of all the art department and special effects, very much so, quite rightly

Roy Fowler: What was the contrast between Islington and Shepperton. Shepperton was not that good a studio

Maurice Carter: We never worked inside the studio, we only used their lot because there was no lot at either Lime Grove, the lot which we used mutually was the lot out at Northolt. But I don't remember any film from Islington actually directly using that. But it was available.

Anyway finally in Lime Grove the two films I made were with Val Guest. Val Guest became a director then and gave me my first job as art director which was on Miss London Ltd which was a musical of sorts. And then we did Bees In Paradise, an unremembered, and unlamented musical again. Both those we made towards the latter part of 1939.

I was again called over to Lime Grove because they were making Man In Grey and Wally Mutton was the art director on Man In Grey and he had got himself into terrible difficulties with the budget. Also more importantly with the schedule of building the sets. It looked as though they would have to stop shooting while they built these enormously elaborate sets. So he came down one day and there they said When's the set going to be ready and look it has to be ready by Tuesday. Wally said to them, look you can stick this film up your arse, I'm off. And he put his hat and coat on and walked out of the studio. And that is when Maurice Ostrer called me over to Shepherd's Bush and said look you've got to pick up this picture and put it right, in the middle. A lot of the sets were drawn, so I had to go through and see what we could possibly do. It was the old thing of cutting, a horrible thing to do to some body else's set. But anyway I did it and got through the

picture fairly successfully and that is how The Man in Grey was finished. I never got a title on it because it was Wally's picture and I said I didn't want a title.

Many found: Haven't we jumped a couple of years. The Man in Grey was 42. 43.

We haven't had the outbreak of war yet. You were going to say about Alfred Junge with Jessie Matthews, because that was a pre-war. The Man In Grey was definitely wartime because the exterior were shot down in my part of the country East Sussex, Woodhurst anyway

Maurice Carter: Maybe it was sandwiched between the musicals I was doing but I didn't think it was that late, my mind is very confused as to the sequence of events

Roy Fowler: I'm not the strongest person for chronology, because suddenly everything seemed to be happening

Maurice Carter: Everything was happening, then there was this closing down of the studio on the outbreak of war, everybody was sent off just like that.

Roy Fowler: I'm a bit confused as to where you were based, did you go to the Bush for just the one picture with Junge

Maurice Carter: Just the one picture and then I came back to do the musicals and with Val Guest, as art director

Roy Fowler: Is any think to be said if about Lime Grove at that period.. Who will was directing. Sonny Hale has gone by this time has he not.

Maurice Carter: I think Sonny was directing as far as I remember, I'm pretty sure he was.

Roy Fowler: Rather sad, because he was a bit of a disaster as a director wasn't he, as a performer.

Maurice Carter: Going back again to Islington we did Shipyard Sally with Gracie Fields which was an interesting interlude. That must have been very much on the eve of the outbreak of war because her little Italian husband then was being questioned, I find it very difficult to place the time of things

Roy Fowler: I know that was 20th Century Fox which indicates its rather late, about 1939

Maurice Carter I know it was very soon a question of her husband being interned and she leaving for the States, it can't have been too long after that that she left England.

Roy Fowler Scarpered. Was there even then ill feeling, so many took off, If you remember they used to say was gone with the wind up

Maurice Carter: Yes, there was great resentment and that she had gone, that she had taken her Italian, obviously she was very wise because for instance Guido Baldi, the special effects man at Lime Grove, he was obviously Italian and he was put on that ship which was sunk, it was sunk by a submarine

Roy Fowler: Did he survive

Maurice Carter: He survived and they brought him back if to England and. He was interned for it bit and then he was released to come to Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: Del Giudice was also interned.

How about the Germans

Maurice Carter: They seemed to get some, because they disappeared. We always used to wonder and because been coming it up and took to the outbreak of war either they took their own idea there was going to be a war and just disappeared

Roy Fowler: Junge was very prominent here during the war

Maurice Carter Junge was, because he was naturalised of course so there was no problem with Junge,

Roy Fowler: There were so many one wonders, did they go to the States so many of the cameramen, too

Maurice Carter: Most of them seemed to take the hint and go. The Italians had been here so long they thought they were uninvolved but they didn't become interned until Italy entered the war it self

Roy Fowler: And they weren't inside for so long

Maurice Carter: No, well, I think they were for a fair time, they were sent to the Isle of Man, for a fair amount of time

Roy Fowler: Have we fully covered the Jessie Matthews film, or is there not much to be said about it

Maurice Carter: Not much, because the picture was already under way when I went to help out , it was purely a helping out

Roy Fowler: What did you learn from Junge

Maurice Carter: I think the thing I learned is that it is necessary to do a good sketch if you want your draftsmen to understand what is in your mind; and the more you can disseminate what you have in your mind to your underlings the better. And he could, Alfred, he could do that

Roy Fowler: So it became your practise as an art director to do fairly finished drawings

Maurice Carter: Yes, I'm afraid they became to finish in the end, became over finished

Roy Fowler: I always remember someone saying to me at the time Caesar and Cleopatra which is a little later some body saying that Messel who had the production designer credit on it only send in a few very miasmic oils, tiny little oils, I was going to ask you about that

Maurice Carter: That's right. It's rather the same thing as Vetch, then it was up to the drafts man and the assistant art director to translate

Roy Fowler: It's a hell of a long way

Maurice Carter: A long way. Well, it's a long way from the sketch on the back an envelope with Vetch to the finished set I can tell you, it's a pretty long journey

Roy Fowler: Was Vetch then a bad or good influence, the fact that you had to do so much yourself

Maurice Carter: It was marvellous. I would never have become an art director without working with Vetch, because I would never had sufficient confidence to know that it was my set in fact

Roy Fowler: And was part that being so young and as one does when one is young think I can to anything

Much Carter: I think so

Roy Fowler: That worked out very well

Maurice Carter: I think I got through my early pictures pretty comfortably. I understood how to keep to a budget, those sort of things I'd learnt the hard way, from Vetch

Roy Fowler: Well no nonsense presumably, if you didn't stay within budget

Maurice Carter: You didn't last long, you couldn't last long

Roy Fowler: Again it seems to come down to such a large extent to Ted Black, his proficiency in employing people who knew they were doing

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: We are now at the point where you are making that transition from chief craftsmen to art director, you say it came out the blue. This was Val's first film as director. Had you known him much before

Maurice Carter: No, only in the studio, only from meeting up occasionally on the set and his knowing I was doing a good deal of work on the actual design of the sets as well as drafting

Roy Fowler: What was his reputation as a writer was he seen to be a bit bumptious and a opportunist

Maurice Carter: Yes I think he was, the idea that he'd worked in the States as a gag writer was considered to be, maybe he had, maybe he hadn't. And he adopted this half American accent , so he was thought be a bit, but on the other hand he had written all the gags for the Hay pictures. He was a good gagster and he used to play out all the gags with Ted Black in his office. Ted would go through all the actions to explain what the gag was about, bend down and peer through the key hole and all this sort of thing

Roy Fowler: There again there aren't many producers who would that to make sure it worked

Maurice Carter : He was very involved and of course he had great experience of theatre, as he you know, from his association with his brother, his whole family was theatre. No, he a good producer

Roy Fowler: What did that do to your life when you became a art director, you obviously know trepidation about taking it on

Maurice Carter: No, the greatest change was I'd bought myself Austin Seven. I think I was promoted to £12 / 50, £12 /30 first of all, and eventually to £15

Roy Fowler: It was a lot of loot. Are you living independently now, or are you still at home.

Maurice Carter: I was married, I had got married was living in Hounslow

Roy: Did you buy a house or rent a house

Maurice Carter: I bought a house, I was buying a little house. And I used to drive my little Austin Seven via Highgate to get to Islington, quite a journey

Roy Fowler: What made you choose Hounslow

Maurice Carter: Because my wife's father and mother lived there, that was the reason I think

Roy Fowler: Those first two pictures with Val, anything to say about them. You say they were musicals, were they both Arthur Askey

Maurice Carter: No, it was mainly Jean Kent. She was the chief artist in that. I remember I didn't have much faith in them I must say

Roy Fowler: What happened to them, did they disappear without trace

Norwich Carter No, they did the circuits but I don't think they did much business

Roy Fowler: Is Rank a presence yet or is it still the Ostrers

Myers Carter: It was still the Ostrers very much, Rank was not until quite well into the war

Roy Fowler: Will you take us through what happened later

Maurice Carter: What I can't remember was exactly which films I was making at Islington. I must have gone there after the closure. Whether they were for the Val Guest films or not but I can remember coming home, by that time the air raids had started

Roy Fowler: That would bring us to what 1940

Maurice Carter Sure. But I did another film at Lime Grove which was with Tony Asquith which was Cottage To Let, a nice little film made at Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: You're the art director on it

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler : From here on you art director everything you work on

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: Was it that Gainsborough or Gaumont British

Maurice Carter: Gainsborough. The titles were pretty interchangeable then I think, it may well have been Gaumont, it may have been a Gaumont picture

Roy Fowler: It was always my favourite main title, the Gainsborough Lady

Maurice Carter. Yes, it was a great title. And we revised it several times, and updated it

Roy Fowler: Did you ever shooting it yourself design the frame

Maurice Carter: Yes, I had to re draw the frame. Jean Kent and Maggie Lockwood both played the Gainsborough Lady, if you look at the back titles you will see that it was both of them

Roy Fowler: Before they became very famous

Maurice Carter: No afterwards. The original Gainsborough lady I can't remember who that was that the later one was certainly Maggie Lockwood and Jean Kent and at the time of the musical films

Roy Fowler: So they would reshoot to it just so they got one of their prominent

Maurice Carter: Yes, one of their up and coming Artists in the picture. But I'm very confused about what the hell I was doing at Lime Grove after the air raids started

Roy Fowler: Well you mentioned Cottage To Let which was a very successful play at the beginning of the war, and with Puffin. Tell us about Puffin

Maurice Carter: I know what's escaped me was talking about the picture Dear Octopus because it was the beginning of a long association between myself and John Bryan. This is while I was still an assistant. John Bryan was brought over to make Dear Octopus at Islington, he came from Shepperton, he had been with the Kordas. And I think he had also been at Lime Grove, I think, he had done a picture at Lime Grove. And then was brought in to do this, for them, important picture. It had rather a big cast. And he introduced me, that was my first introduction to Ferdy Ballan. I don't know if you've heard of him, the greatest artist in the whole business. He was a sketch artist to Vincent Korda.

And we had a very drunken Irishmen who was doing the scenic painting at that time and he was so drunk and he couldn't get to work. So we in a panic Ferdie was sent for. I always remember the set, it was this lovely house, this Georgian house in the picture and it had wide windows and looked out over the countryside. And Ferdie had to paint this. I think he had to paint a huge background in 24 hours, and he worked continuously for 24 hours on this. And I'll always remember I was absolutely amazed and, he painted a yew hedge and it was a great black lump. And I thought what the hell is this. And he came along with a brush of green, just flicked it, on top, and then another lighter at brush over that and it became the marvellous picture of a back lit yew hedge. And beyond it with a long stick with a little bit of charcoal on, he drew in the golf course in the distance, and just touched bits, quite marvellous

Roy Fowler: Where had he learnt his craft,

Maurice Carter: In Germany he came from U FA again. Korda brought him over to Shepperton from UFA when he moved to Shepperton

Roy Fowler: Do you mean Shepperton or Denham

Maurice Carter: Shepperton, well to Denham primarily. Unless one looks up these references are very difficult to remember after 40 years also

Roy Fowler: I'm curious about Puffin Asquith

Maurice Carter: A marvellous character Puffin, everybody absolutely loved Puffin, and he always worked in a pair of denim overalls, never anything else. And he used to take all the sparks and everybody over to the pub on Friday evenings, the Prince of Wales, on the corner, and buy them all drinks. Delightful man, marvellous to work with, because he knew exactly what he wanted. He was as good as Hitchcock virtually without being able to do his little drawings to tell you what his set up sets were. It was a very easy, the easiest picture I've ever done I think. Super bloke, absolutely super.

I then progressed, I can't remember what I was doing in actual war time at Islington but it was a very tough period for me because I had to travel home through all the bombing. I had to get home some how, the trams had stopped running to Islington because it was a favourite bombing site. So I had to walk the two and-a-half the miles down to Old Street station with the bombs falling all around. And then when I got to the underground station, it was all of bodies laying on the platform, sheltering, then travel right back to Hounslow. I hadn't got a car because as you petrol, couldn't get petrol for love or money, so it was a pretty tough period for me during that time

But the raids must have continue because I can remember a raid at Lime Grove, it was a daylight rate and they dropped a bomb in fact on Shepherd's Bush market on that occasion

Roy Fowler: This was quite early in the war

Maurice Carter: It was after the phoney war

Roy Fowler: The bombing started in the summer of 1940, didn't it

Maurice Carter: That's right. I remember being there and seeing

Roy Fowler: There was the Battle of Britain and then the night raids

Maurice Carter: And the Italian bombers came over so low we could actually see the markings and know they were Italian. They came sweeping over the studio. It was the only raid the Italians took part in

Roy Fowler: Very sensible of them

Maurice Carter: I think the whole lot were shot down before they got back, they thought they were bombing Abyssinia

Roy Fowler: I suppose one should ask what the immediate results of the war were on the film business

Maurice Carter: The thing was all of us were worried about where we were going to be called up, of course it. That was always in your mind. Then they said we could get delay in our call up because the studio was working on war work at the same time with making films. They gave me a special task, the studio actually was making the parts for the trainers the xxx trainer. I did a lot of were with George Hill, I don't know if you remember George Hill, he was in the camera department at Lime Grove. Wonderful man, who was highly experienced with the high-speed camera and I was doing a lot of work with him on the trainer, on the night trainer.

They had the problem with the night trainer, you know it was the little thing where the guy got into a simulated cock pit and it rolled about and you could see what he was doing. But they wanted to demonstrate what course he was flying to a whole class of students as well as the one under test. And so we had to invent a system, and I drew it for George exactly how all the mechanical parts were, a little pen moved over a map of country, showing exactly how this chap was going, guiding, flying blind.

My big task was to do a trainer, a flare dropping trainer for the Navy to demonstrate to the class how to drop flares to illuminate the fleet so they could be bombed in a bombing raid. A very elaborate thing of working out the mechanics and mathematics, for me the mathematics were terrifying, how the wind direction in one direction, and the speed of the drop of the flares in the other. Anyway it was a considerable problem to be involved in while I was trying to make films, art direct films

Roy Fowler: This was all based at the studio and in between features

Maurice Car: And I had lost virtually all the staff there, I was left with one little girl to draw the sets and myself , so had to do drafting, art direct and run a project for the Navy at the same time. That was pretty stressful

Roy Fowler: Did materials become very scarce

Maurice Carter: Yes, the timber, one had to avoid timber as far as possible on the set

Roy Fowler: What would you substitute

Maurice Carter: Plaster, used as much plaster up as possible, with the minimum of frame work. But those were late into, I think we were into those with The Man In Grey probably

Roy Fowler: The Man In Grey was at Lime Grove,

Man's Carter: Lime Grove, Yes at Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: They're noticeably grand sets aren't they, big sets

Maurice Carter: Yes, very big, I that is how Wally got into so much trouble as I told you

Roy Fowler: In a sense it's almost the beginning, I wouldn't absolutely swear to this, but certainly British films ceased to be tiny and certainly began to assume a scale

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: It really began with that cycle of pictures at the Bush

Maurice Carter: This was the first toehold into the American market we ever had. The Man In Grey was actually shown in the States, as were several of the pictures of that period

Roy Fowler: There was the problem with the cleavage

Maurice Carter: By that time there was John Bryan, Andy Mazzei, and myself as art directors, so there were at least three art directors working at Lime Grove

Roy Fowler: Now John Bryan is one of the great's, what do you remember about him

Maurice Carter: John Bryan is the greatest the greatest, there is no question about that, really great art director. He could sketch, I can show you a sketch of his and you'll see the power, and very interesting man, John. Very complex but wonderfully knowledgeable

Roy Fowler: How complex

Maurice Carter: He was a very nervous man, very determined to have his own way, again he was like Alfred, he insisted on his establishing shot, the camera point being his. He would fight with the director like a terror to get this shot and the lighting, and he would fight the director for his lighting and mood

Roy Fowler: Was there a tradition of that concept, of having a master shot that absolutely reproduced the art directors vision

Maurice Carter: Very much so, that originated and U FA it came through Alfred. And Vincent, Korda, was exactly the same

Roy Fowler: And John Bryan had worked with Junge or had he

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: When did that die out, because it doesn't apply now

Maurice Carter: No. It died out in I should say certainly just after the war

Roy Fowler: Did you ever make that kind of stipulation

Man's Carter: Never got the chance to, I would have loved to but you had to be, I was probably not tough enough

Roy Fowler: What else about Bryan You said he was complex

Maurice Carter: Well, very difficult to explain but as I say he lived at great tension and wanted perfection, he was an enormous striver after perfection

Roy Fowler: Was it also an effortless talent that he had. Did the ideas and the visions just come flowing out

Maurice Carter: Yes, absolutely flowed. He had a huge sketch pad on which he would use charcoal and drank coffee continually all day which killed him eventually, drinking strong coffee, it killed his liver, but he used to sketch these sketches and screw them up one after another, but he sketched with enormous speed. He never spent more than, an hour would seem extreme to him, beautiful impressive sketches, marvellous sketches, as I said I'll show you up one and you'll see the power of them

Roy Fowler: So really they required very little interpretation

Maurice Carter: Practically none and he was very keen and he had to fight for this to build in perspective, and he believed the camera should be kept very low to give the power of perspective to the sets. And that's why the pictures he did like Oliver Twist and all those other pictures were so impressive simply because he insisted and this power of the visual. But a great thing to hold out against directors and camera men and everybody to get that on the screen. But he built up this nervous power to do it

Roy Fowler: I suppose one could make up the case there is a kind of enormous German Expressionists influence on both of those

Maurice Carter: The whole of our art department is founded, until recently, on that experience, the U FA experience

Roy Fowler: Translated here by Junge

Maurice Carter: Translated by Junge and Vincent and picked up by John Bryan particularly

Roy Fowler: I'm not sure that's been said before, an interesting thought

Ms Carter: That's a fact, and our special effects of course very much affected by the experience of these art directors

Roy Fowler: Well the German films of the Twenties were quite marvellous

Maurice Carter: Dr Mabuse, if you think of a film like that, wonderful marvellous film

Roy Fowler: And the Murnau's films, Nosferatu, The Last Laugh. Is it now a matter of remembering what films you worked on

Maurice Carter: It's really trying to remember exactly what I worked on at Lime Grove. Eventually, all this time, 1938 nobody was doing anything about up war, all of us could see it coming and probably foolishly I joined the National Fire Service, so two evenings a week I had to become fireman, pretend to be a fireman. So as soon as war was announced I was actually put on full time with the fire service. But then as the phoney war progressed they lost interest in that and I went back, but I was still a fireman by night, every night I used to go down at 8 o'clock down to the fire station and come home at 12

Roy Fowler: This was where you lived.

Maurice Carter: And we had one or two farily violent fires too to go to, not by bombing, civil fires. This was prior to bombing. When the bombing started, it was extraordinary. I was out three-quarters of the night and staggered into the studio in the morning with this load as I told you, the war work and the film together

Roy Fowler: We did say the bombings affected the way films were made, partly because materials was in a scarce supply, people had presumably been drafted, called into the service

Maurice Carter: That was a creeping paralysis really, in fact from The Man in Grey I was working with an Austrian refugee Billy Kellner who came over, Korda had brought him over, as a refugee, and he was working as my draughtsman, assistant plus Iris Wills, a girl. who was sort of acting as a set dresser and draughtsman. So we were right down to the absolute basics of people to draw work.

Roy Fowler: Was there a noticeably a change do you think in the films that were being made, suddenly a change in outlook. The films yes, because suddenly they became

propaganda to a very large extent; but was there immediately the beginning of optimism. Because in the Thirties, maybe not at Gainsborough, but generally in the British film industry it was up and down, feast or famine

Maurice Carter: We made, for instance not necessarily all the films of that period had war connotations. For instance we made Snowbound with David Macdonald directing, he was killed, during the war, but I'm pretty sure that was made during that period. The other one was Night Train To Munich was a build. We had a very amusing thing on that. They decided to keep the pace up, on construction, they would have a night art director in, we had a night crew anyway building but they decided to have a night art director, so they called in Peter Proud.

And Peter unfortunately had a little indiscretion in taking all the boys out, we had a big perspective set of the station, Munich station and Peter decided to take all the boys, all the chippies, out for a drink at 12 o'clock. Went they came back they decided Vetch's design of the set wasn't all that Peter thought it ought to be and he brilliantly altered all the pieces of the set and, into different progressions. Of course on a prospective set, you can't alter one single thing without it being apparent. So when Vetch came in in the morning he was horrified to discover this set, absolutely all the pieces rejuggled. So everybody had to set to put the whole set back together again

Roy Fowler: How active when you on Night Train

Maurice Carter: I was assistant on that. I can't quite understand during this period, where I seem to be to juggling from assistant and to art director. I don't seem quite to remember the sequence of the pictures

Roy Fowler: It was a time of confusion was it not.. That was directed by Carol Reed. what do you remember of Carol Reed

Maurice Carter : Carol was a bit of a cross patch at times . I remember him calling me a onto the set went Vetch was missing and giving me a right dressing down in front of 300 extras about where a door handle had been removed and replaced on a door with marks on the door, nothing to do with me but I got an the blame. He was all right. Carol was quite a nice man, very nice man really, sweet man in his best moments

Roy Fowler: That seems to go against so much that is said about him, that he was very quiet, manipulative yes but very quiet and gentlemanly.

Maurice Carter: I think in general that's true. But he had a big tracking shot to do, he was probably behind time and like every director once he begins to fall behind time, they it all becomes very ferocious. It's his neck on the line

Roy Fowler: Painless film from your recollection

Maurice Carter: Yes, apart from that little incident I think it was pretty painless. But it was during the time when things were pretty ferocious for me with my night watch

Roy Fowler: That must have been a great burden. Kipps was mentioned. And again quite the stylish film. That was again with Vetch.

Maurice Carter: Lovely, we had a very interesting thing. It was more or less my design, we had to build the Crystal Palace in perspective, for the scene set at the Crystal Palace, very interesting exercise

SIDE FOUR, TAPE TWO

Roy Fowler: Another Carol Reed film around that time was Disraeli, with Gielgud, you were on that

Maurice Carter: No, I was on another picture Carol did at that time, The Young Mr Pit. That was a very interesting picture to do, period picture, and I must say I've always enjoyed period pictures.

Roy Fowler: Were you art director on that or was that Vetch

Maurice Carter: I think it was Vetch, it must have been

And Roy Fowler: I was going to ask you if it was your picture, what your sources were

Maurice Carter: The interesting thing was that Vetch and I went to 10 Downing Street to take exact details of the committee room, Cabinet Room. And also the office which has remained exactly the same architecturally inside. We were shown up, the great thing of getting into number 10 in wartime with passes and all this sort of thing. And we were taken into this room and it had a very big roll-top desk in one corner and we were going all round the room measuring it and I had the pad and Vetch had the rule and he said 9 ft 6, I said what Vetch, 9 ft 6 he said, no, don't take that down, I'll just measure the fireplace now, it's about four foot two and a half to the shelf - so a voice came from behind this desk, can't you go about your work a little more quietly and Churchill had been sitting all through this and sweet man, all he said was can't you go about your work a little more quietly. Very nice incident in the middle of the war with the great war leader.

Roy Fowler: Everything was reproduced exactly

Maurice Carter: Yes, the interior of number 10, because it had changed so little, at that time from Pitt's time

Roy Fowler: Were you getting into generous budgets. Was there more money

Maurice Carter: Yes, I don't think I ever knew the exact budget, being assistant art director one didn't come up against the budget so much, but I imagine it was considerably more. It would be close £750,000. Very big increases by this time actually.

Roy Fowler: That would be what, because it was Twentieth Century Fox

Maurice Carter: Yes, and was thought to be an international picture. At that time we had been all through the quota quickie period and it was considered to be an international picture rather than a purely national picture.

Roy Fowler: I suppose too people were going more to the cinema, so much more was denied them

Maurice Carter: The attendances were very good.

Roy Fowler: During the war attendances were way way up. Was that Ted Black producing

Maurice Carter, Almost sure it was.

Roy Fowler: He didn't live much longer

Maurice Carter: No he didn't. I think he died towards the last years of the war as far as I can remember.

Roy Fowler: I'm sure you went from film to film.

Maurice Carter: There were other pictures going on, like Millions Like Us and various others.

Roy Fowler: That wasn't you

Maurice Carter: No

Roy Fowler: Was Rank part of the picture yet, he was beginning to be I think.

Maurice Carter: He wasn't visible as far as I remember until after the war. I don't think so. I'm pretty sure not because when Rank took over, he may have taken over at that time but it was after the war that he became visibly, all Rank pictures became Rank at Shepherds Bush

Roy Fowler: Maybe at this time he was acquiring cinemas as much as anything.

Maurice Carter: I think he wasn't so much into production by then

Roy Fowler: At some stage he got Denham, we won't go into that.

Maurice Carter: He may have been working at Denham while the Ostrers continued at Shepherd's Bush. And Twentieth Century Fox came along and there were co pictures with Twentieth Century.

Roy Fowler: I think it was 20th Century Fox's way of satisfying the quota, distributor's quota.

What is the next point in your mind.

Maurice Carter: It was being involved in the war and spending, I think I spent two and a half years in the fire service as a regular, full time

Roy Fowler: So no pictures at all.

Maurice Carter: But I had been up to the dock fires in the evening in the early part of the Blitz, but by that time it had calmed off so when I went in the fire service it was virtually peace time fire service. And it didn't occur again until the second Blitz, if you remember was almost prior to theta landings, the invasions

Roy Fowler: the V1s and the V2s.

Maurice Carter: And we had a fair amount of excitement in that period.

Roy Fowler: Were you totally divorced from film work during this time.

Maurice Carter: No, in the day time I worked with Vetch who was working at Hammersmith Studios. And we made a lovely little picture there, a comedy, Don't Take it to Heart, Jeffrey Dell's picture, the lovely Jeffrey Dell, Jeffrey Dell was a gorgeous man.

Roy Fowler: Your memories of Jeffrey Dell

Maurice Carter: He was a sweet man, he was such a good director, artist, magnificent man. And I think he wrote the script for the picture, a very amusing little picture, it just crept away in wartime of course. That is Hammersmith, Riverside, and everything was devastated outside, ruins all around it and the bombs all missed the studio. I think that was the last film I had contact with actually during the war and it was only after, I managed to get a release, early release from the fire service to go back into the film industry, the film industry applied for me to go back as art director at Shepherd's Bush

Roy Fowler: During the flying bomb period

Maurice Carter: No, the war was actually over, or was a few days from being over certainly and I went back to Shepherd's Bush.

Roy Fowler: As a contract staff art director

Maurice Carter: Staff art director because before that I'd always had contract as art director and I picked up my contract with the studio

Roy Fowler: Who is running the studio. Sydney

Maurice Carter: Not yet, because we made Jassy, and certainly Sydney wasn't concerned with the making of Jassy. I think I went back to that, it was the first film I made when I went back.

Roy Fowler: Jassy was Bernard Knowles

Maurice Carter: It may have been Aubrey Baring producing, I have a slight feeling it was Aubrey Baring. It was a lovely film to do. The extraordinary thing is and I would have to check the facts on this, I think it was the first time that any British film had been nominated for an award by the Academy, and I got the award for art direction that year. I didn't get the actual Oscar, I got the nomination, not the award. I think it was the very first nomination from this country, I may be under an illusion there, but of course it was very early anyway in any of the Oscar nomination periods, because it was immediately after the war. It was interesting from that point of view, it's a very pretty picture. A very attractive picture

Roy Fowler: How does it begin to shape up.

Maurice Carter: After the end of that the Box era arose, Rank brought Sydney Box from Hammersmith Studios into the studio and there was a general shake up everywhere. He brought with him George Provis who was an art director, his art director, and he obviously didn't want to lose him, and he was put in as supervising art director over myself and Andy Mazzei who was still art directing there. And I think it was round about almost then that we started to make Christopher Columbus, one of the big bombs of the picture world

Roy Fowler: I think it is worth recording in as much detail as you can remember.

Maurice Carter: My first memories of Christopher Columbus was of being called up to Sydney Box's house, a big house in Mill Hill and they were writing the script. They had destroyed, I was working to the original script, the designs, and they called me up a Sunday to tell me that it was going to be a different script entirely.

Roy Fowler: A historian or school teacher had written the original script which was quite accurate

Maurice Carter: A very nice accurate script, exactly. And I went up to the house and Sydney was in one room, it was a lovely summer's day with the French window's open, and Muriel was in another room, and they'd torn the script into halves and were rewriting it half each on either side and shouting their instructions where they'd got to between each other between the rooms. That is my very first memory of it. So I had a fair amount of revision to do having worked on the original script, I had to then go at full speed to revise from the new script which came out which I must say was pretty patchy as you can imagine being written in that way over a weekend because we had the deadline, we had to have the script on Monday

Roy Fowler: Was the first script, the original script, any good.

Maurice Carter: Yes a nice script, I thought that was a pretty competent script.

Roy Fowler: Do you think it was a fool hardy project to embark on at the Bush

Maurice Carter: Absolutely crazy, absolutely crazy.

Roy Fowler: Do you know whose idea it was or why.

Maurice Carter: I think it was the attraction of the American market, and whether Sydney was given the project over his dead body I don't know. But it was obviously well financed and I was allowed to build the most elaborate sets I've probably ever built in my life. The great problem came from the building of the ships. Sydney had a ships architect friend and he was sent out to the West Indies to build the ships in Barbados, presumably because they had to sale in the better weather of that weather, anyway they needed island sites, so the three boats were built. The trouble was that the Pinta, one of the boats was just in the near state of completion and it was left out of anchorage with a native watchman on board, and he decided to build a bonfire on the deck and the whole thing caught fire and sunk. So we were left with only two ships before the film had even been shot on.

So from then on they had to shoot with two ships and at the end of the picture it was supposed we could superimpose the third ship on the scenes shot but of course what they had forgotten was that they were shooting from a ship, another boat, and it was rising and falling so the images were never steady enough to add anything on by process, not at that period. Nowadays it would be very simple to electronically add a ship on it, but there weren't the means in those days and by the time the film came back the money had run out and Sydney said we couldn't do anything, we would have to do it ourselves in the studio, between ourselves. So the only thing we could do was get Alf Davis to project the two boats on the screen and have a little cardboard boat, lit with a single spot and bob it about in the appropriate position. Unbelievable but that is now it was done.

Roy Fowler: Is that in the final picture

Maurice Carter: It's in the film. There is no way you could not show three boats. And then we had another major tragedy. George Provis, we were going to build the deck of the Santa Maria and I'd said let's do it as we normally do boat things by moving the camera slowly up and down. They said no, that wasn't good enough. George said he wanted things rolling about the deck and all this sort of thing. And all the great detail, the sales sagging as the ship went. So we built the whole of the deck of Santa Maria on stage one at Shepherd's Bush and George had another firm, theatre firm of his, to build the rocking mechanism. Well the theatre firm may have done the turntable at the Palladium but they had never encountered anything like the weight of this enormous ship built on a rocker. So nothing to do with me boys, I'm walking away from it. So George had to watch the

first turn over, the first test, and they turned on the power and it started to rock and everything started to break lose, all the bearings tore apart, what they had used was ordinary cast iron block bearings to the floor of the studio, and with the weight, these tons of weight of the ship came on it, the whole thing fell over in the studio with the mast against the wall. So it was jacked up, got in position and done my way with the camera on a float. But it was a picture of absolute disaster at every inch of the way.

Roy Fowler: What had gone wrong, because during the war by and large we were making very good, very successful pictures, efficiently, well made as pictures, all of a sudden, post war, and again maybe it was the rush for the American market

Maurice Carter: That is what it was. Exactly. To be as spectacular as the Americans.

Roy Fowler: You said George Provis wanted that done in that way, was he not enough of an experienced professional that he couldn't discern the problems he was getting into

Maurice Carter: He should have been because he was himself, basically he started life as a chippy in the studio, so he should have had a very, very good idea of the constructional strengths, that sort of thing, absolutely astonishing.

Roy Fowler: This in a certain sense is a turning point, a watershed for the British film industry because all the disasters of that time led to the advent of John Davis and the accountants coming in, the shutting down of studios, if only pictures had been made efficiently and sensibly then it would have been a lot better.

Maurice Carter: They were venturing into areas where they had no experience.

Roy Fowler: But during the war very large scale pictures had been made

Maurice Carter: In Which We Serve, but they had been done with respect to traditions and manners which we had long known. A simple illustration is if you want to rock a whole ship, whereas you can raise the camera and lower the camera slightly, providing the horizon moves on the backing, you have no problem. It only means a draw backing to get the horizon to rise in sympathy with the camera movement and you have the whole motion of the ship without doing that sort of thing. But they did of course, they went strongly on In Which We Serve, at Denham, they did have a sinking ship in the tank, it could be done, it was just simply that the wrong people undertook the job. But that wasn't it, the whole film must have been very badly budgeted, to run out of money, it was mainly over the building of the ships in Barbados and the sailing of them, the cost of these ships became fabulous, it was never calculated, it was calculated by inexperienced picture people, people who had only done minor pictures before that.

Roy Fowler: Is the problem somehow with Sydney.

Maurice Carter: It had to be with him, because it was his accounting and his budgeting department and his crew.

Roy Fowler: David Macdonald seems a somewhat enigmatic character who directed that film , what do you have to say about him.

Maurice Carter: He is a nice man David but I don't think he was a strong man although he had done all this wonderful filming in the desert and that, I don't think he was a toughie and I think his ill health and other aspects, he wasn't in his best state at the time. Of course Sydney Box was a very strong dominant man, and he had Peter Rogers as his assistant at that time and Betty was there, concerned at that time with accounts.

Roy Fowler: They weren't experienced filmmakers were they. Peter Rogers had been what a teacher, and writer.

Maurice Carter: Sydney had been a writer mainly.

Roy Fowler: And had been involved in commercials.

Maurice Carter: Yes the scale they had been doing at Hammersmith that was right up their street, they managed very well.

Roy Fowler: Sydney and Muriel Box are two interesting characters to try and suss out. What were your dealings with them.

Maurice Carter: I had a good deal of dealings, particularly with Betty, but that was later at Pinewood. Sydney was a tough character,

Roy Fowler: A bit crooked

Maurice Carter: I wouldn't say that. I've no real evidence he was. The only sort of instance I can give you he was talking to the production manager on the picture and the production manager was bitterly complaining about his income tax, I don't suppose he was earning more than £25 quid a week at that time, and Sydney told him, he always used to have a meeting on every Friday evening, production, all of us were in there, and this is where this complaint took place, and it is why I overheard it. And he said I got this bloody bill for my income tax. So Sydney said well what are they asking you for. He said £220. He said you must be crazy. You know what my tax was last year, he said 25 quid. You want to push it around boy, he said push it around. The chap said well I've only got my little salary to push around. He said well I've got a cleaning shop, I've got a underwear shop, I've got, and he went through all this, so I don't know, what you say may be slightly true. But that was just a conversation I heard. But they were very interesting meetings. Peter Rogers had to serve the drinks to us all and I don't think Peter has ever forgotten that I was sitting there and Peter had to pour drinks for me while we , so I think that's why I didn't ever get a job on Carry Ons.

Roy Fowler: What about Muriel.

Maurice Carter: Muriel had great ambitions to become the producer director. And that was the way she was driving. I never did a picture with her, she was quite a nice person really, quite sweet.

Roy Fowler: There were some very good people at Shepherd's Bush in those days,

Maurice Carter: Technicians. They had some good technicians.

Roy Fowler: What about that kind of inner court of the Box's. There was what, Anthony Darnborough and Vivien Cox

Maurice Carter: Tony Darnborough is the best producer I've ever worked with, ever, without doubt. I think

Roy Fowler: He liked a drink or two or three

Maurice Carter: Not much, no. He liked to drink as much as you or I would like a drink, certainly no more than me, I had a very close acquaintance because I did all that series of Maugham pictures for him.

Roy Fowler: What was his strengths as a producer

Maurice Carter: He was terrific on casting and he had a lovely way, he could persuade artists to do something for him at a price they wouldn't think of doing for anybody else. That was one of his big contributions. But he also left people alone to get on with their jobs. And if they made a mistake and it was an honest good mistake he would never go into fits and blow tempers, he would simply say that's not the way to do it. You've got to look after this, take it easy.

Roy Fowler: Sydney and Muriel considered themselves expert on scripts did they not.

Maurice Carter: It was their origins, they had been writers all their life of one sort or another

Roy Fowler: They had been writers, writing all those one act plays, was that something you would go along with.

Maurice Carter: I never saw it.

Roy Fowler: How did you judge his scripts, or did you only pay attention to the visual aspects.

Maurice Carter: No, no. obviously one read the dialogue, you thought this was ridiculous dialogue or you thought that is pretty good dialogue.

Roy Fowler: Where did their stuff fit in.

Maurice Carter: I thought it was absurd, personally, but then who was I to judge, mouldy little art director. But I thought it was pretty crazy, it was a crazy set up altogether.

Roy Fowler: The more one thinks about it the more disastrous Sydney Box is in retrospect.

Maurice Carter: And we had to move out of Shepherd's Bush at that time, it was sold to the BBC, three quarters the way through Columbus, so the whole shooting match had to be transferred to Pinewood. Of course that was received with absolute joy by people who were already at Pinewood. They hated our guts, because they had been nicely ensconced there, all the standard of productions had their little corners, cubby holes and there were these awful people from Shepherd's Bush coming in.

Roy Fowler: What were you perceived to be, you people from Shepherd's Bush

Maurice Carter: Rough necks.

Roy Fowler: Is there more to be said about the last days of the Bush or the Boxes. I always wanted to do a retrospective evening at BAFTA called the Boxes at the Bush.

Maurice Carter: I think Muriel was doing Two Boys and a Bike or something, something interesting like that.

Roy Fowler: How about Vivien Cox

Maurice Carter: Vivien was busy because he came in with the whole of the Box group, what exactly he was doing I don't know

Roy Fowler: I don't know what he did precisely.

Maurice Carter: I think he was a sort of assistant director, contact man .

Roy Fowler: It is probably what it was, I remember crossing on the Queen Elizabeth with Sydney around that time, 1951, and made a date for lunch at Les XXX and instead of Sydney it was Vivien Cox who turned up, which is my first meeting with him. It was a good lunch

Maurice Carter: I'm sure it was, all the Box lunches were pretty good.

Roy Fowler: So lock stock and barrel, everyone trooped over to Pinewood and you were regarded as the country cousins.

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: What were the factions there, there was the Earl St John bunch and Independent Producers, were they still operating because they were on the way out

Maurice Carter: Yes, they became xxx with Rank Studios, and from then on it was Rank pictures

Roy Fowler: And Sydney didn't last very long at Pinewood

Maurice Carter: I imagine he last two three years, but diminishing. But then I began working with Tony Darnborough on the Somerset Maugham series – at Pinewood – and I think we started with Trio and then went on to Quartet. But the interest in those was that we had to visit with Maugham in his villa, Cap Ferrat. And it was very interesting because we always filmed Maugham for the last of, the introduction to the picture, always Maugham was saying my dear friends this shall be the last time I shall be talking to you.

And the very interesting thing was that we were having supper with him one night, and there were about 8 of us around the table in the famous room, with the great big eagle over the fire place and Maugham was chatting along and he had this incredible man servant, a Spanish guy who used to wear these soft shoes, and suddenly in the middle of the meal Maugham fell into his plate, and we though this is it. We've actually seen the end but it wasn't so, his man servant came around, took a bottle of pills out of his pocket and popped two in the old man's mouth and got some water, and in about two or three minutes more Maugham was sitting up now where was I, and we stayed on with the conversation.

Roy Fowler: So he wasn't gaga at that stage

Maurice Carter: No, by no means.

Roy Fowler: He became so later, he was on the monkey glands, he was having the treatment. Did you stay in the Villa Moresque

Maurice Carter: We didn't stay. We used to come every day. We used to stop in Nice and drive out every day.

Roy Fowler: Did Maugham write his own material

Maurice Carter: Yes, he wrote his own material.

Roy Fowler: How long were you down there to shoot such a thing. Did you take all the gear down, it must have been quite an expensive proposition

Maurice Carter: Nearly always there were locations down there, one at least of the stories had a French location, so it was quite easy to take the crew down to do just that, it was only a day's work these little introductory things. In fact one of them we remade again back at Pinewood

Roy Fowler: With him

Maurice Carter: Yes, we built a little study for him.

Roy Fowler: Was he easy to work with.

Maurice Carter: Very easy. I mean he was very nice to us, absolutely sweet.

Roy Fowler: What about the menage, who would have been his boyfriend then,

Maurice Carter: Alan Searle. Yes, Alan was there, he used to sit out with us on the terrace and Maugham had these two little poodle dogs and they used to jump from about 5 ft away into his arms and he and Alan Searle used to pick off the ticks on the dogs, as we had our evening aperitifs, very nice, the Villa Moresque.

Roy Fowler: They were very successful pictures.

Maurice Carter: Yes they were, and great fun to do in sections, each story had a completely different setting, like The Verger, and Three Fat Women of Antibes, The Kite.

Roy Fowler: I suppose material such as that now we find on television which is I guess why it isn't made on film any more.

Maurice Carter: I suppose so.

Roy Fowler: It was all very literate and middle class.

Maurice Carter: Absolutely, but it was a very pleasant time to live and work in the south of France. The only trouble was that we were only allowed £10 a day for living and everything, exchange control.

Roy Fowler: Even on the production, could you not live on the production

Maurice Carter: That was also under exchange control, so it was very strict.

Roy Fowler: It is difficult to think that people couldn't somehow circumvent that, the studio couldn't get around it.

Maurice Carter: They couldn't, that's for sure. We did find ways round it because we couldn't have a drink or anything on that, nothing. So we did find ways round it which became very amusing. Tony had to, he could only get it by driving to Paris so he couldn't be away from the production so it virtually had to be a night hawl travel, or Sunday and get back on the Monday, to raise the ante in Paris. But the marvellous thing was that also, for instance the barman, the English had a great reputation down there, their reputation was marvellous, our word is our bond, and Tony went into the barman at the hotel down there on, the Negresco, he went into the Negresco bar and of course Tony knew everybody in the South of France and he said can you let us have £700, and the barman said yes, sure. And had no receipt for it or anything, just £700 straight over. Quite marvellous the trust, Tony said I'll better write out something for you, he said no, you're English, happy days.

Roy Fowler: It wouldn't happen now.

Maurice Carter: Within months of that another film unit went down there and couldn't pay any of its bills. That destroyed it forever.

Roy Fowler: You say you have great respect for Tony Darnborough, anything more to be said about that, I don't know what happened to him

Maurice Carter: He sent me a Christmas card, he's fine.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about the politics of Pinewood at this stage, because they must have been quite fraught, the Rank Organisation going bust and all these internecine battles

Maurice Carter: Yes, it went on for quite a few years, it didn't happen just like that. It went on for quite a few years as you know and the other companies were still operating there as independents. But the Rank programme was going forth with Sydney and Betty Box, Betty Box by then, soon after we'd finished with the Maugham things, I was art director with them on the Doctor series. We started the Doctor series and we went on with a number of those, and they were slightly interlarded with the Maugham series.

Roy Fowler: Were you aware of it at the time, the fractional nature.

Maurice Carter: Very much so.

Roy Fowler: Was it spoken about or was it one of those deathly hushful things.

Maurice Carter: I think it was pretty much a hush but it was there. There was Earl St John and his cronies naturally, and there was Sydney and his cronies and I don't think anybody meshed too well together, everybody had ambitions

Roy Fowler: Where did it manifest itself, in the restaurant or bar or in terms of vying for properties

Maurice Carter: I think more, as far as I'm concerned, the clash of requirements for competing for the labour with the set construction. There was a good deal of competition for the labour.

Roy Fowler: Where was the money dished out, on South St

Maurice Carter: No, in Pinewood

Roy Fowler: I don't mean physically, but productions chosen, the go aheads given.

Maurice Carter: Yes in South St.

Roy Fowler: How prominent was John Davies becoming

Maurice Carter: Just growing into the scene. He was a sort of name we'd heard of, yes he was South St., he hadn't moved into Pinewood at all, or seen at Pinewood but he was a name in South St that occurred when you talked about budgets.

Roy Fowler; An ogre, dragon

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler How about Uncle Arthur.

Maurice Carter: And of course they had a very big budgeting, or very quickly built up a very big budgeting department under Frank Godwin, our mutual friend. And very soon we were getting daily budget returns, and that sort of thing, it was very much refined.

Roy Fowler: Was it an efficient studio, there was a lot of bureaucracy there

Maurice Carter: No, it became so bureaucratic that it defeated itself in the end. That was the ultimate disaster was exactly, the office staff increased and the working staff decreased in proportion. I mean they had huge studio managers and studio managers assistant, and assistant to the studio manager and the accounts department had something like 32 people in it, there were machines rolling out these daily budgets and so forth, it had a general atmosphere of a nice young bureaucracy coming, which gradually developed and virtually destroyed it in the end.

Roy Fowler: Were they making good pictures

Maurice Carter: Yes, most of those series were pretty good. The Doctor series were highly successful, the Maugham series was highly successful, there was a lot of success in

that first flush of it, but it gradually died away into, Muriel's pictures were absolute disasters.

Roy Fowler: Muriel as director

Maurice Carter: Yes, director producer and became more and more debased.

And then Aubrey Baring came in, I'm trying to think what pictures he made, he was a very good producer. The producers that then came in were Aubrey Baring and my erstwhile next door neighbour Paul Soskin and we were making these rather fiddly pictures of Paul Soskins about the little funny man who falls all over the place, the Norman Wisdom series. I imagine they made money,

Roy Fowler: Paul Soskin had had greater pretentions earlier than that, it is rather sad that he would end up on a Norman Wisdom film.

MAURICE CARTER

SIDE 5, TAPE 3

Roy Fowler: Paul Soskin is a name from that time. He had been a fairly active producer in the late 30s and he had made one or two nice little middle class films like Quiet Wedding

Maurice Carter: After he had sold, Amalgamated as you know was taken over by the, which was Paul Soskin's studio, Ministry of Supply

Roy Fowler: It never opened as a studio

Maurice Carter: It was a tragedy because they went in there with sledgehammers into the power house and smashed out all the dynamos, it seems totally unnecessary

Roy Fowler: Why did they do that

Maurice Carter: They wanted the space they said, I mean terrible idea but it was all fully equipped as you know and had lights, lamps and everything there. But it was all bundled out of the studio and left as empty storehouses.

Roy Fowler: Who financed the original construction, do you know

Maurice Carter: It was American finance, the object was it was for American companies to make films in England, it was always the object of the studios, a very fine studio. But the interesting thing was that my brother was one of the architects for the design of the studio because he had had experience in Shepherds Bush in films before and he was asked about the proportions of the studio and he wanted to have the height and breadth he knew a camera could take in, a maximum long shot in the stage. That is the dimensions a stage should be, thatthe end wall should fill the frame of a camera at maximum distance and consequently and the roof mustn't come into the frame. But the final architects on the building, my brother was there simply as an adviser, his advice was ignored and they built the roofs far too low. Later on when it was adopted by MGM, you probably know they had to raise the walls another 10 or 15 ft but it was completely unnecessary. My brother had had experience in camera angles, and a simple thing if you know anything about sets is that you put a camera angle down and you know what height you require and what width require, minimum

Roy Fowler: Did you have a protractor that gave you

Maurice Carter: We had camera angles, I can show you some of them, they were made in celluloid and each separate lens, and you could simply lay those on your plans and work out exactly what was taken in by the camera, both in height and width.

Roy Fowler: So these other architects

Maurice Carter: They were architects who had no understanding of that and couldn't see the need why a studio had to be 60 ft high when it only need be 40 ft.

Roy Fowler: The mind boggles. But that was basically one of the better lay outs, it was a very efficient layout in terms of the relationship

Maurice Carter: Well my brother was adviser on that side but in particulars they wouldn't take notice. It's like advisers everywhere, when the advise is as they need it or like it, then it is accepted, when it's not, if it interferes with the cost or the structure of the building they had in mind, then it is rejected.

Roy Fowler: Did you ever work at Denham, because that was a very inefficient studio in terms of lay out

Maurice Carter: Yes, terrible. I did one picture over there during the war which was Beneath Us the Waves. It was a submarine picture, about a submarine, Roy Baker directing. That was the only picture I only made

Roy Fowler: With people having to bicycle down the corridor. But that was done by an American expert.

Maurice Carter: And the shops miles away from construction site, terrible place.

Roy Fowler: What happened to your brother, did he stay in the business

Maurice Carter: No, he started a business which he thought was a good thing, people wanted to build their homes and this was after the war of course, and he started a magazine which he gave all the elevations and plans of houses you could build yourself. And he did the wrong thing, he put his name on it, and the British Institute of Architects had him up before them and disbarred him for advertising. So he moved to Canada on the Lake Eyrie scheme, the settlements, so he never returned to England.

Roy Fowler: Back to Paul Soskin, what else do you have to say about Paul, because he does seem to be a rather lost or disregarded figure now. He was a competent producer

Maurice Carter: Very competent producer.

Roy Fowler: And it was he who brought you to this part

Maurice Carter: Yes, I must say it was, he had the house next door, which had been xXX's house, it was owned by Jubert, the airforce man, Coastal Command. And he had this part added on for his Waf driver during the war. He was married and living with a Swiss fellow, the Swiss fellow was the guy who was the timer on the Cresta run and so they lived partly here and partly in Switzerland. But Paul bought the house next door and he wanted to buy that land but he didn't want all of it himself, he didn't want to have to look after it, on the other side of the river, so he said would you like to buy it, because I'd talked to him about building a house myself. So I went in with him and bought it, bought half the land.

Roy Fowler: So you came here during the 50s when you were at Pinewood.

Maurice Carter: Yes, 34 years ago.

Roy Fowler: How long a drive is it to the studio

Maurice Carter: From here, not very bad, 17 miles, very easy, country roads so it is very easy.

Roy Fowler: What happened to Paul Soskin eventually, he just tailed off

Maurice Carter: His wife left him and went to live with an Egyptian scent manufacturer, his daughter is married to a great society character. He just went broke, he went virtually bankrupt and lost everything. I don't know if you know his origins how he became to be virtually a multimillionaire when he built Amalgamated. Of course his losses over Amalgamated were enormous in spite of him being teamed up with Prudential for the building

Roy Fowler: It was the Pru again

Maurice Carter: It was the Pru who were with him but he caught a very bad cold, he had a very large share in the project and caught a very bad cold, but he still had a few millions left. But he was an inveterate gambler in share dealing and eventually got caught, badly caught, but his father's fortune was established with an interesting thing, he and another guy cornered the pepper market, I don't know if you will remember back that far, but that is how they did it, they cornered the whole of the world's pepper between themselves and then held it to ransom and made an enormous fortune each. And that is how the Soskin fortune but was lost in films mainly, gambling.

Roy Fowler: He is dead now, did he die in poverty or poor

Maurice Carter: Yes, had to live in the basement of his own house in Eaton Square and let it to people to live in

Roy Fowler: At least he had it at some stage

Maurice Carter: And he knew how to live it, he had had a beautiful house in Kent, marvellous Tudor house in Kent. And gradually came down and down.

Roy Fowler: Is that an aspect of the business that you've enjoyed, the living high, because certainly producers did it, the Rank Organisation executives did that

Maurice Carter: Yes, they sure did. No, I'm afraid we lived on the breadline mostly. Not really on the breadline, I mean I've always had a very good salary from the business, when I was art director after the war I was earning £70 a week which was considered to be pretty high pay. And very soon it was into the £90 a week. And so I wasn't living exactly like a pauper by any means.

Roy Fowler: Where do we find ourselves now in terms of productions.

Maurice Carter: Well we're into the

Roy Fowler: The Doctor films, is there much to be said about them, we could talk about the young Dirk Bogarde, they couldn't have presented any problems to you really

Maurice Carter: Not really,

Roy Fowler: Was there any professional challenge for you in any

Maurice Carter: Well every film is a constant challenge, however apparently easy it was. Every film you've got, the main one is that the money is limited, if money is unlimited anything is possible. With money limited you have problems, and to forecast what you're going to spend when it's not even in the director's mind what he wants, is only on the page of the script, you have to translate the idea on a page of script into a solid set, that is difficult.

Roy Fowler: How did you make that equation, instinctively between

Maurice Carter: Yes, it came by shear experience of comparing one set which you knew you'd built, knowing the rises in the salaries of the construction people, and the cost of materials rising. There was a constant rise, ever since I've started in the business, so you add on year by year 5%, 10%, 20%. These charges, you knew what the salary rises were, the great guessing game was to know how the work would progress, and how much overtime would be demanded by the construction people, how much over time they would make for themselves, that was a guessing game. Well we're into the strike period then, you never knew when you were going to have a strike and so all these things you made a slight allowance for but you obviously couldn't deal with every circumstance and you were caught out.

Roy Fowler: Two topics open themselves up, one is the strikes and the other was, did these bureaucratic layers at Pinewood make it an expensive studio to work in.

Maurice Carter: No, I don't think it was particularly expensive

Roy Fowler: It always had that reputation

Maurice Carter: I know it did. I don't think, I can't see why it was, not in my experience, it was no more expensive than the other studio providing you cut your cloth to suit.

Roy Fowler: The feeling I think was that there was no flexibility on the part of the studio management that you had to like it or lump it and you had to take everything.

Maurice Carter: I think there was very much a producers point of view, especially independent producers coming in to an established situation, it may have been true, I'm not sure. But I wouldn't have thought it was so, the pictures I did, I was working between Pinewood and Shepperton, and alternating pictures between the two so I had a pretty good idea of the balance and I must say Shepperton was basically, but simply because it didn't provide the great scope of services that Pinewood, it didn't have cars standing by for you to be able to pick a car to drive anywhere, you had lesser services so naturally it was more economical.

Roy Fowler: But if you weren't using or didn't want those services

Maurice Carter: If you didn't want them, then it became pricey

Roy Fowler: We're still in the 50s, and you say this is the time of the strikes

Maurice Carter: Yes 50s drifting into the 60s.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about that, what kind of problems called the strikes, demarcation disputes

Maurice Carter: Going back a little bit to Shepherd's Bush, in the last period of Shepherd's Bush was when the union ACT became active, Les Wilde was working hard for the ACT. And gradually, also we thought we might ought to have some overtime with these extended evenings, they were getting more and more popular drifting in, especially on location, going onto 12 o'clock at night, and this sort of thing. Everybody thought well we ought to have a little bit of cash for this and maybe a supper allowance would be a good idea too. So the union was picked up there, and of course, naturally once you get union affairs involved in a studio, you have problems. It was easy, we had been working before at Islington, but now you had everybody in the union, before it was only the sparks who could call a strike. Now anybody could call a strike virtually,

Roy Fowler: Les was shop steward was he

Maurice Carter: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Were there a lot of disputes at the Bush in the 40s

Maurice Carter: It came in a narrow sort of period, yes, little petty

Roy Fowler: What were they about

Maurice Carter: Oh anything from get the supper allowance increased to having an early morning call that they disagreed with

Roy Fowler: So it was more that than demarcation would you say

Maurice Carter: No, demarcation occurred occasionally, but it was more small, trying to advance the money

Roy Fowler: Would you say they were minor disputes over the agreement or was it trying to get a new agreement

Maurice Carter: Well one period they wanted a new agreement but I don't think that was the main thing, most of them, I don't know what everybody else thinks but to my mind, anyway it was getting bad enough that I decided to get fairly involved in union affairs myself to try and check this thing, particularly in the art department, of ridiculous little problems occurring. So I had to get involved and had to go to London once a week for the meetings. It became up to twice a week, I was having to drive into London for one meeting or another

Roy Fowler: For your section

Maurice Carter: For our section

Roy Fowler: When had you joined

Maurice Carter: I had joined immediately after the war, my number is 3,334

Roy Fowler: Had you joined willingly

Maurice Carter: Yes, there was no means of coercion, because it was an open market

Roy Fowler: But it became a closed shop not long after

Maurice Carter: It became rapidly a closed shop.

Roy Fowler: So when you say you tried to sort these things out, who would you sort them out with, George Elvin

Maurice Carter: No, with the whole committee of the art department, we had a committee meeting once a week and somebody would get up and say we've got a complaint about

this and we've got the shop stewards interested, if they don't' come round next week we're going to give them a belt

Roy Fowler: What was your feeling that there was a kind of blackmail process

Maurice Carter: Yes, quite frankly yes

Roy Fowler: Was it politically motivated, or was it purely industrially based, was it more money better conditions, or was there an actually a political

Maurice Carter: That's a difficult question to answer, I'm not sure is the real answer, I think a mixture of probably both. To be honest a mixture of both.

Roy Fowler: It seems to me with all respect to Taffy in our presence the sound people, you said Les Wildes was the shop steward there, the sound people notoriously seemed to have had a chip for this kind of thing and they saw affronts where there weren't necessarily any

Maurice Carter: I don't know why it occurred, why it was so strong in the sound department

Roy Fowler: Either they had more time on their hands than every one else, I don't know, or maybe coming later to the filmmaking process they felt somewhat alienated from it. I don't know I've often thought about this, without an answer

Maurice Carter: They were such a bloody pest in the beginning, when sound came in, as I've related to you, making us cut holes in our set, and then when we all wanted to get home at night, he would say no, no, no, something, birds chirping or there is an arc going.

Roy Fowler: It wasn't only in this country, in the USA it was exactly the same thing, they all came in from outside and I think tried to make their place in it; but it is strange that in this country they became such union activists, they weren't necessarily political activists, but you come up against this all the time

Maurice Carter: I think it was probably just that Les was very

Roy Fowler: Bloody minded

Maurice Carter: I wouldn't say bloody minded, strongly politically minded

Roy Fowler: A lot of them were bloody minded

Maurice Carter: That is what my opinion was, which is why I went in to try and sort it out. But I had it from two sides of course, I had it in my construction workers, so I had all that, I had the plasterers, I had carpenters, and so I was getting shot up really.

Roy Fowler: Looking at that 3 fold union activity, the electricians always somewhat tough minded in terms of their interest as they saw it, and the NATKE people were they

Maurice Carter: Yes, at one period they got, this period, everybody

Roy Fowler: Was this post war discontent do you think

Maurice Carter: Yes, well we had a socialist government, the socialist principles were operating and everybody thought they ought to take advantage of them

Roy Fowler: Were they being exploited do you think

Maurice Carter: Studio management was very willing to, I think the studio management would have a pinch at any time, but I think it was very much a double sided proposition. I think the management were much less aggressive on their side than the union I must tell you, I was virtually a neutral in a way, but that was my opinion

Roy Fowler: I think there was and still is bloody mindedness on both sides. One side always seems to have the advantage over the other so that then creates ill feeling that continues sadly. The whip hand now is with producers, few that they may be.

Maurice Carter: One feels sorry for them, it is such a struggle

Roy Fowler: Not currently, because they can write any deal they want to but there will be a reaction against that presumably

Maurice Carter: But I've seen many of these trying to set up pictures, been with people trying to set up pictures, in latter years I was with Johnny Dark, and trying to set up the Edgar Rice Burroughs pictures, I saw it really from root and branch, from the very beginning trying to get the money and when you've been in that situation , well you have haven't you

Roy Fowler: Yes, it's very dispiriting and it's like spatial chess, keeping it all together

Maurice Carter: And all you want to do was to turn a bloody good picture and make a good deal and you get a little bit of the chicken broth back.

Roy Fowler: By and large this is usually an end question, what would you say about our union, would you say it's been a good thing, a bad thing or a mixture

Maurice Carter: From strictly my point of view, it has done nothing but hold me back in money wise. I could have got bigger salary for most of the time without the union

Roy Fowler: Even when you were under contract to studios

Maurice Carter: Yes, because they always quoted to us the minimum salary, look we can get art directors for £16 a week. That is the minimum rate, I'm just quoting, or £50 a week, we can get an art director for 50 quid a week, why do you think you're worth £180 a week. I mean it is your union saying the proper pay for an art director is £50 a week, so in that respect I was always fighting to get a bigger salary naturally.

Roy Fowler: But there is a wild disparity, I have to ask Taffy this because I'm inactive, but there is great disparity now between the book rate and the going rate

Taffy Haines: Yes, the only people who recognise the book rate are the people who are self employed

Roy Fowler: Do you think nowadays people are held back by what agreements survive, because there aint many, not that are enforceable anyway.

Taffy Haines: I don't think but again you see we've been cut down, cut down all the time. Every picture you go to is less, you have got to take less and less and less. Until at least we have the union minimum to fall back on, in other words, it is the agreement but if nobody recognises the agreement we haven't got that to fall back on

Roy Fowler: This is the problem

Maurice Carter: But I always was told look that is what your ACT people reckon you should be getting, I said it's not what we should be getting, it's the minimum you guys can possibly pay me. Well, look, if that is the minimum what do you expect as a maximum then. That was the dialogue given to me.

Taffy Haines: But there has been a bone of contention all the time, the differential in rates between the going rate and the book rate. We always said the book rate should be a lot greater than what it is.

Roy Fowler: Were you considered an employee of the Rank organisation or on contract

Maurice Carter: I was on contract to large extent and then suddenly all went wrong and I was knocked off and my contract, I had been there 24 years with contracts and suddenly they said we're not renewing your contract baby any more, not renewing anybody's contract. You're on your own, so that was a bit of a shock you know.

Roy Fowler: Does that mean that you were eligible for Rank Organisation benefits

Maurice Carter: No,

Roy Fowler: You got no pension

Maurice Carter: No, for instance I was in the scheme they had called Top Hat which you paid say £10, £20 of your salary into this top hat fund. And that was excused tax. It

developed into a pension at 65. So when I left the studio I didn't know what the hell I could do, I was then having something like £20 a week extracted and I said I just can't go on, I'm sorry, can I draw out my money and pay the tax on it. They said you haven't read the small print chum have you, if you withdraw your money falls into the fund, you don't get anything. It's in the small print on the back of your book. I said that is not bloody likely, whatever the small print says you can't just take our money like that. So eventually, alright, it took a lot of argy bargy and a lot of tears, they said alright we'll turn it into a pension when you're 65, what you've got in. It turns out very amusingly, it has now risen to £27 a month, it started off at £21 a month when I was 65.

Roy Fowler: And you'd paid in for

Maurice Carter: I'd paid in £1,850. Not much, but if I could have spent it on a bit of furniture at that time it would be worth ten times as much now. But I still get the pension, an absolutely joke

Roy Fowler: I was curious how they treated one, you obviously had a rolling contract, you were never not paid by them and yet you weren't really an employee. It's a pity in a way.

We were still in the 50s. The whole ethos and activity of the Rank Organisation is interesting, how fondly or otherwise do you look back on your days there at Pinewood.

Maurice Carter: Very much so.

Roy Fowler: Productive

Maurice Carter: I thought so. I went into a series of pictures that had some very interrupting implications, with Betty doing the ignorant fart as the unit used to call it which was The Wind Cannot Read which was in India which was very interesting. And I did earlier that that, earlier on, soon after the finish of the war with George Brown, I did a couple of pictures in Germany in Berlin and the whole city was still a ruin, very interesting, there was no wall been built

Roy Fowler: Which pictures were they

Maurice Carter: I did the Quiller Memorandum much later which I did go to Berlin again, my third time in Berlin.

Roy Fowler: Were they major pictures

Maurice Carter: Major pictures, one with Dirk Anyway we were shooting in Berlin, it was very interesting shooting at that time, because no Berlin Wall, it was dangerous to cross over to the East sector, we used to go at nights but jolly dangerous. Incredible city.

Then later I went on the Quiller Memorandum, which everybody thought was going to be, ridiculous to start off thinking the picture is going to be an award picture, they had this convinced, I used to laugh to myself, these guys talking of course it's going to get the award, crazy

Roy Fowler: That followed on, that was Len Deighton

I'll go through the list and see if there is anything you want to add to those we've talked about so far.

9 Days a Queen I think we've covered. Sing as We Go we didn't mention, I thought that was Ealing

Maurice Carter: I don't remember doing it

Roy Fowler: Then Boys Will Be Boys was the 1st Will Hay film. Doctor Syn was 35. Where there's a Will, that was Will Hay

Then Winbad the Sailor, and then Good Morning Boys.

The Crazy Gang come in in 37 with Okay for Sound.

Said O'Reilly to McNab in 37,

Maurice Carter: That was the Will Fiffe with an American artist

Roy Fowler: Oh Mr Porter and The Lady Vanishes back to back. Convict 99. Alf's Button Afloat.

Bank Holiday, we haven't mentioned before, with Carol Reed

Maurice Carter: That was Carol's first picture on his own, wasn't it.

Roy Fowler: I think Midshipman Easy was his first one.

Acacia Avenue which I remember seeing as quite a young film buff, and it impressed the hell out of me. Bank Holiday is largely about whether Maggie Lockwood would lose her virginity or not. And who cares. But Carol Reed was a very accomplished director very early on

Maurice Carter: And of course there is good characterization with Kathleen Harrison, those sorts of characters, very popular picture. I think it did and very well and

The Roy Fowler: Any particular memories

Maurice Carter: It is memorable only for my personal disaster. I had to calculate the amount of sand to cover number one stage, Carol wanted a good covering of sand in which he could bury dad and build a sand castle, not just an inch covering of sand on the floor. So I tried to calculate the amount of sand for the whole stage, but in the course of my calculations I must have added a naught and when the lorries began arriving, tipping the sand ready to go into the studio, in the little side street at Islington which is only 25 ft wide, quickly the sand was mounting up to the windows of the houses opposite, the first floor windows. And so in a great panic we had to get the police to stop the lorries coming and phone the labour exchange for all the available labour to come and shovel sand into the studio in wheelbarrows. So it was a bit of a disaster in general but Carol had his sand

Roy Fowler: He didn't hold it against you

Maurice Carter: He didn't know

Roy Fowler: What did it do to the budget.

Maurice Carter I think they had to come and fetch the sand away again, it was only loaned, the sand as it were

Roy Fowler: The thing that surprises me is that on a picture of that scale the budget could afford that kind of set requisite, that amount of sand to be delivered

Maurice Carter: In those days sand was cheap and labour was cheap, so it wasn't a major item by any means

Roy Fowler: Whereas today trucking all that in would be a major problem

Maurice Carter: Would be quite a problem

Roy Fowler: Old Bones,that was the one you shot at Shepperton. Ask A Policeman another Will Hays, he was very busy, Climbing High that was the Jessie Matthews film do you have anything to say about Jessie Matthews

Maurice Carter: She was not getting past it but passed her peak as a star

Maurice Carter: Yes one of the little interesting things on it was that there a young graduate who came in to be in the film industry on the camera side and he was a very attentive fellow and he always sat himself, nobody quite knew quite who he was, who this strange fellow was there, and he always sat himself on the front of the dolly to be absolutely close and see what the camera was seeing. And Jessie was doing one of her dances, and she danced through the whole routine, she finished up bending into the camera, a close-up of her. Unfortunately her bra didn't have an the necessary suspension strength, as the camera came into close up and both her boussies fell out. And this young man's face was almost pressed in close up on these boussies. So then being xxx whose this bloke who's sitting down here, and a great inquiry went on. It didn't faze him too

much because he became head of the Technicolor at later, Frank , who was head of Technicolor processing

And what I didn't mention to you that I think is quite important is our entry into Technicolor with Jassy, the first Technicolor film

The Roy Fowler: Shell we just run down the list and till we get to Jassy. Bandwagon 1939 which is probably then the transition into wartime. Frozen Limits is a Crazy Gang film, Charlie's Big-hearted Aunt which was Arthur Askey, Gas Bags, Night Train, The Ghost Train, Cottage To Let, Kipps, Backroom Boy, The Young Mr Pitt, Dear Octopus that was produced by Paul Soskin

Maurice Carter: Yes that was my first contact with Paul Soskin , John Bryan and Ferdy Ballan in one film

Roy Fowler: Important relationships

Maurice Carter: Very important relationships to later films

Roy Fowler: I remember the film at the time, one can't help not know the play which was archetypal West end three-act comedy drama, Dodi Smith and the film was precisely that too. The only thing I would say about that film is how middle-class everything was, the accents, the outlook, the assumption was that Kathleen Harrison was in everyone's kitchen and Felix Aymler would come in as the vicar

Maurice Carter: Yes, all the convention that were in that

Roy Fowler: It was a very restricted, limited viewpoint on British life, I suppose it began to change with an Millions Like Us

Maurice Carter: It was obviously affected by the war Beware Of Pity that was Maurice Elvey, the return of the Maurice Elvey much to Vetch's consternation

Roy Fowler: Was Vetch art director on that and you assisting

Roy Fowler: Do remember it, it was an expensive but rather disappointing film, a very subtle story

Maurice Carter: Far too subtle

Roy Fowler: Miss London Ltd

Maurice Carter: That was Val Guest musical with Jean Kent.

Roy Fowler: We Dive at Dawn which was Puffin

For Maurice Carter: We Dive At Dawn we made partly at Denham

Roy Fowler: Did you have to construct a submarine interior for that

The Maurice Carter: We built a submarine which had to be on a tilt so it was built on a massive beam, so it could tilt, that was absolutely essential because everybody had to stagger down

And Roy Fowler: Where did you get an all the detail from for such a set

Maurice Carter: We got photographs from the Navy, they gave us photographs which were censored slightly for certain instruments but pretty much up to date of that period

The Roy Fowler: But it was all mock-up

Maurice Carter: Yes all mock-up. The instruments were real of course, we got the vital instruments because they had to work, seen to work, so the gauges and that, we did that by putting air pressure tanks

Roy Fowler was there a lot of tank work, they had a very good tank at Denham didn't they

Maurice Carter: Yes they had a very good tank

For Roy Fowler: Was that the first time you'd been deeply involved in a tank. You had done a previous submarine film

Maurice Carter: No, that was the only one

SIDE SIX, TAPE THREE

Roy Fowler: We're into 1943 now and I suppose the studios themselves are fairly used to this kind of simulation and special effects

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: Was it an interesting film from your point of view

Maurice Carter: It was interesting, interesting, these sorts of films from a technical point of view, understanding of technical things, of having to learn and get to work on them

Roy Fowler: In terms of verisimilitude it was exact

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: We then come to The Man In Grey which you took over. And then two more Val Guest films Bees In Paradise and Give us The Moon. . Then after war service your 38th credit is Holiday Camp which was Box at Shepherd's Bush. That is almost the archetypal Box film

Maurice Carter: Very much Bank Holiday, very much a recreation of Bank Holiday

Roy Fowler: The Boxes were very big on this kind of omnibus film, which today would be a television soap opera

Maurice Carter: Yes they were the forerunners of soap

Roy Fowler: I do remember Peter Hammond was in that who has become a television director who can't resist shooting through and up and around everything, the weirdest angles that get in the way of the story. I'm very fond of Inspector Morse and he does Inspector Morse, and I notice those he does you can't really tell what's going on

And then Jassy which as you say marks the advent of Technicolor at Shepherd's Bush.

Maurice Carter: That was a shock to the whole industry, the invention of colour. Because it affected everything. It affected the lights, sound, set, constriction, everything

RoyFowler: Denham had been doing colour since 1935

Maurice Carter: Yes, they had some experience in it but of course we had Natalie Kalmus and Joan Bridges who were the technical advisers over here. And the thing about Technicolor is, I think it's much improved since that time because at that time there was a variation, in the thing. For instance if you wanted to present a bishop's, with the gorgeous

purple of a bishop's robe you had to de- accent the blue and accent the red in it, so it became a reddish purple, it always tended to go back to the blue. And the same for instance if you wanted to show an orange, it was no good presenting an actual coloured orange, you had to spray it, paint it into a yellowish green to be produced as an orange

Roy Fowler: So this is what Mrs Kalmus would do

Maurice Carter: Theoretically that is what they were chatting to us. I must say they told us primarily a lot of things, a lot of the information, a lot of misinformation. But we managed to get through in the end

Roy Fowler: In turns of the set you could cope with that fairly easily with mixing paints, but how about wardrobe, how would wardrobe cope with that. Would they dye

Maurice Carter: If they would dye, they had to dye, or find the material

Roy Fowler: Which was the preferred route

Maurice Carter Buy, , because you didn't always know exactly what the fibre was and the change in fibre from nylon, say to wool was vast, in the colour retention in the process

Roy Fowler: Did it you have to do extensive tests

Maurice Carter: Yes, every costume had to be tested first. You could never be quite sure, you hadn't got some sort of weave into it, a mixture of weaves that would change the colour for the camera. But what we were trying to do all the time, the Americans had been using the process and we were horrified by the rawness of the colour, so we struggled right through Jassy to suppress, to use greys, brown greys in the paintwork to suppress colour and get it down. But you always had to be terribly aware of this accent ting of the blue of the process at that time, it showed up. So that was the watch word, mainly on blue

Roy Fowler: That was the main way of controlling colour was it in terms of art direction rather than colour processing

Maurice Carter: There was no way through colour process, once the three strip was made that was printed off as it came, there was no way of suppressing that, or very little I imagine from what happened

Roy Fowler: The British studios became very expert, remarkable in coping with three strip process

Maurice Carter: They did indeed, of course, but what they couldn't change was one on the same strip, changing one colour against another one, they could only change through the whole range, you could just ask for a print, a warmer print or a colder print and that was about the whole they could give you

Roy Fowler: In terms of production what other problems did it cause other than having to be very careful of colour values, did it you find you could cheat less on construction. Because you can get away with a certain amount in black and white

Maurice Carter: That's right. No you had to be pretty careful with your construction, much more careful than we had been previously

Roy Fowler: So all these things are adding to the cost of the picture, it not just the process

Maurice Carter: Yes, very much so

Roy Fowler: Was Jassy an interesting picture from your point of view .

Maurice Carter: Yes, it was a period picture

Roy Fowler: It was a rotten script

Maurice Carter: It was on the level of Wicked Lady and all the rest, that series of pictures it was no higher, no lower I guess

Roy Fowler: I think it was getting a bit boring by that time

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think people had rather had the period picture

Roy Fowler: Following that you had the notorious Christopher Columbus, it says here Lime Grove, Bermuda, did you have a trip to Bermuda

Maurice Carter: No I didn't it was purely the location crew shooting the boats

Roy Fowler: You seem to have lost out on the trips. Then follows an even more infamous film, The Bad Lord Byron which is one of the great jokes of all times

Maurice Carter: That was extraordinary wasn't it, dear old Dennis Price, he got thrown into the canal to douse his spirits a little, he was so much after the boys we decided he needed a little cooling off

Roy Fowler: In Venice, chasing the gondoliers

Roy Fowler: Yes, up the little boys on the X square, it became a little worrying. So he came to the hotel one night and we were all in the bar getting rather high so he was taken out on the little balcony outside the bar and pitched into the canal, but a lovely man, he came back striding up the steps and through the front door all dripping wet and said where's my drink

Roy Fowler: He could have got a very nasty bug out of that

Maurice Carter: Well it was cleaner in those days you know

Roy Carter: It was still an open sewer I think. Poor old the Katie Hepburn never recovered from her ducking, she got some affection in the eye and has had it ever since

I didn't realise he was that indiscreet

Maurice Carter: Only that time, it was the only time I saw that

Roy Fowler: Then more Val Guest, Penny Princess, it says in Spain, did you make the entire picture in Spain

Maurice Carter: Yes, in Barcelona and in the Barcelona Studios

Roy Fowler: He had met his wife by this time

Maurice Carter: Yes she was in that film and we had a rather interesting thing there, because you know it was the Franco time, immediately after the revolution, or soon after, within years of the revolution and there were bandits still about. And one night the whole unit was sitting in this little hotel way up in the mountains and we heard bangs out side. Presently the owner rushed in and said late down, lay down. There was a battle going on out side between the Guardia of Seville and the bandits. I never knew the result. They were driven off eventually after about half an hour. It didn't affect the unit very much. They very soon got back, just out the way of the windows

Roy Fowler: Mr Drake's Duck in 1948. Snowbound. Good-time Girl. That was the slice of life, was it not. Then we come to The Astonished Heart. I can't remember who directed that but I'm sure it wasn't the master.

Maurice Carter: Peter something.

Roy Fowler: I saw that fairly recently, very much of its time is all one can say

Maurice Carter: But the master felt he wasn't being done justice to, he was looking particularly like an old mandarin during in those days

Roy Fowler: He did, didn't he

Maurice Carter: And I think it destroyed the picture because it was ridiculous, he took over the whole thing

Roy Fowler: I'm quite right in telling you that they fired Michael Redgrave off it. They started with Michael Redgrave. It was a story that Sydney Box told me in some depth. And it was very funny but 40 years later it's difficult to remember it all. But the major point of the story was telling Michael Redgrave who essentially, Noel looked at the

rushes and he had casting approval and he saw what they had shot for a week or so and said Sidney you know very well this will not do, there is only one person who can play this, it is I. But his terms were then absolutely frightful and they had to go to Arthur Rank to get permission to pay him. He wanted an extraordinary amount of money to do it which presumably was the ploy. So it was all finally agreed that he would take over but in the meantime there are still shooting with Redgrave and came the day when they had to tell him. And they invited him for a meeting at someone's flat. The bell rang. Sydney Box and Noel Coward inside, and the bell rang and its Michael Redgrave wearing dark glasses and Noel says Michael what is the matter. And Redgrave said it's nothing it's just a sty. And Coward according to the story took the glasses off and said let me look and put them in his pocket and wouldn't give them back. And later he said to Sydney Box , he said I wasn't about to let him play that scene in dark glasses

I was talking about this once to Roy Baker and there was something he desperately wanted to make. And it had for the time what was considered bad language and I think it was probably in all truth very innocent but he wasn't allowed to do it because of that so-called bad language, it was a best-selling novel I've forgotten what it was but certainly by modern standards

Maurice Carter: You have to remember that the censors had at that time was pretty heavy. You can imagine the thing with poor Maggie with just seeing actual cleavage was too much for them, they had to have a Rose stuck in. It had to be re-Shot with a rose stuck in her bosom

Roy Fowler: That's very true up until the Fifties there was that dead hand of censorship both here and in the States

Maurice Carter: Everybody was terrified. I remember

Roy Fowler: In the States it was mainly sex, because they required reshoots on Wicked Lady because of cleavage which had been accepted by the BBFC here. Here they had these peculiar things about class didn't they and any kind of political thing. But nevertheless I still say there was a virility to American pictures which by and large was lacking here

Maurice Carter: There is a natural for a virility in Americans anyway, it is they characteristic as we all well know. The British, let's face it, are a pretty cold fish

Roy Fowler: Not always in the Sixties for example it changed here briefly, for a decade or so. I'm not making any large sized case out of this because I think it's very complicated, and not easy to understand but I do think particularly around this time in the 50s

Maurice Carter: It was pretty tight I agree

Roy Fowler: Almost constipated feeling about British films, particularly The Astonished Heart always strikes me as the epitomy

Maurice Carter: Being Coward, it must be it

Roy Fowler: Noel Coward when it were an was absolutely marvelous it seems to me

Maurice Carter: Cavalcade and that sort thing

Roy Fowler: Cavalcade or Blythe Spirit or The Three Peppers for example, some great stuff in it. I loved This Happy Breed I think it's a marvellous picture, but it's a load of old nonsense but he gets away with it

Maurice Carter: He was an amusing character. He was very adept at sitting at the piano to amuse the electricians on the set and singing the whole of the real Eskimo Nell, which is quite something

Roy Fowler: Still talking about The Astonished Heart, what are your memories of Noel Coward

Maurice Carter: He was quite amusing, he used to sit tight the piano and amuse the electricians singing songs during the camera set-ups. But I got attacked. I made the typical film technicians mistake of letting my set dresser, it wasn't myself, it was my set dresser, in a flower arrangement include a peacocks feather there. All hell was let loose, the whole set had to be abandoned until the feather was officially taken out side and burnt

Roy Fowler: Is there some kind of superstition attached to that

Maurice Carter: Yes a great superstition, never have a peacock's feather on, it is the same sort of thing as the whistling, you mustn't whistle

Roy Fowler: And the Scottish play. I've never heard of the peacock's feather before

Maurice Carter: 0h disaster

Roy Fowler: So the master got carried away did he. Was he very grand or was he very approachable

Maurice Carter: He varied terrifically from hobnobbing with the electricians and singing bawdy songs around the piano to being extremely lofty and the master. And if anybody failed to called him the master he was extremely upset, yes he was pretty pompous come to think of it

Roy Fowler: And he was still very young, he was then just 48, 49 younger than we are now. Anyway it must have been quite interesting to have worked with him

Maurice Carter: Yes , but of course I had Gladys Calthrop to his designer to deal with you see and she had to approve my designs, the set dressings, and it was Gladys who first noticed the feather, the fatal feather

Roy Fowler: And told him

Maurice Carter yes, and of course from then on I was damned

Roy Fowler: Was she part of the kind of sycophantic entourage

Maurice Carter: Very much so

Roy Fowler: Did she have any talent

Maurice Carter: Oh yes,

If Fowler: Because she worked only because of him

Maurice Carter: No doubt about it, Gladys with knowledge of the stage, no knowledge of films, when push came to shove she couldn't art director because she hadn't got a ticket but she laid no heavy hand on me at all, it was just saying, suggesting things, very light handed, very nice

Roy Fowler: But he did have his band of courtiers didn't he, not just dear Graham, but there was Joyce Carey always turned up

Maurice Carter: Well Graham was the great sucker up

Roy Fowler: The maitress en titre. Well he was patient and got it all

Followed by White Corridors

Maurice Carter: White Corridors was very interesting, Pat Jackson directing, it was immediately after he'd made The Gun, an extraordinary successful money-making picture that was, it was Pennington Richards was the lighting cameraman. It was the first film I'd ever had in which we got together and wrote the script between us, we sat on the curb together with the writer and Pennington Richards, myself and Pat Jackson, we used to sit in a shelter outside in the Chelsea pub on the curb and get the scripts together ourselves and say what it was like. And they could tell me XX X but could we built a lift , a practical lift, and I would say yes, we can build it, why not. Let's have one of those open grill lifts - so you can shoot through, and that sort of discussion would go on. The whole film was made in that way exactly, and Pat would say we'll get the lighting in the corridor like this, and like that, what we could do to make the ward interesting is so and so and so and so. One of the most interesting films in my life to make.

Roy Fowler: Studio bound

Maurice Carter: Yes the only exterior was shooting the exterior of the hospital was shooting on Ealing Library

Roy Fowler: Pat Jackson who never really achieved his promise

Maurice Carter: No, he made The Gun and Western Approaches which earned him his distinction

Roy Fowler: We were talking earlier about people who had written their life's stories and hadn't found a publisher, he is yet another. White Corridor was followed by Trio which we've talking about and then Encore which we didn't mention but essentially is the same tradition

Maurice Carter: Essentially the same format, shooting, partly in the south of France and partly in

Roy Fowler: And then comes the Berlin picture whose title you couldn't remember and that is Desperate Moments. And then Quartet and I Believe In You and you'd moved to Ealing for this

Maurice Carter Yes I did

Roy Fowler: As a freelance

Maurice Carter: Yes, Michael Relph and Basil Dearden directing. and the distinction of the picture is Joan Collins, I think it was her second picture and she had just married Maxwell Reed and was terrified of him. Also he wasmistreating her sexually and at the same time everybody had this sexual thing about her. Michael Relph was absolutely mad to get that this girl. In fact he batted down her dressing room to get in, it was real rough stuff

Roy Fowler. At Ealing Studio of all places

Maurice Carter: At Ealing Studios of all places, with Michael Balcon around. And she used to come and sit at my table and say can I sit at your table, otherwise he'll come and sit with me and I can't stand it at lunchtime, I'll be sick

Roy Fowler : She was having a rough time of it

Maurice Carter: She was terrified. It went on and on

Roy Fowler: That must have affected her performance

Maurice Carter: It didn't help. But she did pretty well I think

Roy Fowler: I'm afraid actresses and indeed actors sometimes do hit the rough of it

Maurice Carter: I'm afraid it was me, I was responsible for getting her cast in the part. I was in Pinewood and she was with Reed, Maxwell Reed, in the restaurant and I thought gosh that's a super looking girl. They were trying to cast a girl for the part so I saw Basil in the bar and said I've just seen a super looking girl, have you thought about her for the part she might be something, he said where is she. I said she is up there on the top table, that is how she got cast the part. That really got her on the way, the first really minor major picture she ever did

Fowler: Maxwell Reed is a forgotten name, was he a shit

Maurice Carter: Yes, utter, he used to give her the golden xxx treatment, absolutely disgusting, but has you know she divorced him very quickly, wisely

Roy Fowler: Strange title for the film wasn't it I believe in you. A Day to Remember maybe makes more sense, that says France

Maurice Carter: Yes that was Betty Box's picture in France and it was largely shot first of all on the cross-Channel steamer, The story is an outing of darts club to Boulogne and it was shot mainly on the boat and then in Boulogne itself

Roy Fowler: All location, are they getting more venturesome now, getting out of the studio

Maurice Carter: Yes it was one of the first pictures almost entirely on, I think it was entirely on location, almost entirely any way. I think there is a little cafe scene back in England, not much more

Roy Fowler: How about recording sound, did they record direct sound to use

Maurice Carter: Yes, they were getting braver the sound boys by that time

Taffy Haines Levers Rich, portable.

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: Pinewood behind everyone else, very slow into magnetic

Taffy Hanes: Yes, very slow, it was Levers Rich for ages when the Nagra was just coming in.

Roy Fowler: Was the Levers Rich sprocketed tape

Taffy Hanes: Quarter inch tape and it was two big boxes run from a 12 volt battery because I remember CC Stevens going out to do a Basil Dearden picture, with a Nagra for a back up and using the Levers Rich. They'd in have any trust in thne agra, a lot of sound people didn't have trust in using them

Roy Fowler: Because they were so small

Taffy Haines: Because they were so small

Maurice Carter: And foreign

Roy Fowler: The Seekers, you went to New Zealand on that

Maurice Carter: Yes. That was George Brown. And a girl called Lea Rxxx was the star.

We got on very well Frank Green was the production manger. And he and I went out to do a reccie there. George Brown had been out there, as the producer and had flown around New Zealand in an aircraft, because it was very heavy rains, most of the places was flooded so he had, wisely I suppose, taken up an aircraft to look at many of the sites and there was one important beach he wanted to use, it was located for us on the map, so we had a map with a star on it.

Frank and I got there, we were there over Christmas and on Christmas Day we went looking for this, all the Maoris were cooking their little meals in pebbled trenches and when we got there we found this beach was below a very steep valley, declivity and was entirely filled with Thorn bush and after nearly tearing our clothes off we gave up the whole project and came back and got our Maori friends with machetes to come with us and cut a track through.

And we cut a track right down, just enough for us to get to down to this, over this almost precipice cliff. When we got to the beach there was a wonderful xxx tree all in flower, a great blaze of red, and a little white tent underneath and there was a little man sitting inside. He was a hermit. And he was terribly upset when we appeared on this beach. Because he didn't come overland to reach it. He used to swim across a minor a, climb over some rocks, swim the other side and reach it and was entirely cut off from the world. He only when in once a week to XXX to get some stores. So we had to tell the poor fellow that we going to cut a road. So we sent a wire to George. Beach completely approachable, T tree Forest between us and it . The reply telegram was, obtain Boy Scouts immediately. So we got hold of a bulldozer and cut a road down to it. Desecration really. We had to grade this road all the way down, it must have been half a mile long, a mile long probably and cut it right down so we could get all the unit down .

Roy Fowler: Probably a tourist trap now

Maurice Carter: The interesting thing about the story was that the little hermit in the tent, they gave him a job in the canteen, of course we had to bring all the services down to

this beach, and gave him a job in the canteen. And he finished up at the end of the picture we went to his wedding with one of the girls who was serving in the canteen, he was a happily married man, no more hermit. The film studio fixed that

Roy Fowler: There couldn't have been many films shot in New Zealand around that time

Maurice Carter: There was a little native industry but it was down, right down south, in the Wellington Studios. We were making mainly round about this area, the Maori area of X X X and, naturally because it was a story about an the Maoris and the first settlers.

I had to double for Jack Hawkins. They wanted to see him with the legendary Maori girl, which was a boy dressed up and, because this site they wanted us to get to was again down through a great valley, with a stream running at the bottom the other side . So they dressed me in the Jack's clothes, gave me gave me his long barreled gun. And the Maori boy was dressed up in the girl's feathered skirt, reed skirt, etc . And we set off to get the shot . The camera crew was set on this side waiting for us, they thought it was just a warp down and up again. Well it was about half and a half but it was again the through all this Thorn bush and when we got to the bottom the Maori boy had taken the rifle from me because I was stumbling along, my clothes were practically in tatters by this time, the stockings I had on were just an shreds of wool trailing behind and me and he dropped the rifle in the stream. So he had to dive in for that. By the time we got to the position that we were needed on, the unit had moved off and left us. They didn't need the shot any more.

Roy Fowler: Was it a successful film, I've never seen that I'm sure

Maurice Carter: Average for that period and

Roy Fowler To Paris With Love

Maurice Carter: That was a nice, pretty picture. That was with Robert Hamer. And I had to be his keeper on that and we got him to the set on time. It was produced by Tony Darnborough. Of course Bobby was always on the drink but pretty picture

Roy Fowler and: Did it affect his work, he drank during the picture

Maurice Carter: He drank from breakfast-time onwards. He always had a large gin in his bath, of course the problem was trying to keep him off with all the cafes around and drink available, so I had to go and sit and with him and watch him and keep him, you couldn't say don't have a drink Bobby, all you could do was sit with him and try and talk to him and distract him and amuse him and get him back and to the set when I got a little signal.

But eventually he got terribly drunk and Tony saved him. He got so drunk one day, he kept on drinking these drinks and glasses were left as you know in France in front of you and he always eventually passed out solid, so he fell forward and poor Darnborough had to take an all the broken glass on his arm

Roy Fowler: Tragedy because he had an enormous talent

Maurice Carter: Wonderful, he was a wonderful talented man, lovely man too, gorgeous man in his sober moments

Roy Fowler: And I suppose alcohol was the great menace then, I suppose I nowadays it would be drugs and but then it was alcohol and there were quite a few who were alcoholics

Maurice Carter: I think alcoholism has always been overt, not like drugs so covert which we've all experienced with producers and directors since, and performers

Roy Fowler: It is very sad to hear all that about Hamer

Maurice Carter: Odile Versois was the girl in a the picture, pretty little girl

Roy Fowler: 1954, Above Us The Waves

Maurice Carter: That was my second submarine picture

Roy Fowler: A Woman For Joe

Maurice Carter: That was a disaster, I cannot remember now who produced it but we had a French cameraman on it and it was the story of a fat woman and a circus midget, a rather frightening horrible story of the romance between this midget and this fat woman.

I had to build a circus tent and this particular cameraman wanted to light it from out side, to get the glow of out side light, the sort of the diminished light of an interior, diffused light of a circus tent. So I had to build it all of gauze, to get him the strength of light to photograph inside. Very very difficult because gauze doesn't behave like canvas and we had terrible troubles starching the gauze to get the crispness to form the shape of a tent properly. Very difficult to things, highly technical and very difficult things to build tents

Roy Fowler: He was ahead of his time because nowadays it's like every shot you see, shooting against the light from out side. All For Mary

Maurice Carter: All For Mary was by Wendy Toye, very simple, sweet story, we shot it in Switzerland. It had all the problems of snow. Every shot you do you have to move again because you can see the traces of the last shot in the snow. So if you wanted virgin snow, some body approaching there was no rehearsal or else you had to move on. It was the time the guys were climbing the Iger. We were living in the hotel at the foot of the Iger mountain and we used to operate and from there. And Paul Soskin, Paul who was producing used to sit on the terrace with his drink and his family and watch us through his binoculars. And he would send messages up via the ski-lift saying what are you doing now, I've seen you sitting down for 10 minutes. When do we get the next shot. Chasing us up constantly

Roy Fowler: These were all freelance pictures, independent productions, you touched on that but didn't go into it in detail, you said quite suddenly they wouldn't renew

Maurice Carter: I think they were still through, making some Rank pictures through

Roy Fowler: So this was Rank finance,

And Maurice Carter: I think it was Rank finance, supervised by Earl St John from Pinewood but otherwise it was a semi independent production

Roy Carter: Has that moment arrived yet when they said that's it, we're not renewing your contract

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think so

Roy Fowler: When was that

Maurice Carter: I think it was shortly, it was after the Doctor pictures, the last Doctor picture, it must have been later, I must have been still on contract then

Roy Fowler: We've got then Doctor at Large, what would have been the last Doctor picture

Maurice Carter Doctor In The House, or it may have been Doctor In Love , yes Doctor in Love

Roy Fowler: That was 1960 and that was when they more or less closed down production.

Maurice Carter: I think so, we'll come to that in sequence.

Roy Fowler: The next film is The Spanish Gardener

10 January 1991

Maurice Carter

SIDE 7, TAPE 4

Roy Fowler: The Spanish Gardner, your recollections of this

Maurice Carter: The Spanish Gardner, I went back to working with John Bryan. John Bryan was the designer, and myself as art director and it was obviously located in Spain with the sets built at Pinewood. We shot it on an estate of a millionaire just north of Barcelona, very interesting house and John designed the set really almost exactly as the house, as the interior of the house was. And we had one or two struggles with it because we had to build an old mill on a river, and of course as usual with film crews that particular part of the season turned out to be the wettest Spain had ever heard of, and we were trying to build this mill and the only way we could get the materials to the site was by mule. But we had marvellous Spanish technicians. I think as everybody knows the plasterers and people in Spain are absolutely above reproach. In spite of all these difficulties they built this wonderful mill and dressed it

Roy Fowler: Where they motion picture craftsmen or did you have to train them

Maurice Carter: No, they were from the Madrid Studios

Roy Fowler: So even in those days they had that kind of expertise

Maurice Carter: Yes, very much so.

Roy Fowler: Actually he this is the time of Bronson and co

Maurice Carter: That's right and. There were a lot of films being made in Spain at that time.

Roy Fowler: Very big budget pictures

Maurice Carter: Yes, much bigger than ours

Roy Fowler: 55 Days and Fall of the Roman Empire. It might be interesting to ask you here, given two people of considerable talent, because you've paid great compliment to John Bryan and also yourself, how did the art director relate to the production designer, was that ever a complication in terms of talents and personalities

Maurice Carter: Yes, it shouldn't have been a great, really what happened was this inversion, re selection of titles by the art department. It occurred when the Guild of Film Art Directors, and John Bryan and many others thought that there should be a division between design and actual construction, the art director was responsible for construction. And that was really the separation in fact, the designer did exactly just that, the design of the set. And the art director put it to be an accomplished fact. It was really the relationship that had been before between the art director and the assistant art director. There was no change really. I think it started in the States this idea. And then John Bryan and several of the others who were leading in the Guild of Film Art Directors established it as practice

Roy Fowler: It started in the States of course because each major studio had its departmental head, such as Cedric Gibbons, that didn't really apply here did it

Maurice Carter: Not really, no, because they did rarely more than one picture at once as you know, several pictures. No, it was applying that title to a different circumstance in fact. But it worked pretty well, but as I say really it should have still remained as art director, it was purely a new complication in order to be able to get the assistant the money that formerly the art director had got. And the designer was then able to stand above him with more money. I think little more than that.

And Roy Fowler: Was that inhibiting for you as a fully fledged production designer to use that phrase, to have to follow someone else's

Maurice Carter: Not with John because I had so much regard for him and his design, I think everybody did, everybody knew that he was probably the best designer in England at that time, without doubt. So it worked pretty well

Roy Fowler: As a side question to all that, did you ever encounter charlatans, designers who had the gift of the gab but not much else

Maurice Carter: Not until later, I think it became much abused later on, that relationship, much abused

Roy Fowler: But Bryan as an example would have some input and authority. And he wouldn't just give you a few off the cuff sketches and say get on with it. He really was supervising

Maurice Carter: Yes, he would go, he wouldn't go much further than the sketch, he would consider that an instruction, beyond that apart from checking on textures and that sort of thing, he came obviously and looked at the built set and if he saw something that displeased him in the building he would want a change, but in general he chose his partners because, I knew him so well by then that I could interpret exactly what he wanted, especially as far as texture and colour

Roy Fowler: Would he be working on several pictures

Maurice Carter: No purely one picture

Roy Fowler: I'm trying to find out how present or how remote he was to the actual shoot

And Maurice Carter: He was very close, he would be with the director considerably. I think also adding to the directors ideas on set ups

Roy Fowler: And he was on location in terms of dressing the set

And Maurice Carter: Yes, and of course he would control costume. That was another factor that came into it, the designer then had say so on costume as part of his design and also largely on, also reckoned they should be certainly at least in charge of master shots on the production, master set-ups

Roy Fowler: Anything particular about that film, problems that needed to be solved

Maurice Carter: We had no great problems, as I say the greatest problem was weather and rather mucking up the gentleman's garden which we were using

Roy Fowler: I imagine you restored it even better

Maurice Carter: Yes, for instance the sound van tried to drive down one of the garden paths past which was built up with stone walling and the whole thing collapsed, it was that kind minor tragedy

Roy Fowler: It's always the sound people

Maurice Carter: I wouldn't say that, sometimes, usually it's the spark's for my money, they used to drive their lorries across the lawn

Roy Fowler: Was the director Philip Leacock

Maurice Carter: Yes, just before he went to Spain, sorry to the States, he defected but he was a very fine director, very sensitive man, lovely man

Roy Fowler: Curious story as I remember, almost border line in terms of sexuality

Maurice Carter: Yes it was

Roy Fowler: I think there was a kind of naivety then or maybe it was something to do with Dirk Bogarde's personality, but I remember Roy Baker talking about a film he made which he swears was a love story between the bandit and the priest, I've forgotten title of it, but I think there must have been kind of innocence

Maurice Carter: Well Dirk holds that kind of atmosphere around him

Roy Fowler: But a curious choice of subjects for the Rank Organisation in both instances it seems to me

Maurice Carter: Very strange, but then the Rank Organisation was a very strange set-up anyway, exactly who chose subjects and how they came about was almost unknown to me. They had a huge library of subjects of course and I think the general thing was that the director and producer went into the library and selected subjects, already bought subjects.

Roy Fowler: And then up they had to get board approval

Maurice Carter Yes, I imagine some body went into this and said we must use Dirk, going to be Dirk picture, go and choose subject, and some body thought this is very applicable to Dirk's character, I imagine how it was chosen, don't know, but I imagine that's how it was chosen., Phil would certainly be very sensitive to Dirk

Roy Fowler: And a child performer too

Maurice Carter: You know he had made number of pictures with children before

Roy Fowler: It sounds a happy picture

Maurice Carter: Yes, very apart from the weather and we're always trying to struggle with that

Roy Fowler: Then we're back to do Doctor At Large. Was it that your first Doctor film

Maurice Carter: No, the last one actually, I'd done two or three, but Doctor At Large certainly wasn't the first. I think it was mostly shot around, as close to the studio as possible. Of course we used the hospital again that we had used on every other set for the hospital base

Roy Fowler: What did they do in the cases like that, where elements of the set preserved or did you just work from the same designs.

Maurice Carter: No, in general there were completely new settings anyway, new construction, the script itself dealt with more or less domestic situations as opposed to before being mainly in the hospital, this was only as an introduction in the hospital and the rest of the film took place in sets which we built in the studio, almost entirely a studio picture as far as I remember

Roy Fowler: In your experience has it been much of a practice in this country to have standing sets either on the stages or certainly on the back lot, some have stayed for a while haven't they

Maurice Carter: No, very seldom up, only on the back lot, as far as up studio sets, never never left standing as in the States because here space was at a premium, and if there was going to be any repetition of the set it was simply struck and put in the stock bay. Pinewood had an excellent stock bay, there is no doubt about that, an enormous stock of pieces and it made the building of sets very economical

Roy Fowler: Was that an aspect of your design, work that you would deliberately seek to use stock items or design items that could become stock items

Maurice Carter: We never considered whether they would become, because stock was really in a way written off once a picture was finished, it was no attribute to the picture, it only became the property of the studio and any reward coming from having any stock pieces certainly didn't accrue to the production itself. One had to look in the bay before you designed a set really to see what stock was there, particularly when it you were budgeting, it was a good idea to have a good search around and formulate your ideas around the stock which was available

Roy Fowler: So you might find a staircase for example or door opening

Maurice Carter: So you would budget your set with that at the back of your mind, that you could probably use it

Roy Fowler: While we're talking about these general items what was your favourite set that absolutely broke your heart to see torn down

Maurice Carter: I think probably the Canterbury Cathedral in Becket which was a pretty interesting set

Roy Fowler: Large was your last Doctor film

Maurice Carter: Certainly it was the last one I did. There may have been one up after myself because we sort of did alternate Doctor pictures.

Roy Fowler: Have we talked about Betty Box

Maurice Carter: I don't think we'd did talk about her much but I regard her as a very excellent producer. She is always a very good tempered producer and very knowledgeable in casting artists, the fact that she found Bardot virtually, gives you a good idea of her insight into picking out likely artists. Of course, she was basically an accountant originally with her brother's set up, so had a very great touch with finance also. So I think

she was an excellent producer, and very calm as I say, and allowed people to get on with their jobs, no she was an excellent producer

Roy Fowler: Along with her husband Peter Rodgers, did they work as a team or were they entirely separate

Maurice Carter: Entirely separate. I mean her close partner was Ralph Thomas, I mean they were very close

Roy Fowler: What is to be said about Betty Box and Ralph Thomas, I don't want to put words into your mouth but they were a very efficient, commercial, efficient, taut little team

Maurice Carter: I think that exactly describes them, certainly commercial. I think they also had good artistic intentions

Roy Fowler: But they're very much bread and butter pictures, it was still the age of bread and butter pictures

Maurice Carter: Of course

Roy Fowler: Anything to add about Betty Box and Ralph Thomas

Maurice Carter: As you know from the list I did quite a number of pictures with them, I suppose as many pictures as I did with any producer, so we were quite a good team I think

Roy Fowler: Congenial working partners

Maurice Carter: Very

Roy Fowler: Well that's more than half the game.

Maurice Carter: Very, they trusted me and it was fine, didn't interfere unduly

Roy Fowler: Tight budget spend

Maurice Carter: Very tight of course, but not extremely tight, many other producers at that period were working on equally tight budgets. But of course our biggest problem was the Rank set-up which round about this time, I believe I'm speaking in time, but they were Rank productions and they were building up this enormous staff of accountants and overseers and we were infested with the these daily meetings which detracted very much from the picture and gave us the feeling we were working for a government department rather than making a film

Roy Fowler: And it's all part of the overheads too

Maurice Carter: Exactly, it was all added on to the film

Roy Fowler: Pinewood had really in those days the reputation for being a very expensive studio to work in

Maurice Carter: Only because of this enormous, daily budget returns, daily returns to South Street, enormous background staff in the office block, I mean there were 34 in the accounts department alone which was a considerable staff if there was only one picture to bear, usually there was at least one other picture which made it easier, but if one picture was there then it was bearing all that costs, especially if it was an independent producer, as later on it was independent producers, not Rank themselves bearing it

Roy Fowler: Do you know what the mark up was for overheads

Maurice Carter: No, no I don't

Roy Fowler: Could we talk actual figures for a film like Doctor at Large in the middle Fifties

Maurice Carter: Overall budget, I wouldn't know. Set budgets were going at about, I suppose something like £35,000, in that area

Roy Fowler: Was that based on estimating the script or was that a budget figure that had to be adhered to

Maurice Carter: How it was done once Rank Productions took it over, they had a little accountant who was declared to be the specialist in sets budgets and how he formulated his budget was to look at our all our past costs for sets, he would search a set of a similar size in an earlier and picture and say that cost £7800, so this one I'll add a bit on for the extra cost of labour and that is how he arrived at it. He had no idea what I was going to design for the set

Roy Fowler: It's nice to know it was scientifically based

Maurice Carter: How he could hope to know what I was going to do with the design, or what the director was going to say to me, the question of floaters and his request for action and props, I don't know

Roy Fowler: So once he'd plucked his figure out of history were you stuck with it

Maurice Carter: I was stuck with it, I could argue before he finally formulated the budget but I had little hope of actually shifting the position seriously

Roy Fowler: Compared to other studios how did they work

Maurice Carter If you worked on an independent production, the budget for the sets it would come from me, arguing it out with the producer, I mean if he says this is ridiculous, you're nowhere near the budget with sets like that. Every production had a formulated idea what sets should cost for it, rather based similar to the Pinewood idea, that a similar production had cost X, Y plus. But that had more sense because at least it came from me and I had some idea of what I was going to design for the picture and some idea of what the real cost was. But how it worked being at Rank anyway, the only way you could salve the situation was to cheat by urging him to put more on one set and then knowing you could save on other sets and finally you could get the all important set up to the standard that the picture required, it was quite absurd

Roy Fowler: Did anyone else use that, say MGM or ABPC

And Maurice Carter: I don't think so but I didn't have any direct experience

Roy Fowler: We come now to Campbell's Kingdom in 1957

Maurice Carter: Again, a Betty Box picture, shot mainly in the Italy at Cortina xxx. It was standing in for Canada of course. The whole setting of the picture was in Canada and concerned the construction of a huge dam and the Cortina site became apt because Betty had been out and made a reccie and found a huge dam some 50 miles, 40 miles from Cortina and we needed snow scenes and lake scenes and a big river scene, and so the combined situation was obviously very suitable to simulate Canada.

I had an enormous problem there because I set up the picture in England, the sets. Then I had to go off on my own to Cortina to build a ridiculous thing which was demanded by the book, it was a **vernicular** which carried a lorry, you can imagine the construction required to carry a lorry. It was a comparatively short stretch obviously but it still had to be built, constructed. And the only construction materials we had of course was trees and timber, obviously at that time it couldn't be built with metal. So I went out there and of course the time I went out there was mid winter with heavy snow and they were due to follow out in the spring. And I was nearly frozen to death out there building this blasted thing. I had local labour, not film labour, it had to be local people building the thing. They had no knowledge of vernicular building, and also they were cheating like mad. I would say I will be out at such and such a spot at 10 o'clock, will you bring all the work people out there. I would simply sit in the snow and nobody would turn up and I would be 15, 20 miles away from Cortina. So it was a very, very hard picture for me. And eventually, the great joke was that when the unit turned up, it was no joke actually, but of course the snows had all disappeared by the time they all came in the lovely spring sunshine. So I had then the problem of having built in the snow a whole Western town, a kind of Canadian village, I had to bring the snow down in lorries from 1000, to 2000 ft up and dump it and try and make it looked like the slush and muck on the rooves of the set which constantly, of course every day the sun was so warm it melted all the time

Roy Fowler: Was it unseasonable weather or just bad scheduling

Maurice Carter: Bad scheduling of course. They didn't want to be stuck in the heavy snow, very difficult to operate so I think they tried to have their cake and eat it

And Roy Fowler: That sounds a higher budget than usual for a Betty Box picture

And Maurice Carter: Yes, fractionally higher

Roy Fowler: Only fractionally

Maurice Carter: Yes, because there were less sets in the studio, the rest of it, the bulk of, it became in fact a location picture. That was why I was able to leave the picture in London with the sets already built and move to Canada, and move to Cortina to build Canada

Roy Fowler: This is a very much the time of exteriors on location and the interior sets in the studio

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think so. Well at that time it was extremely difficult to shoot with the gear we had, to shoot interiors of course. The lamps and the advanced gear wasn't there, which is so easy today. I suppose it was a reasonably successful picture

Roy Fowler: Violent Playground in 1957

Maurice Carter: That was with Michael Ralph and Basil Dearden and set in Liverpool obviously from the title and that was shot mainly on location and in Liverpool

Roy Fowler: Including the interiors you mean

Maurice Carter: No, we built some interiors, there was a school room in it which we built, back in London

Roy Fowler: Had you worked with them before

Maurice Carter: Yes, yes I had worked on a picture called I Believe In You at Ealing with Joan Collins, and we talked about it. I found it a very dull film

Roy Fowler: Penny Princess, was that Val Guest

Maurice Carter: Yes, Val Guest and Yolande Donlan taking the lead and shot mainly in Spain, mainly a place about 60 miles outside Barcelona, up in the mountains and I think I've said somewhere else we were in the midst of the Franco revolt, the partisans were attacking, Franco was already in power of course and the partisans were attacking

Franco's guarda. And we were up in this mountain hotel one night, and we were all sitting in the restaurant of this hotel, and suddenly there were bangs, outside shots, and they rushed in and said take cover, the guarda are fighting the partisans. We obviously took care to sit behind the walls and not in front of the windows and just continued with our little old banquet

Roy Fowler: The guarda of Seville were some rather hairy customers weren't they

Maurice Carter: Yes they were. It was quite a ridiculous sort of story about villagers fighting by throwing cheeses at each other, those round gouda cheeses, I mean absolutely fantastic story, it was quite pleasant, it had some rather good music by Val

Roy Fowler: We've talked about Val as a writer, have we talked about him as a director

Maurice Carter: No, he was the very efficient director, there is no question about that - it was purely, he never seemed to choose really good subject matter but he was a very talented man. He wrote the music for Penny Princess which was a musical and it was extremely good and it became quite popular, recordings of it. So he was a man of no mean talent, writer, director, musician

Roy Fowler: What did he do best do you think

And Maurice Carter: I think he was better as a writer overall

Roy Fowler: As a gag man

Maurice Carter: Yes, that is what he had been trained for.

Roy Fowler: Followed by Square Peg

Maurice Carter: Yes, that was a Paul Soskin production. Who is the little man who always falls about, a Norman Wisdom picture, the usual comedy

Roy Fowler: It is rather sad to think of Paul Soskin making Norman Wisdom pictures

Maurice Carter: That is what he mainly did while he was at Pinewood

And Roy Fowler: Earlier he had pretensions

Maurice Carter: That is what he mainly did while he was at Pinewood. I made quite a number with him, as we mentioned earlier, All For Mary and the Norman Wisdom comedies. He was very amusing, Paul because he used to act out in front of me as he saw the scene and with his mid European accent it was very funny to see him playing the part Wisdom would play, I thought much funnier than Wisdom actually

Roy Fowler: Did he direct

Maurice Carter: No, just produce. He used to sit at a distance with a telescope, was his favourite thing, to keep a close eye on us

Roy Fowler: The Wind Cannot Read took you to India by the look of it

Maurice Carter: Again a Betty Box's picture. Set in India, and the story is basically the love affair of a young army lieutenant with the young Japanese girl in India during wartime. I think we built some rather nice sets for that, it was a very interesting production. We were in India which is marvellous in itself, a marvellous place to shoot, had the usual marvellous adventures there.

We built a little Japanese camp and we had to put a night watchman there to look after it and in the morning they came to see how he was getting on and the poor chap had had the fright of his life, had left because two tigers had been cloying their way into his little Bxxx hut. I must say when I was there I saw a black leopard which was quite a extraordinary, a huge beast, it was set in a sort of little quarry with these huge trees growing out of it, well a big quarry. And I saw this leopard coming along on the top so it was obviously a pretty hairy place to be at night. I wouldn't care to stop there in a little tent

Roy Fowler: Was there a lot of construction on the film

Maurice Carter: Yes, we built all the studios sets back at Pinewood

Roy Fowler: I was wondering about shooting on location in India

Maurice Carter: No, India we built an army camp out on the desert and the unit in their usual nice callous way took me out in the car, I was putting up tents and dressing this thing out in desert and they dropped me there at 8 o clock in the morning and said look we have to take the car back but we'll pick you up at lunch time. And I thought ah ha. And wasn't careful enough, being out in the desert, one needed water. There was no water at all. They of course didn't come back at lunch, they didn't come back till late evening. By mid afternoon of course I was absolutely dry as a bone and eventually I made the foreman understand I was passing out with thirst and he got a little chap and there was a village right on the horizon, right away, just a few signs of palm trees, and he got a little fellow to go and get me some water from this village. And this little chap, I saw him running into infinity and then come running back half an hour later holding a little brass bowl. And of course I was so eager to get at this water that like a fool I let my lips touch the edge of the bowl, so this poor little man, I'm sure he had to go through all this hell of having the bowl reclensed

Roy Fowler: Because infidel

Maurice Carter: Because an infidel had drunk from it. But it was a very nice picture to do, very interesting. I enjoyed it

Roy Fowler: Working in India, we all know there is an enormous Indian film industry, did you have any contact with that

Maurice Carter: Yes, I had a couple of assistants, art directors, drawn from the studio, they came up from Bombay and several carpenters and technicians came up too. And we had an Indian production manager

Roy Fowler: Did they impress you with their capabilities

Maurice Carter: Yes, I thought they were very competent. The trouble was of course the usual thing in India, the awful cheating. For instance, we had been buying paint and I thought these bills are very stiff. So I said where do you get this paint from. And eventually I found out detective work that it came from the Shining Hour Paint Store. So I thought I'll go and see what this is all about. So I went down there and I said to them these prices are ridiculous, to the Indian in charge of the store. He said don't blame me, I have to put on another hundred percent for your people

Roy Fowler: What's called improving the shining hour

Maurice Carter: So I got a bit tough on prices. I had a lot of trouble too, we had to build a street and at the end of it was a Muslim temple. And we found such a place just close to Delhi. And I had to find a place to build it any carpenter's tent and all the rest of it. I found a field nearby with a stone wall around it and that and we got in touch with the Muslim priest and all the people there. And we rented this field at a very high rate but we didn't grumble about that, having got it so near to the site we were working on. And eventually as we were finished work there, the police came to the hotel and I and the Indian production manager were charged with desecrating a Muslim burial place. They were claiming 24 rupees and we were on charge, I was officially not allowed to leave India. As I had to go back to the studio, they were depending on me getting the sets ready in the studio at Pinewood, I had to be smuggled out of India

Roy Fowler: How did they do that

Maurice Carter: They just didn't inform any body and I crept away and away we went

Roy Fowler: Was it a justified claim or was it just the police way of sharing the wealth.

Maurice Carter: No, it was the Muslims, it was the usual thing in India, it was the bakchis, good bribe, I think that is how it was fixed in the end

Roy Fowler: How about the materials, not just being charged exhorbitant prices, did they disappear all the time

Maurice Carter: No there was not a lot of stealing, as far as I ever saw, it's just that timber is very hard to come by in India and it's the worst sort of timber you could possibly find

Taffy Haines: Talking about that, I remember a buyer, just before the war I knew a buyer and he did a location picture going to Egypt, and the whole unit went on a boat. How did you boys travel around in the 50s. Aeroplane, prop aeroplane, there weren't any jets

Maurice Carter: Prop aeroplanes of course

Taffy Haines: How long did it take you to go to India

Maurice Carter: I think it only took one day to the best of my memory or did we have a break in Rome

Taffy Haines: A very long day

Roy Fowler: I think longer than a day Maurice in all probability. We're in 1958, jets were just about to arrive, planes were doing about 500 mph an hour

Maurice Carter: Probably a whole day and half or something like that, so you arrived in Baghdad about midnight and took off at 4 in the morning

Roy Fowler: The flight crews would change and they would refuel and new food

Maurice Carter: But of course that was a minimum, flying earlier when I went to Australia, New Zealand, that was five days nearly, four and-a-half days, continuous flying

Roy Fowler: And previously before the advent of general air travel had you had to go on any distant location by boat

Maurice Carter: No, it was always aeroplane

Roy Fowler: Because there was a Gainsborough film of the Thirties when they all went off to Egypt, The Camels Are Coming

Maurice Carter: Very unusual for Gainsborough

Roy Fowler: Absolutely yes there is a photograph I've seen of them all boarding the train at I suppose Waterloo to take them to their ship. As an experience India, working in India was to your liking, it is an extraordinary country

Maurice Carter: It's not the best place in the world as far as your comfort is concerned but it is so interesting

Roy Fowler: Well drinking that water was a bit of a risk anyway

Maurice Carter: Yes, and of course mosquitoes, in xxx it's pretty plaguey with mosquitoes

Roy Fowler: We can now go to the first remake of The 39 Steps

Maurice Carter: That was again Betty Box and Ralph Thomas

Roy Fowler: Do you have any idea whose idea it was to tackle what is possibly a brave, possibly a foolhardy project

Maurice Carter: I don't, no idea how they came up with that subject but interesting to do. Because what had happened technically in-between my days at Gainsborough and being at Pinewood was that back projection was advancing, I'd always been very interested as I've said before being back projection. And by now the one good thing about Rank was that they had put their money into building a triple headed projector, you remember Charlie **Staffle**

Roy Fowler: Pinewood was technically very advanced

Maurice Carter: It was indeed and Charlie Staffle were largely responsible for developing it and the train sequences in the remake of The 39 were so much easier than the first because we had the wide screen and could be more ambitious, as I explained before been connecting up perspective sections of train to plate. For instance the transfer from one carriage to another that goes in The 39 Steps was made much easier

Roy Fowler: So think triple headed BP System, how did that work

TAPE 4, SIDE 8

Roy Fowler: The triple head back projection process, three contiguous films going through three synchronised projectors

Maurice Carter: Yes, that's it

Roy Fowler: So it's almost like Cinerama in effect, you would have three adjacent pictures on the process screen

Maurice Carter: Yes, that's right. All the projectors impinged, obviously had to impinge exactly as a matching overlay, they all carried the same image and overlaid each other, and of course Charlie was very wise in choosing the lazy eight gate on the picture which was the wide film, Panavision. It was called VistaVision, and choosing the VistaVision added considerable complications of course because you had to make sure that the plates were originally shot and with a VistaVision camera, a rather large camera for use on location and most of the plates obviously were location plates and it avoided the problem of judder in the gate. The lazy eight system meant that you had the punch holes securely held in the gate and the wide film of course gave you a better emulsion definition. And so it was altogether a superior to the original single projector and normal 35 millimetre film strip before.

Roy Fowler: To get it absolutely clear in my mind, there were three separate strips of film

And Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: It wasn't shot on one VistaVision Camera, it was shot on three

Maurice Carter: No, it was shot on one, only one, three prints were made and fed into each of the projectors and they, the prints, Charlie used to it just the colour by having one print might be slightly warm, another might be slightly cold, so the image on the screen eventually had a correct colour balance. So you were able in fact to control the colour to match to the studio shooting, you could balance beautifully.

Roy Fowler: The purpose of this was what, to give one width or illumination

Maurice Carter: No, purely the power of illumination, so something like the maximum of a 14 ft screen we could suddenly get a 28 ft picture. And he had also discovered how to deal with hot spots on the screen which I mentioned earlier, had always been one of our worst problems, he now had 2 screens, the back, laminated, which diffused the hot spot but still gave a clear image on the screen.

Roy Fowler: And so the system was largely to obviate the slowness of the colour stock presumably.

Maurice Carter: How do you mean

Roy Fowler: Colours stock was still comparatively slow at this point

Maurice Carter: Oh yes indeed

Roy Fowler: So it was to get a good image

Maurice Carter: Exactly, to give a sharp and clear image

Roy Fowler: Had he started to work with front projection yet

Maurice Carter: No he hadn't, he was just fiddling with it at this time, I think. We were all just then just about talking about front projection and the idea was more or less, he was beginning to build, and experiment with camera mountings and mirrors and screen material. But I think 3Ms right from the start were building the screen material, it was in use already and that is where the basic idea came from, in night signs, in street signs. It was used, overlaid with the printing with a weatherproof surface and used on road signs, that is where it came from

Roy Fowler: And so someone quite early on got the idea

Maurice Carter: Yes. I don't know whether it was Charles or whether it was in the States, I wouldn't like to say who was first and. I think Charles was credited with it with his award

Roy Fowler: I think he got a special Oscar

Maurice Carter: He got an Oscar for the development of it and I think he must have been the first to fiddle with it

Roy Fowler: And yet if anyone was a responsible for bringing it to prominence, I guess it was Kubrick in 2001

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think it was

Roy Fowler: Especially the early sequence with the apes.

On 39 Steps there are these technical process obviously helping you a great deal.

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: Did they hinder as well

Maurice Carter: No, I don't think so but it wasn't used to an enormous degree. The picture didn't call for it. I mean we shot on the Forth Bridge, a very interesting experience, going up on the Forth Bridge, I went right up on the top, it was very interesting indeed. But that is one of the benefits of being an art director, that you do go to so many unusual places, especially on reccies. Much more than the crew. Usually on reccies there's more time, for instance we had to climb up to top of the bridge to have a look if there was a good angle for the trains, shoot the trains

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of the Hitchcock original, was it a point of reference. Did you set out to emulate it.

Maurice Carter: No not at all, it was thought of entirely as a fresh picture. Of course in the back of everybody's minds one had the scenes, the race across the moors and that sort of thing, so you had this slightly lurking in your mind. But I don't think it was considered, any effort made to making it to respond to a similarity

Roy Fowler: I don't think I've seen this version, I've seen the next one on television

Maurice Carter: Which was better really

Roy Fowler: I was going say the original Hitchcock is really idiosyncratic. For instance all that business of Mr Memory was a Hitchcock invention, I don't know who wrote the script, Charles Bennett perhaps

Maurice Carter: I think that was all originally in the book, as far as I remember, I did read the book at one time.

Roy Fowler: Maybe I'm mistaken saying that

Maurice Carter: I maybe mistaken in saying that but I think it's in the original book.

Roy Fowler: Largely studio-based

Maurice Carter: I would say it was preponderantly – a location picture. I think the house, that was built, the theatre was built, or was it, no it wasn't. The theatre was again location, we used a theatre in Watford, but otherwise I would say it was an equally balanced picture between studio and location

Roy Fowler: Are you enjoying location despite the problems involved

Maurice Carter: Only at times I'm afraid, location in general is very much a pain in the arse apart from the enjoyable interludes.

Roy Fowler: Which were really tourism rather than film-making I suppose

Maurice Carter: Yes. Of course the general thing with art department is that they probably had to spend a something like a month often before the unit turned up in a place. So you had got pretty used to the place if you were doing a big build, you knew all the local people and local populace and you were pretty bored with it by the time the unit turned up.

Roy Fowler: To what extent did one rely on one's construction manager to solve all those problems

Maurice Carter: In a big way. I've always regarded the construction manager, I must say as an art director, as his most important link to the construction and vital, vital. And also a good construction manager could protect you in your costs, that was the important thing. I had Vic Simpson largely for a long time, who was excellent at, he kept the books for the set and got the daily returns, the costs of the set and kept them, we knew, he'd say we're up creeping over here, what can we do and we could either cut something out, cut down the labour or take steps to try and keep ourselves in bound. So he is a vital piece of the mechanism of building sets.

Roy Fowler: As a general rule what about the production office, did they help or hinder

Maurice Carter: No, they had their own problems, and where up the production office and I had to work very closely was in working out the schedule, so that I had the time to build the set and strike it or reconstruct it when necessary within the scheduled time of the unit working there, then we had a crisis if they either came off too soon, then we had big problems

Roy Fowler: That's a very involved equation the lengths of time it takes to build up a set of course, it has to do with scale, it has to do with budget, how would you tackle it. Was it more experience than anything else.

Maurice Carter: That is largely the co-operation between the construction manager and the art director, once he had the drawings he became a vital cog in estimating the amount of time the set was going to take. The earlier estimates we had, before the construction manager really had all the details of the sets I had designed, before he had the drawings, then it became a system of guesswork, and experience in assessing exactly how long you would take to build a set. But of course you had the facility especially, that was another good thing about working in a studio with a set up like that at Pinewood, that you could either flood the set with workers or you could reduce it. And if you had three pictures operating then you could adjust your balance between the three productions, take labour off one and storm it. And then in return if the other protection was in trouble, you could allow your workforce to move over to the other production. In other words there was a fluidity which you cannot have when you have a single production working. Then you're stuck with the amount of labour you have, whatever you do, and it becomes much, much more difficult

Roy Fowler: On pictures of the scale we are talking about, in this era at Pinewood, what would one take, two stages,

Maurice Carter: About three was the usual, between two and three, seldom more on this sort of picture. Later pictures which will talk about like The Battle of Britain, that's entirely different

Roy Fowler: They take over the entire lot presumably

Maurice Carter: Virtually

Roy Fowler: So it's very much an industry in effect isn't it, a factory I suppose is a better word

Maurice Carter: Yes, and of course because one of the items in the budget was the rental of the stages which was put down into your budget, it could be that you would be told that where we've got to get these figures down, to squeeze the set some how into one stage, not spread them over into two as it should have been. In other words you often had to condense your set to do that

Roy Fowler: Upstairs And Downstairs followed which was not a forerunner of the television series

Maurice Carter: No, no, it is quite a different story actually, I think Wendy Toye directing, Betty Box again producing

Roy Fowler: So really you're almost full-time at this period with Betty Box, but you're not under contract

Ms Carter: Yes, up to this time, I don't think our break had actually come with Rank, I can't remember exactly when it broke. And it may have been that I was working from picture to picture because I did that subsequently

Roy Fowler: Well, the following one is a Doctor picture

Maurice Carter: I think I must have been still under contract there, it wouldn't have been so continuous.

Roy Fowler: Wendy Toye was somewhat unusual in being one of the very few women in a position of authority

Maurice Carter: Quite honestly she is up for the only competent woman director I have ever met

Roy Fowler: That is out of who else

Maurice Carter: Not many, Muriel. I have to search, to think.

Roy Fowler: Because there just weren't that many, were there

Maurice Carter: No, but Wendy had had so much experience, stage experience, generally had experience that she was she was far superior to anybody else

Roy Fowler: So she was good with actors as they say but also technically she was capable

Maurice Carter: Technically quite good but depended enormously on her cameraman of course.

Roy Fowler: How would she relate to you, carte blanche more or less

Maurice Carter: More or less, almost totally

Roy Fowler: Doctor In Love

Maurice Carter: Another sequel following the standard pattern

Roy Fowler: Frightened City

Maurice Carter: One of the very first films with Sean Connery, I think it was his first film, Paul Soskin producing for Rank. It was the story of ruffians in London

Roy Fowler: What was the boy Connery like

Maurice Carter: Very good, of course we didn't, he was just another actor, one didn't take particular notice of him but that was before the first Bond

Roy Fowler: Who was the director

Maurice Carter: I honestly can't remember

Roy Fowler: It was followed by No Love For Johnny

Maurice Carter: That was a very nice picture, successful picture, I find it very difficult to remember who directs. I remember it was a new director to Pinewood, I know that. But it was a picture about, the story of an MP having an affair And we had to build the House of Commons for that, which was largely drawn from the stock bay, they did keep most of the House of Commons set, but I did go to, it was very interesting go to Parliament and photograph the interior. Because the Parliament has changed since the original set which was from pre-war.

Roy Fowler: Well it was destroyed during the war, the chamber.

Maurice Carter: Destroyed and rebuilt, but many things remain, the Speaker's Chair and so forth and soon were all there. But we just had to build the chamber and it's quite a complicated set with all those step ups and seats, and one has to be so technically correct.

Roy Fowler: Granada I think currently has a more or less exact replica which they seem to keep standing.

Maurice Carter: I think it's probably taken out of, I think that was bought from the stock bay at Pinewood

Roy Fowler: You think it was bought from Pinewood, because eventually it was all sold. When they went four-walled. I mean stock sets like the criminal courts, the central criminal courts, the Old Bailey has always been a stock set

Roy Fowler: That keeps cropping up doesn't it in television. So possibly your original set for No Love for Johnny is indeed

Maurice Carter: A reconstituted version of what was in the stock bay

Roy Fowler: Anything about the film, Peter Finch

Maurice Carter: I think that was the first film I'd ever made where Finchie was in, but he is such a good actor, a marvellous guy. And he is a great close friend of my construction manager, Vic Simpson. They were playboys

Roy Fowler: He was a hellraiser then

Maurice Carter: A marvellous man.

Roy Fowler: In the Dog House, 1961

Maurice Carter: Another Paul Soskin comedy, the most fatuous comedy I've ever worked on, I think it was a ridiculous thing about looking after a dog's home. I can hardly remember exactly what it was about but that is the general theme, pretty pathetic

Roy Fowler: Would it have been considered a first feature, or were they still releasing double bills in those days.

Maurice Carter: It was made as a first feature without doubt, and possibly shown as a first feature. But it was sort of playful little thing, I don't think anybody had great aspirations for it.

Roy Fowler: Again, it isn't one I've heard of, it doesn't even seem to turn up on television yet.

Maurice Carter: But a lot of these films of this period were introducing artists who later became very well known.

Roy Fowler: A Pair of Briefs, 1972.

Maurice Carter: A Betty Box picture. Yes, the story of law courts and a woman barrister, I've got an idea Glenys Johns was in it, I may be wrong. Ralph Thomas directing. This is where we had to reproduce the central criminal court which is one of the most complicated sets, not because of anything very visual in it because each step is a multiplicity of rostrums, levels, very complicated and they have to be right.

Roy Fowler: I've never been in the original, I've seen the set many times in various pictures.

Maurice Carter: We went to the Royal Courts and photographed it again to make sure because things change from time to time, I think we built the corridor on the outside which is a sort of marble palace corridor where all the witnesses wait.

Roy Fowler: Interesting to speculate how that Number One court came into being, it's partly theatre isn't it.

Maurice Carter: One of the interesting things, we were going in to shoot that film, we were shooting location obviously on exteriors and on the notice board in the hall we read Geoff, the cameraman, Unsworth, his divorce was coming up in the law courts at the same time.

Roy Fowler: The next one sounds interesting, Lancelot and Guinevere

Maurice Carter: This was extraordinary, this was a film we shot in Yugoslavia, not one of my favourite experiences I'm afraid. We had to build this huge castle on top of a mountain and I'm struggling to remember the producer, director, star. But we went out there with this, to find this place and of course he and I went out in absolute midwinter and we, it was just at the time in, that they were in discussion, Yugoslavia was in great discussion with Russia over their separating from the block and we were taken out by car, we were also tied up with the studios in Belgrade and we were taken out by one of the production managers and the whole team of people, a couple of cars out to, the nearest we could get by road to the site they proposed for us.

And the director and I then had to walk something like 8 miles to this site, with a local guide. So we started out from the cars, the cars couldn't get any further because they were blocked by snow, and the road was blocked, and so we started out through this snow and tramped up to this place and we got to this place eventually after a very hard, you can

imagine 8 miles through snow, it's nobody's idea over a mountain pass road, and we reach this place. And there was absolutely nothing there, except that we could just look at the site, we couldn't reach it because the snow was too deep, we would have been up to our chest in snow. And the only place that was there was, in summer it was a holiday camp for Yugoslavians, and people went out into the country and enjoyed themselves. And it was just this hotel which was virtually closed down, with just a keeper there and we were just about dead with cold from the snow, but this chap, the keeper was a very nice fellow and gave us hot xxx, which cheered us up enormously. And then we had to, obviously it was starting to get to dusk and we had to start this 8 mile walk back. So the guide, we got out and the wind by this time had risen to gale force and we got up onto this height and the wind was blowing and the pine trees were having the tops blown off and we were staggering against this and holding each other up and the poor chap who was guiding us said he couldn't go any further and he would have to go back to the hotel and he couldn't make it the rest of the distance.

So he left us to go our own way, and we fought on and eventually got back before everybody had gone, it was pitch black at night and at last we saw about quarter of mile ahead of us a little spot of red light. And we thought oh god perhaps there is somebody still there, we went across and bally up to our waist in snow and climbed up the other side and got to one dear bloke, all the rest had gone off home, but our dear driver had stayed there, in absolute faith that we would return eventually. And but for him I'm sure we would have died, by that time, we were absolutely exhausted, we were falling into the snow.

That little adventure was with Cornel Wilde

Roy Fowler: It would be interesting to have your memories of Cornel Wilde

Maurice Carter: Well, he was as you know, he had an interesting history, having been a fencing master and being in Hollywood purely as a stuntman and progressing to director, actor-director, and he was a very good director there is not question about that, whether his choice of subject with Lancelot and Guinevere was the best I doubt. But Jeanie Wallace, his wife, was playing Guinevere and poor old Jeanie was a bit of a dipsomaniac and so Cornel had a problem.

I found that the Belgrade studios were pretty awful. At that time it was a pretty primitive studio anyway. The big stage had purely an earth floor for instance and of course it was a small studio and we were trying to build things which were really beyond their scope there, so it was quite difficult.

Roy Fowler: Did the studios have any kind of history or were they part of this era when you could get the Yugoslav army for 9d as I remember

Maurice Carter: Yes pretty much so,

Roy Fowler: Unlike East Germany or Czechoslovakia or Hungary where there were established studios.

Maurice Carter: It had been established a fairly long time the studio itself, but of course conditions as they had been from the war and under the communist regime, for instance the shops were completely empty, all you would see in a shop window were two pots and pans and nothing else. It was very much as I imagine Moscow has been for so long. And the economy was really virtually bankrupt and they were so anxious to acquire dollars through film production that they would do anything. And it was a participation picture, as many of them were that went from the West to shoot in Yugoslavia, in which they had half rights to distribution in the Eastern block

Roy Fowler: And you got a lot of below the line stuff in return

Maurice Carter: Everything, extras, everything was below the line in fact.

Roy Fowler: You obviously didn't have the same respect for the local technician and crafts people as you did say in Spain

Maurice Carter: No, no.

Roy Fowler: Was that a kind of attitude, local attitude or was it the training.

Maurice Carter: It was also, I think probably in the Serbian character, very tricky, same old thing I've mentioned before like in Italy, like one could never rely on something happening, you had a promise you would have people up there grading the road to get to a place. You would sit there and nobody would turn up. You would then get on the phone somehow in the nearest village and you would phone back and they would say they were on the way, they would be there in ten minutes. Then you waited another 8 hours and they still hadn't turned up. It was this thing that we almost wouldn't understand in England which is complete lack of response, lack of care.

Roy Fowler: One is that the film industry has easy pickings and attracts rapscallions

Maurice Carter: I don't think so, I think it was the effect of course of the communist regime, it is one of the effects of the communist regime, their job was assured, they had no fight to keep the job at all

Roy Fowler: And obviously they were intent on making as much as they could out of it because their living standards were so poor, that is equally true in Italy for example at this time.

Maurice Carter: But a great problem in Yugoslavia at that time was that everything was run by the studio committee. The script had to be submitted and approved by them. All my drawings for the sets they were going to build had to be submitted and the committee consisted of one person from every department including the gardeners so many of them had absolutely no touch with filming at all

Roy Fowler: That is very interesting, what then was the result of that. Do you mean they would actually start to form a critique

Maurice Carter: Oh yes, very much so, the gardener was particularly strong, he had never seen a film, almost, a proper film being made

Roy Fowler: What was his input

Maurice Carter: Well he would say I don't think this is right. And I don't like what is mentioned in the script, I should have thought she should have said so and so. They went through every word. Then they took my drawings and they estimated the costs of the set from those drawings and they all had to be converted, we normally worked in half inch scale, they insisted that everything had to be converted to quarter inch scale. It was quite a problem to work with this. The gardener would say, or the boilerman would say I think this set is costing too much and you better cut it out, we can't afford this sort of thing. Which is a bit difficult.

Roy Fowler: Presumably that was because that they were in effect co-producers and the co-production function was embodied

Maurice Carter: Every man is equal and had equal input and equal say

Roy Fowler: It happened at least once in England, this is purely a side light, we researched Our Film which was made at denham in 1941 by the Works Committee and the interesting thing is that it was dominated by Bert Bachelor who was a ETU and a member of the communist party, but there was a committee which fulfilled exactly that same function and they were commissioning or requesting because it was all for love, requesting scripts from Emeric Pressburger or such and saying no, and almost a similar experience in microcosm

So all in all other than rather hairy with the distant castle nevertheless it wasn't a happy experience in other ways

Maurice Carter: It wasn't really, it was continuing arguing that went on in the studio, continual

Roy Fowler: What about the language

Maurice Carter: The language of course was a problem, and the interpreters of course were dominated by the committee and often wouldn't interpret directly what somebody, if I wanted a direct answer the interpreter would interpret an answer that would please me, for instance if I asked for who was going to be out on a site on Wednesday and would they be bringing the snow down or something with them, she would say, although this guy said well it's a great problem I don't think that is going to work, he is asking too much anyway, she would say well certainly the snow plough will be there alright, I'm sure it will be alright. So I never, they were mostly girl interpreters but always one eye, weary eye was kept on the boss man to see that she was interpreting it

Roy Fowler: Two questions, why would they do that, was it national pride or was it because she wanted to please you what was the motivation

Maurice Carter: It was national pride basically, and to keep us happy in spite of their short comings

Roy Fowler: The second question, is the boss man as you called him, was he overtly the boss, was he designated the boss, or was he a rather anonymous figure who just happened

Maurice Carter: No, he was designated the boss, he was head of construction where I was concerned. And when I requested these things, in stead of saying no I'm sorry we can't do that we would like to but we just can't do it, they would make these vainglorious promises of things they couldn't fulfil which left me on the short end because I went back and said to the unit, yes it's ok, everything is laid on for Tuesday. Whereas nothing in fact was laid on for Tuesday and the unit would arrive and there would be nothing there.

Roy Fowler: This is not of course particularly Serbian, because it is certainly Latin, and I think it's Asian too.

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think the Serbs have a large Asian, I think the whole of Yugoslavia was one time Muslim, I think they have a large measure of

this wanting to please but not having to be totally honest about what they're saying to you

Roy Fowler: The face has a lot to do with it

Maurice Carter: An enormous amount.

Roy Fowler: You were back again not long afterwards for yet another one. But there was another feature inbetween, Two Left Feet, do you remember that

Maurice Carter: I can hardly remember what it was about.

Roy Fowler: You're back in your beloved Yugoslavia then for the next one, Genghis Khan.

Maurice Carter: That was an experience in itself

Roy Fowler: Was that my mentor, Yul Brynner

Maurice Carter: Yul was in it, yes. And produced by Irving Allen who is something on his own as you probably know

Roy Fowler: I've had no dealings with him, only by repute

Maurice Carter: Quite a character. He at the time was living in Berlin, no Paris, and he had a stable of girlfriends there and the only connection we had with him really was when he hired a plane and brought his girls to Yugoslavia for a visit. So it was, we saw very little of him and when we saw him it was pretty stormy. And of course it was a huge picture to mount, enormous picture, we built the biggest set ever built in Europe for it, the city of Peking. It was very interesting because in the script, it was an American director, I can't remember his name, an obscure director

MAURICE CARTER

SIDE 9, TAPE 5

Maurice Carter: We were building, the interesting thing in the script it described the shot, or shots, very accurately, the arrival of Genghis Khan in Peking, and script said that he came through the great gate of Peking; and amongst cheering masses of people he progressed right through the city up to the great hall. And to me that read that there was a vista of Peking, an enormous tracking shot following his arrival. Anyway, so I designed the set and they were pretty appalled by it, the Yugoslavs, but by this time they'd got themselves better organised than before, on the last film, and the construction staff had increased enormously.

And so we began to build this huge set which how I managed it was to incorporate the studio buildings as the great hall, overcovering them with camouflage, the buildings of Peking. And we had to build the great gate out, which extended out on the lot so it was about between quarter and a half a mile from one end of the set to the other, which was pretty extensive set. And there were great big pagodas, 70, 80 ft high built and I said to them now you must be very careful doing the roofs because if it rains we must have solid, and ready; and they should be wonderful green glazed tiles as they are in Peking. So they understood this all perfectly.

Meanwhile the consternation from the producer was that we should build the interiors in Berlin because it was a co production financed partly from Germany and partly in Yugoslavia, which was a pretty interesting set up, West German but using Berlin because at that time there was an advantage in using Berlin, a) they had good studios there which were unoccupied and b) there was a financial help on materials, all materials were duty free there. And consequently it was almost a free city as far as costs were concerned. So I had the problem of then commuting between Belgrade and Berlin which wasn't the most direct thing to do, you had to fly to Frankfurt and then Frankfurt to Berlin. But anyway I had to leave the set just to go and see how things were and I, when I left they said you can't take any money out of Yugoslavia because of currency restrictions, but I tell you what when you arrive in Berlin you find this man Swan and he will give you all the money you want, he is the distributor, Rank's distributors. Rank was one of the distributors, anyway a potential distributor of the picture.

But when I arrived, I flew to Berlin without any money in my pocket except about £20 or £30, I had still had left in English coinage. So I arrived in Berlin at dusk with absolutely no money and I phoned this number to contact this man and the voice on the other end said we don't know anything about you, I'm sorry, and also Mr Swan has gone to Paris anyway so I'm afraid you're on your own. So there I was in the middle of Berlin airport, had no idea how to get back, I only had a single one way ticket. So I thought , I don't know what to do, so I decided, I got a taxi and went to the Hilton, booked into the Hilton although I knew I couldn't pay for a room for more than a single night there and I thought the only contact I've possibly got is the studios.

So in the morning I got a taxi to the studios which was about the limit of my resources by then and asked to see the studio manager. And by absolute sheer luck he was the most marvellous man, he knew nothing of the arrangements at all that had been made to use the studio, but he advanced me £100 in marks. And I explained about the studio and the arrangement ostensibly somewhere, that we should be coming there, and could I look at the studio and I gave him the drawings so when he really found out if there was any truth in what I was saying we could start work. Anyway with the £100 I was able to pay my hotel bill and get back to Belgrade. I thought what a marvellous act of faith from this man. It turned out it was all true, the arrangement was then made that we could go into the Berlin studios.

Anyway I came back and there had been a huge storm and half the set had been blown down, this huge set. And instead of painting the roofs with real solid oil paint which they didn't tell me they hadn't got, they painted it with water paint and all everywhere had snow white roofs. So they told me, yes they'd painted it with water paint but they had put some protective material on it and they thought it would be alright. They put some varnish on, and they thought it would be alright. Anyway, we got over all those problems and rebuilt it.

Roy Fowler: The picture is in production at this time, is it.

Maurice Carter: Yes, it was shooting, they were shooting further out on location, I mean you can tell the scope of the production, we had, the communist bosses had told every farmer for miles and miles around to arrive at the site of the battle field and bring with them their horses and be prepared to stop a week and they were to take part in the charge, for the battles, it was on the side of a long slope down into a valley where the opposing side were huddled. And the idea was to shoot this enormously long line of horse stretching probably a mile and half to two miles long, of horse, all ready accoutered with their lances, and ready to charge.

Roy Fowler: That is surely the way to make motion pictures

Maurice Carter: They all got 10 shillings for their journey, bringing their horses and they all came and camped out, they brought a farm cart loaded with the hay for the horses and so forth and two horses tied up behind and trekked in from miles and miles around on the orders of the communist boss. There was no arguing, they either came or they were in trouble. A great way to collect a crowd.

Roy Fowler: I suppose there is no way to cost a set like that is there, the set you were talking about

Maurice Carter: They did, they arrived at a cost, I had to make all the quarter scale drawings for them

Roy Fowler: So it wasn't just Mickey Mouse money, they somehow translated it into whatever it was, dinas

Maurice Carter: Yes dinas, that was charged to the production, it was their part of the overall production and presumably affected the slicing up of the finances.

Roy Fowler: Was there corruption endemic at the studios

Maurice Carter: Not, particularly, just laxity and false promises

Roy Fowler: Irving Allen was just an entrepreneur in this respect, he wasn't the actual line producer

Maurice Carter: Yes, eventually he, I had a disagreement with him, he wanted something I thought was absolutely wrong for the film, he wanted me to put a set up in such a way that I couldn't believe the director could possibly shoot the scene. And the director refused although he recognised that I was trying to work on his behalf, wouldn't support me and so I'm afraid I just left and got an airplane and came home. But it was virtually the last thing in the picture, it didn't have much effect on it

Roy Fowler: Out of curiosity why would Allen want to do that, because it would be so impractical

Maurice Carter: He was being dominant and obstinate, and really having a weak director was the thing, I thought the whole thing would severely damage the picture and it did.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of Yul on that film

Maurice Carter: He was a cheerful old chap, knocking off all the whores in Belgrade, very fond of whores. He liked the dirty trade, scurrilous, I'll probably be sued for it

Roy Fowler: He's dead and I don't think Rocky has any illusions about his father.

Yul as you know was a rather forceful dominant personality, did he take over direction vicariously

Maurice Carter: No, not at all,

Roy Fowler: He didn't take kindly to fools or weak people, he was probably just there for the money

Maurice Carter: I think so.

Roy Fowler: Does that conclude your experiences of Yugoslavia

Maurice Carter: Yes, I swore I would never go back to Yugoslavia again, that is the only conclusion to that one.

Roy Fowler: A Stitch in Time

Maurice Carter: Another Norman Wisdom, with Paul Soskin again.

Roy Fowler: Is there anything to be said about Norman Wisdom

Maurice Carter: No, just a popular figure at the time, a cheerful chap no problems with him at all. I think the most inspired set in that was part of a French chateau that we built, we built it in the studio on the lot, yes in the studio actually

Roy Fowler: You're still based at Pinewood

Maurice Carter: Yes

Roy Fowler: Beauty Jungle

Maurice Carter: Yes, that's Val Guest. And was shot mainly Weston Super Mare and in Cannes, between the two places. The story is obvious from the title, a beauty contest in which the finalist eventually goes to Cannes and has a romantic affair and so forth. But Val on his usual form was pretty good doing his stuff

Roy Fowler: It sounds another world but it is almost 30 years ago.

Guns of Batasi

Maurice Carter: Guns of Batasi was a very nice picture with Dicky Attenborough, not directing but acting as, it was the story about a remote British station in Africa, somewhere in Africa and it was being besieged. And Dicky Attenborough acted the part of the sergeant major and he was quite marvelous in his preparation for this, his devotion was quite extraordinary. He noticed that the sergeant major's boots were always turned up at the toes because they were always doing these very smart roundabout turns , and he used to go up on the concrete platform of the lot and he would drink, he drank port and glasses of port in the morning to get his voice into the right sergeant major timbre and he used to go out and to get his boots right - he'd polish them up with dubbing and then went out and did about turns and about turns and about turns shouting all the time commands to get his voice and boots and accoutrements into the right sort of pattern. Absolute marvelous devotion to duty and I think it was a marvelous performance that he gave.

It was totally centred in this sort of mess building of the camp , the whole siege took place in which they were confined to this place, and George Brown was the producer, what we needed was a fairly large stage because you had to see, have a big cyclorama round it and see outside into the distance. But unfortunately George couldn't afford the big stage at Pinewood so I had to have the small stage so the backing was almost touching the front doors but it was still a lovely effect of distances, all relied on the backing. Minor things you know which is great heartache to an art director who could

have done so much more with it but it was very interesting, very lovely picture, but totally shot on the lot . We built up glass and hatchements and sights on the lot and it was very complementary, one of the critics thought, he couldn't understand which part of Africa we'd shot it in so we must have become pretty authentic.

Roy Fowler: It this the first time you'd worked with Dicky

Maurice Carter: I think so, he may have worked in small parts earlier, probably did.

Roy Fowler: Was there any indication then that he was going to become one of the xx of the British film industry, or indeed of the British cultural establishment

Maurice Carter: Not really, I mean except by that time his standing as an actor was pretty stunning, pretty high.

Roy Fowler: It is interesting how he worked on the character because that does indicate attention not just to detail but true professionalism

Maurice Carter: And he kept it up right through the day until he relaxed in the evening and that was it. But it is a marvelous performance, if you ever get the chance to see it on television, do have a look at it

Roy Fowler: I know it turns up from time to time

Maurice Carter: Very fine picture, very small budget.

Roy Fowler: George Brown was a very active producer at that time, wasn't he.

Maurice Carter: He was indeed, as I've mentioned already, I've done several pictures with him, most of those in Berlin, and so I was pretty used to George's workings and we got on pretty well together, a very good practical producer

Roy Fowler: Was he financed by the Rank Organisation

Maurice Carter: Yes, I think they were released in association with Rank if not totally Rank pictures.

Roy Fowler: Next follows a very big film Becket, Oscar winning picture.

Maurice Carter: We got a lot of nominations but not many awards I don't think. Burton got an award but it was John Bryan, we got together again on the same sort of art director/designer relationship. And it was very interesting with John on that picture, he was intent on getting, we obviously had a lot of castles, interiors of castles and buildings of the period, and he got me to scrub it, the plaster, we had a special plaster made up mainly of sand and xx and part plaster, in which we could scrub it with wire brushes to

get the actual quality of stone. It is a great thing to get stone, very, very difficult on a set to get real stone quality which you can go right into close up and look like stone

Roy Fowler: It's a dead giveaway always because you can see the mortar line added on

Maurice Carter: It mustn't be painted with any solid paint, it is absolutely fatal to paint it with sold paint, you must put some very thin dxx paints on to give the quality of the stonework and the same with the ageing, it has to be done absolutely meticulously and John was the greatest man ever on finishes on sets

Roy Fowler: Where did he learn that kind of practical knowledge.

Maurice Carter: From the Korda set up

Roy Fowler: Pre war at Denham, these were master craftsmen originally from where, British

Maurice Carter: Obviously Vincent himself, he got a lot of knowledge, Vincent was the art director and John the assistant. Vincent had that knowledge because he had been at UFA with the rest of the great technicians.

Roy Fowler: So a direct line to UFA in the 20s

Maurice Carter: Yes, it continued for so long in art direction between the British film industry and those old associations.

Roy Fowler: So it wasn't just Junge

Maurice Carter: No, it wasn't just Junge, it was all of them, Ferdie Ballan, all those people who came, they all contributed towards this quality.

Roy Fowler: One wonders in turn where they had learned it, a theatrical

Maurice Carter: I don't know, I doubt if it was theatrical, I think it was just German thoroughness,

Roy Fowler: That insistence on getting it right

Maurice Carter: I think so, I think that is just what it was.

Roy Fowler: Certainly those German films, the expressionist film of the 20s are astonishing

Roy Fowler: Did you know Vincent or any of the Kordas

Maurice Carter: No` I never worked with any of them

Roy Fowler: This of course is Hal Wallis, you got involved in the picture because of John Bryan

Maurice Carter: Yes,

Roy Fowler: What about Wallis

Maurice Carter: Probably one of the toughest producers ever to have lived, very interesting, but of course John dealt with him, but John again, we had the same old rows. John had built an enormous Spanish town, great high walls, 50 ft high, great towers coming out and Hal had been back to the States and missing for some time and he walked up to the lot on this set with all his henchmen, he had a very wicked little henchman called Dick McWirter who was his undercover man

Roy Fowler: Hatchet man

Maurice Carter: Hatchet man is the term I was looking for, and so Dick had been saying the set was far too big to John and John said that is what my sketch shows and it will look magnificent. This great causeway going up where all the people are supposed to come out of this town, and it was only for a single shot, I must admit it was a bit ambitious, but John Bryan's attitude was sod it, the best is always good enough for me, how it should look is how it should look, and it is their job to worry about the finances

Roy Fowler: This is post the event anyway, the set is up

Maurice Carter: Yes, so anyway, back came our friend from the States, Hal with all his entourage behind him, they walked up towards this set and when he saw was great scaffolding and little men working up, little dots up there , 60 ft, 70 ft above the roadway. And he said alright John stop it all, get them off,

So John said he doesn't want the set, looking very white and very taut, and he said I want it finished, get everybody off. So I was walking up with them and Hal turned on his heels to John, strolled off back to the studio to the Shepperton offices. And John Bryan came up to me and I said what will we do about that, it's terrible. He said just go back there and tell them to get on with the job, he said. And the set was built and finished and shot on just as John wanted it. A great strong personality John Bryan. Actually by that time he was already becoming a very sick man, so it was a magnificent show of guts with him

Roy Fowler: Was it his swan song

Maurice Carter: Yes, he died within a year of it

Roy Fowler: Of cancer

Maurice Carter: I think of liver, he had the same trouble when he was on Lawrence of Arabia and he had had to come off that and that is how John Box took up from him and how John Box established himself as an art director. But eventually it killed John. But I think he caused it himself, what he used to do was to continually drink, he had a pot beside him and brewed coffee all day long, strong black coffee, and I think that must have killed him in the end.

Roy Fowler: Anything more to be said about Wallis, how would you rate him as a producer, as a creative producer

Maurice Carter: I think he must have had a lot of jolly good people around him because he was always restrictive, enormously tried to restrict, to keep costs down, struggling, anything to keep the costs down. I'll tell you later about the subsequent picture we did. But John was marvelous at dealing with him, really tough, but it was a very beautiful picture and we had to build the interior of the cathedral, Canterbury Cathedral and we had to do a lot of research because try and get it, although you know Canterbury Cathedral of course was burned down of Becket's time and there is only the remains actually of the original cathedral there so it had to be a good deal of imaginations. We couldn't discover an actual print or any depiction of it as it actually was, but we knew the fact there was a huge altar screen , incredible altar screen across there, so that we had to design for ourselves, John gave me a sort of vague general sketch of the whole thing. It was a very big set built in H stage at Shepperton which was completely filled wall to wall

Roy Fowler: The silent stage

Maurice Carter: Yes, it was full height of the stage, and then we matted, we built a, not a matte, a hanging model to top it up, very interesting, a thing I have seen so seldom in English films, is the hanging model. But the complication in that hanging model was that all the little columns , fine columns coming down from the roof had to match up with the little columns we had built on the studio floor, very, very difficult because on the model they have to be chewed off just with a razor blade to get them to actually line with the model, you have seen a hanging model set up

Roy Fowler: So it gave you just the one vantage point

Maurice Carter: We did a marvelous shot with shooting down from the doors, we did it on a nodle head to preserve the accuracy of the match up, and the king came in at the doors and we panned up slowly, panned round, he came into the cathedral and then joined in the total hanging model on the set, brilliant shot actually, brilliantly conceived shot.

Roy Fowler: Worked out mathematically

Maurice Carter: Absolutely mathematically. We did it all on the drawing board, absolutely on the drawing board and they would set up the camera on the thing and got

the perfect finish to the matte, so we back panned actually to get the start position, so it was accurate all the way.

Roy Fowler: Was this Charles Jarrott

Maurice Carter: Yes, Charlie Jarrott, and he was of course a comparatively new director, so he made a good thing of it. I think he was much supported by John Bryan, much supported because he was raw, very raw on big camera set ups, so he depended on John enormously for that.

Roy Fowler: I imagine Wallis bought the best in terms of technicians anyway.

Maurice Carter: Yes, the best he could find,

Roy Fowler: What about the two famous piss artists on the picture, Burton and O'Toole

Maurice Carter: You know, the total difference between the character of the two men, I think, I'll tell you a little story which will illuminate the character difference. We had the big throne room and Becket and he were having a meeting and Peter O'Toole was cast as the king and they were both inbetween shots having a fag, having a draw on a fag. So the director said let's get shooting, take one. So Peter O'Toole threw his cigarette down on the lovely painted floor, and Burton took his and handed it to the prop boy, have a drag on this baby until I finish the shot. And the other prop man had to scrabble and pick up O'Toole's which was burning a hole in the floor, right in shot. Just to illustrate. And Burton I always found was such a nice man, really nice chap, kind. And Lizzie Burton used to come and sit on the set all the time to watch him, they were very good together, except that they had such terrible rows occasionally, but they were really a great pair there is no doubt about that.

Roy Fowler: Did they row on the set

Maurice Carter: Never on the set, never ever. The routine was that they were up in their dressing room which was next door to the art department actually, which is how I know this little scene. And in the morning they had a crate of lager delivered and they would both set about the lager and then at lunch time they got into, just before lunch time they had scotch, hard stuff, and then they all went off with O'Toole and the rest of them, they went down to the Shepherd's Bush Shepperton Green, to the King's Head, and there they really got stuck into it, so by the time the afternoon came it was rather a hope and a prayer that everybody would be working again.

Roy Fowler: Did O'Toole drink with them or did he drink separately

Maurice Carter: I think he drank with them. But I know the Burtons had a little clique down there, at the pub, a special room in the pub and they had their lunch there

Roy Fowler: This was the apogee of their fame wasn't it and their authority. They had courtiers, not employees I suppose

Maurice Carter: But I found both of them, both Elizabeth and he, very nice people indeed, whereas I can't honestly say that I was mad about O'Toole, he was careless and arrogant.

Roy Fowler: You got nominated

Maurice Carter: We all got nominated for it.

Roy Fowler: I haven't asked you this before, how many nominations have you had

Maurice Carter: Only two, three really, because I had, I told you earlier I had Jassy, which at that time the Oscar was hardly recognised in England and then I had this one and the next Hal Wallis picture, on both of those I had nominations.

Roy Fowler: Was Shepperton a useful studio to work in those days, it was kind of second best

Maurice Carter: Yes, it didn't have the stock bay, very little in the way, virtually no stock, everything came from scratch, and of course it didn't have the size of workshops or anything of Pinewood

Roy Fowler: What about the personnel

Maurice Carter: Very good plaster shop. And very good personnel, excellent.

Roy Fowler: You enjoyed working there

Maurice Carter: Yes, it was not as comfortable as Pinewood; there was not the backup.

Roy Fowler: It must also have been an old shoe since you'd made so many pictures there

Maurice Carter: Exactly, and I knew everybody

Roy Fowler: It was followed by The Fighting Prince of Donegal

Maurice Carter: Yes, that was a Disney film. I went over to Burbank for discussions and

Roy Fowler: This is 65, so Walt is still alive

Maurice Carter: Yes, I met Walt. Very interesting working there, everybody had to keep their doors open, Walt wouldn't allow anybody to sit in their office and he used to walk along the corridor and keep a quick check on you, that you were at it.

Roy Fowler: He fully subscribed to the work ethic

Maurice Carter: He really did. He was a very nice man though, and his brother was very nice, both good people, but they really expected to have their money's worth in the work area. So we prepared it there and then we brought all the preparation back to Pinewood and made it there

Roy Fowler: Going to Burbank, what differences if any did you find in working practices, presumably you're using their draftsmen.

Maurice Carter: Yes, I had their sketch artists, it was mainly a sketch artist and myself working there, I didn't build anything there

Roy Fowler: But did you do finished drawings there or was that all done back there

Maurice Carter: No, we did the finished ones back here, it was purely sketch artist and myself together with the director, Michael O'Herlihy. He made Hawaii 5-0, he made almost all those series, he was mainly a television director but he had a great reputation for crossing the Atlantic single handed in sailing boats.

There is a very amusing story of him, he normally did the crossing single handed and he had this reputation, I think he had done it twice or three times, twice before, so he decided on the trip back to the States on one of his sailings he would take a companion for the first time, after some persuasion. And the companion persuading him, but he gave in and took this guy. And the bloke decided to fish on the way across and unfortunately he skagged his arm with a hook, buried the hook in his arm and although they cut it out and bound it up, after about a week he found he had a great swelling under his arm and eventually he died. So Herlihy, this is a story, Irishman of course, he said that he got very worried that when he, he'd made a lot of entries, they were quarreling like mad all the time and by the time he got to the other side they would probably arrest him for murdering this bloke. He would be on suspicion of murder. So he decided the only way to do it was to get the axe out and chop the arm off the bloke and they had being a boozy company, a tub of rum aboard, so he put the arm in the barrel of rum, sealed it up and tossed the body overboard. When he got to the other side he told his story until he brought the evidence, he gave them the arm

Roy Fowler: How much of this was indeed Hibernian romance

Maurice Carter: I wouldn't know. It's certainly true that he is a great sailor.

Roy Fowler: What was the primary purpose of going out to Burbank to do this, was it to satisfy Disney himself

Maurice Carter: Yes, he wanted to see the shot by shot progression of the picture

Roy Fowler: Which is probably again from his animation background

Maurice Carter: Exactly, everything had to be sketched and I had to provide the set backgrounds for the sketch artist. I had to sketch all my set ups before I returned.

Roy Fowler: That is very much an American practice, had you much encountered it here

Maurice Carter: Not before that much, no, I think it was the first picture I'd really had a sketch artist of my own

Roy Fowler: It wasn't common practice was it

Maurice Carter: Later on, from then on it became more so

Roy Fowler: The American influence I suspect. I would think made on location

Maurice Carter: Yes there was, we looked vainly for castles in Ireland, we shot some of the location bits in Ireland, not very much, it was really the story of the Red Hand of Donegal.

Roy Fowler: Were they good budgets

Maurice Carter: They were very stable budgets, carefully made, carefully scheduled like everything that Disney touched, done with great preparation, great care.

Roy Fowler: I've always had a feeling that was part of the success of the operation, they were so careful

Maurice Carter: And Michael and I got on very well so it was a very easy picture

Roy Fowler: Was he Irish or Irish American

Maurice Carter: Irish American., his brother was an actor,

Roy Fowler: Followed by another Wallis picture, Anne of the Thousand Days

Maurice Carter: By then John had died of course and so I took over his mantle as production designer

Roy Fowler: Did you then have an art director yourself

Maurice Carter: Yes, I had the art director Lionel Couch, who had been my assistant on many pictures

Roy Fowler: Did you find it difficult as production designer not to get meticulously involved on the art direct level, being such an experienced art director, having such a close touch with the physical production

Maurice Carter: No, because normally, for instance on Becket, John and I did almost alternate sketches for things

Roy Fowler: So it was a collaboration

Maurice Carter: It was much more a collaboration than really the designer art director relationship on that picture:

Roy Fowler: So there is no barrier really for the production designer, it really can be a hands on experience.

Maurice Carter: Absolutely, and on that one he was doing much more the art directing job in the sense he was studying the quality of the stonework and talking to the plasterers and that sort of thing on the actual finish of sets which normally would be the art director's job in a art director/designer relationship. So it was very close, it was, John did nearly all of the big sketches, the big sets

SIDE 10, TAPE 5

Roy Fowler: Are we still on Anne of 1000 Days.

Maurice Carter: No, I think the only interesting thing on that was that John Bryan by this time was taking absolutely no notice of Natalie Kalmus and Joan Bridges for their colour control, sorry on Becket. And although they had credit on each of those pictures, we knew as much ourselves, or more, than they did about colour, as far as sets were concerned.

Roy Fowler: The days of 3-strip are long over, 12 years or so, so even if the film was going into Technicolor for processing

Maurice Carter: I think the deal was on with Technicolor,, I think you will find if you look at the credits for those pictures you will still see Joan Bridges name and Natalie

Roy Fowler: And Mrs Kalmus was still there

Maurice Carter: Mrs Kalmus was still there at that time or had only recently gone back to the states, certainly Joan Bridges name was on there

Taffy Haines: Was that the time they used to shoot on Eastmancolor stock and print by Technicolor, make 3 separation negs, to make the release prints

Roy Fowler: Yes, they made imibition prints

That is an interesting side line, I thought she had long since lost her power, but you were saying you paid no attention

Maurice Carter: No, I think the costume used to talk to them, controls there but I don't think anywhere else

Roy Fowler: For the designer to have that area removed from himis almost ridiculous, no matter what the purposes may have been in the early days.

Maurice Carter: Very worrying, to have to argue about colour and have debates about how you are going to paint something.

Roy Fowler: Did you do 3 strip movies

Maurice Carter: I don't remember, it made no difference to us really, virtually no difference. Because our whole effort all the time was to suppress colour, just hold it back.

Roy Fowler: It was the British school of colour wasn't it

Maurice Carter: Yes, and generally we kept the aberrations of Technicolor under control, but it had become inbred by then to subject colour.

On Anne I was without John, which meant that I had to deal with Hal which was a bit tougher

Roy Fowler: Direct dealings with him were

Maurice Carter: I found him fairly heavy going at times. One of the main problems I had with Hal on that picture was it was Tudor period and normally in Tudor period there are quite low ceilings; and otherwise there was elaborate ceilings with xxx and plasterwork and to get the quality of the picture we needed obviously we had to have ceilings on the sets. Now Hal worked on so many pictures in the States and his principle was no ceilings whatever. And of course we were getting out of the era in which you could get away with that any longer. And so I had to have these terrible fights with him about ceilings, his order was absolutely no ceilings, it holds up shooting, slows down lighting, creates problems for everybody, no ceilings

Roy Fowler: He wouldn't even want the suggestion of a ceiling or add it with a model or a matte.

Maurice Carter: We couldn't because few of the shots were long shots anyway

Roy Fowler: You mean it was just absolutely no ceiling

Maurice Carter: It was a room, it was arbitrary which I found so silly. Anyway I put the ceilings on the sets, but I made them very carefully so we had sections we could lift off immediately, and he came in - in fact, we used to shoot with the ceilings on and lift them up when they came in. Ridiculous procedure really but as you can see on the finished film there are good deal areas of ceilings. But that was just the only real contest with him, otherwise we got along fairly well,

Roy Fowler: You make him sound as if his soul interest was in the budget

Maurice Carter: Yes, his soul interest, obvious interest was in the budget and speed of shooting, but I guess it must have been otherwise, or otherwise he wouldn't have chosen such subjects. He took a great interest in the sketches of the sets when I showed them to him and talked them over

Roy Fowler: Other than ceilings would he make sensible suggestions or

Maurice Carter: The ceiling wall was just his one blind spot. It had been established on all his pictures in the States there were no ceilings and this is what he was going to have when he came to England.

Roy Fowler: I suppose it was the kind of thing they learned in a big studio operation,

Maurice Carter: Of course, and he had done so many of these fast comedies as you know, and it would have been sensible on a fast comedy not to bother about ceilings of course.

Roy Fowler: When he was at Warners they did a great many costume pictures, period pictures

Maurice Carter: They must have faced up to the same restrictions.

Roy Fowler: I think it is something you notice in those Errol Flynn movies and Bette Davies as Queen Elizabeth movies that there are no ceilings

Maurice Carter: Yes, it just goes straight up. When you used to think that John Bryan used to set up his shots with special low angled cameras and force the perspective of the set to get, actually built perspective to get the quality of the force of the camera shot, it is so interesting that suddenly to be faced with a man who couldn't care less about that.

Roy Fowler: And yet at Warners they had Anton Grot who was a superb art director and Wallace at Paramount, a different kind of art department at Paramount but never the less, a very talented one.

Maurice Carter: Maybe he was a very tough art director and was able. I mean I've got away with a good deal, if you look at the picture as it is issued, there is a good deal of ceiling to be seen I assure you

Roy Fowler: The point I wanted to make was that picture making in Hollywood was an industrial process. And Hal Wallis is the factory manager, a very good one. That is why I was curious about his creative input, but presumably that came ahead of time with the script and casting.

Maurice Carter: I didn't get much back up from the director on that score I must say, although I did from the cameraman.

Roy Fowler: Of the two which is your preference, Becket or Anne

Maurice Carter: I think the quality in the end, Becket must have it, a better chance, a better script and overall better actors. I mean we had this little Canadian girl who was playing Anne, Bujold, who wasn't a greatly experienced actress, and we had a director who again was doing his first picture virtually, first major picture.

The only great pleasure was getting a nomination and we had a super, it sounds as if I'm talking about everything except the quality of the picture and the sets, but we had a marvelous finish picture. Old Hal did us well on that, we had it in Whitehall, the great room in Whitehall, where King Charles stepped out for his execution

Roy Fowler: The banqueting hall

Maurice Carter: And he laid on the Grenadier guards to play and march in formation up and down that huge hall.,I tell you the sound effect was something, so emotional, quite marvelous.

Roy Fowler: Followed by Kaleidoscope. I suppose we should reflect that these were the years of Hollywood England when for a variety of reasons, the rate of exchange, the black list, the tax breaks that Americans got, the Eady levy, there was a vast amount of American production

Maurice Carter: It was mainly a combination, the Eady fund made an enormous contribution to getting films in this country and I cannot understand how that can possibly have been canceled when it was bringing in millions of dollars to this country and for the poultry amount of money the Eady money was, it attracted every American producer no doubt, it was mentioned to me very often, I was told frankly the Eady money had made a difference between coming here and making it in the States, how anybody could have canceled that, when you think of the millions of dollars it brought into this country, quite extraordinary.

Roy Fowler: Wilson seems to have been the only prime minister who's had the least interest in films

Maurice Carter: Quite extraordinary, anyway we'll talk about it.

Roy Fowler: Kaleidoscope,

Maurice Carter: Was of course with Warren Beatty, directed by Stanley Donen. It was interesting because it evolved around a plot to commit a robbery, by robbing the casino

Roy Fowler: I saw it at the time and it was very much a designer's picture, wasn't it

Maurice Carter: Yes it was, I was given pretty free scope on it too. So it is quite interesting all the little details of how to fake the cards and this sort of thing.

Roy Fowler: Wasn't it also in terms of visual concept very much part of all that swinging London thing

Maurice Carter: Yes it was, very much so, very much a sixties picture in everything, costume and everything

Roy Fowler: What were your references there, were you conscious of the changes that were going on in England, because it was a decade of extraordinary

Maurice Carter: I think you just took it in your stride that sort of atmosphere, I think it was very easy to

Roy Fowler: The Beatles and Carnaby St and all that,

Maurice Carter: And then it was Monte Carlo and the Italian casino.

Roy Fowler: Am I right in thinking it was very much art moderne, the picture

Maurice Carter: It was to a large degree, it was in the nature of the script that one designed to that idiom. It was fun, quite good fun.

Roy Fowler: And a lot of trompe oeuil

Maurice Carter: That's right. I think I picked it up from the script as much as anything, a very good, concise little script. And then we had to work on all the trickery of the faking burglary, how to get the guy into the place and the robbery. Donen was very nice, he was quiet, and Warren was very nice, I think he was busy with the London ladies very much,

Roy Fowler: It was relatively young in his career

Maurice Carter: Yes, he had a reputation, but he hadn't made Bonnie and Clyde.

Roy Fowler: And Stanley Donen

Maurice Carter: Very quiet, knew what he wanted

Roy Fowler: It's sad they all went back

Maurice Carter: It is, it was a marvelous exchange at that time between the studios

Roy Fowler: I used to often stroll over to the softball game in the park on Sundays. The Quiller Memorandum followed

Maurice Carter: I can't remember either the director, producer or cameraman. It was so interesting, they all started off convinced that it was going to be an Oscar picture, it was started and made in that way, that this was the Oscar, I thought I think you're over ambitious babies. But they were determined to make it as an artistic picture as they possibly could and it was shot largely, almost entirely in Berlin. The story was the resurgent Nazis, and so we shot on the actual sites, and we shot in the old Japanese Embassy bombed, in Berlin, in the Tiergarten. And of course by that time I knew Berlin pretty well, it was my fourth picture in Berlin so I pretty well knew the place so it was pretty easy for me. And very nice sets to build

Roy Fowler: How much was built

Maurice Carter: Nearly all the interiors I would say, except just a piece of the interior of the Japanese embassy and I copied the rest of the rooms in the Japanese Embassy for the other interiors, because they were in this wonderful state of desolation or abandonment

Roy Fowler: These are studios, you're working in the West of Berlin

Maurice Carter: I think we were working through UFA this time, the other studios we were using

Roy Fowler: There were studios at Tempelhof

Maurice Carter: That was UFA

Roy Fowler: No, UFA was at Neu Babelsberg, it was called DEFA on the East German

Maurice Carter: It was just on the East West border, UFA, as I knew it, because they could see all their lamps, the Russians had put them on railway tracks ready to take them back to Russia, they had never been taken back and they were lying in great piles, all rusty. I remember because UFA had a nice little Biergarten, restaurant out in the back lot and you could see over the top of the fence, about 150 yards away, all their lamps piled, a tragic sight

Roy Fowler: But in the other section

Maurice Carter: In the East, over the border, the border ran exactly on the back of the studio, but the studios I used for Ghengis Khan were away over to the West of Berlin. They were well away from the border. Big studios, as big as any at Pinewood virtually. UFA was quite small little stages. I built the inside of the Palace at Peking in them so they were very big studios

Roy Fowler: It's interesting, the Harry Palmer film, it was a sleeper, nobody expected anything of it but it turned out really stylish, Funeral in Berlin. I remember seeing Quiller and being disappointed,

Maurice Carter: That's right, it didn't quite go did it. I think if there wasn't this contention that it was already an Oscar winner, everybody might have paid more attention to the quality of the story and action.

Roy Fowler: If they hadn't taken themselves so seriously. Challenge for Robin Hood

Maurice Carter: I can hardly remember what it was all about, as you can imagine it was some sort of quickie or other.

Roy Fowler: Then we get another very large scale picture, The Battle of Britain.

Maurice Carter: That was the biggest picture I suppose I ever did. But that was an enormous project because, the history was that it was started by Tony Masters, and I think he rather wished he hadn't started it, I think he got a bit frightened by the whole project and anyway he decided that he was going to back out. Because at that point there

was some hiatus in the financing and I think Tony took the opportunity to disappear from it. So I was taken on to take over. Tony had done about 6 months work on it, or more, and I was left with the remaining 6 months to get it into action. And it was such an enormous project.

I went over with them, we were making the French, and using for the French and German airfields, they were using Toblada airfield in Spain, near Valencia. And so we decided to go on a reccie and have a look at it, the director, Hamilton, myself. Anyway we were all in this car travelling out of Valencia to go to Toblada and they had just bought all these ME109 aeroplanes and they were being flown by young pilots, Spanish pilots. And as we came along this long road approaching the airport, about a mile and a half away, suddenly there was a bang and a great column of smoke went up. It was one of the young pilots had gone in, he had been coming in to land and his plane ditched. And they think it was something to do with the oiling up of the engine or something. Anyway that was the casualty which terrified everybody, from then on everybody was terrified how many people were going to be killed on this picture.

But the set up at Toblada was amazing because we went in and all these Roll Royce engines were piled up at the Spanish airforce had bought great piles of them in the original packing cases. And there were the bombers, we had about 16 bombers lined up altogether and eventually I think we had 26, I think it was, ME109s

Roy Fowler: Were these part of the Spanish airforce

Maurice Carter: Yes, the bombers were still in, part of the Spanish airforce, Heike 111s. And the ME109s were being sold, they were getting rid of them. Our big problem was of course was that the last type of ME 109 in the war but they were equipped with Rolls Royce engines and that gave us a problem because the ME109 was supposed to fire a cannon through the shaft of the engine, which fired out of the voss of the propeller. Of course you can't do that through the middle of a Rolls Royce engine, it is quite different. So we had to make a device up for the voss of the propeller, with the apparent aperture of the cannon and all the mechanics of firing within the voss, which was a little bit difficult, but anyway that was special effects problem, not mine.

And the whole thing was so complex to deal with that I had to travel, we were building the radar station at Dover, the original for the bombing which we built to I think it was about fifth or quarter scale, all the great radar towers. And we had radio controlled JU8s to come into bomb, and then we built up also the radar huts there and we had a JU88 full size mock up built which was held on wires to cover in the radar hut and crash on the radar hut and explode. And it was a continual thing of working out effects of course.

And then in the studio, there was enormous research to be done for all the control centres, especially the one at the central fighter command, control room, because we had to be exactly detailed, exactly as it was, by that time we were making the film they had been dismantled. As they were almost stripped down, but I went up to Uxbridge and had a look at it and up to the other place where fighter command headquarters was and we found all

sorts of people whom we could talk to and find out how it was, on this particular day and date, how the planning table, how the aircraft were, who was there, who was up in the gallery watching. It was the day of the Eagle day which was the day that Churchill visited and sat up in the gallery. And of course we had to build an enormous number of Hurricanes in the studio, we had to find a way we could quickly manufacture those. But the thing was that we had to build them virtually as the original bodies were because on the scene of the French airfield burning, when an aircraft burns, it reveals the structure so we had to build them with the actual real structure visibly.

And how we used the other Spitfires, xxx we had Spitfires on the airfield. We put, to turn the propeller we put motor mower engines in each one to give the pretake off spin of the propeller and then they were towed on thin wires for the take off and they had to crash in the bomb craters and blow up, all these sort of things. But the whole time we had this worry of being exact and finding references for it.

Roy Fowler: Because so many people were watching

Maurice Carter: So many people were still alive who would know exactly, who lived on that day, would know it. And of course, we had most of the fighter pilots there as technical advisers, so it was purely a great big technical exercise. But it drove me mad the driving from each airport. We were shooting in Dover, in east of London, and Biggin Hill and I was driving on one day, driving between all when we were building things, construction. I was doing some enormous mileage, I used to get back here at midnight absolutely worn out. And we had great problems

Roy Fowler: But they were in a sense expected problems. Were there unexpected disasters, any more fatalities

Maurice Carter: No we didn't, we had one very narrow escape in the double sequence of the Spit, they took up the stills man to get publicity photographs and that belly, had to belly land. But they got away with it, they got away with everything, absolutely marvelous.

Roy Fowler: The camera crews,

Taffy Haines: John Aldrxxx was on it and his son, Nick

Maurice Carter: That's was flying. Skeets was the main photographer, and early on in the picture we found this American plane which we had to fit up with a great plastic nose thing. And I got built into it an arm so we could drop the camera down below the aircraft and see below the aircraft clear because the dome, you could only photograph obviously within the narrow confines of the width of the dome, the optical dome. But I thought that if we had this camera, remote control camera, we could also shoot sideways and probably get two shots at the same time. But it was never used, the boys didn't like the idea, hated the idea of a remote camera, they never used it, but it was built in. It was a most adventurous film technically you've ever heard of.

At the same time of course I had Bert Davy as my assistant, marvelous boy, absolutely marvelous bloke and he was dealing with the front projection because in the studio we were building a complete Heikel that was on a prod xxx, and we could hold the thing up and manoeuvre it in front of the BP screen. So we had the enormous problem of the first time of building a front projection screen was built that side, it was 140 ft long and 24 ft high. And of course nobody had put paper on such a size before so we had to design a machine to go along and take the paper off its roll and paste it and strip it off. It worked pretty well actually, because you can't handle it, you can't touch it you know, once you touch the 3ms paper it is finished,

We had a roller that evenly compressed it and took it off. Meanwhile Bert Davy was building two front projection projectors, front projection machines that could be wheeled out very easily, we had to build two in case we had errors with one, so there were all sorts of projects going on like this, enormously ambitious projects, and looking after all these things, and looking at them was driving me absolutely potty as you can imagine.

Roy Fowler: It sounds open ended.

Maurice Carter: It was, it had to be, nobody, it was open ended absolutely. But marvelous adventure, technicians.

Roy Fowler: Was it worth it, suffering through all that

Maurice Carter: I think so. We all learned so much.

Roy Fowler: What about the producers, Benjamin Fisz wasn't it

Maurice Carter: He was a pain in the arse, absolute pain in the arse, and a non contributor. I must tell you, the only thing he was good at was entertaining the foreign pilots, like who was the big German, Gallan, Gallan and his chums, and poor old one legged Bader. Bader was very interesting, I had another shop up in the studio, up about the 4th floor I think it was, up a flight of very steep stone steps, and they all said they wanted to go and see it because I had up there, they were building these models, aerial controlled models, radio controlled models, and I said did he really want to go up, and he said, yes, let's go. So the whole crowd of them, these pilots and German pilots and every body and I was leading the way up there and old Bader was coming along and I looked back and saw he was sweating like mad. So I sort of paused on the landing after the second floor and he saw us pause, and the other chaps started pausing and looking back and he said go on you bastards, don't look back at me. He was full of guts, marvelous man, absolutely marvelous man.

But this radio model exploit was a terrible thing because Benny Fisz, it had already been started, the idea had been started before I really got hold of it and when I realised that they originally just had some blokes messing, radio control experts messing around at home making planes. I said this is no good, we have got to have not four old guys

knocking out planes, four planes, because the idea was of course making hit head on and they explode in mid air, blowing up and everything. Eventually I called these boys in and got them to mass produce them more or less at that stage. Later on we just had them cast in plastic, soft plastic. And we could produce dozens, very short life, but this time they were making them as fast as they could with help

Roy Fowler: Was that reasonably innovational work

Maurice Carter: Well nobody that I knew had used radio controlled planes for film work before,

Roy Fowler: What size were they

Maurice Carter: They were, these were about, I suppose they were 12 ft wing span, something like 8-12 ft.

Roy Fowler: And quite practical

Maurice Carter: Oh yes. They contained radio controls, wings and tails, and little engines in them. And they had to be, the problem was, they had to be loaded with explosives on the ground, well the trouble was that as soon as they were loaded, they were a very, very dangerous thing, because if a stray radio signal came in, as one did one day, when one of the special effects boy was xxx xxx, they blew up themselves, gave a signal to the radio. And these boys got so to love the planes they made but they were going out with an assistant director and they were shooting themselves what they liked and they were getting absolutely nowhere, because they were all trying to save their own aircraft and get the other guy, they were all dodging each other or not getting too close to the camera or ground, they were all preserving these bloody aircraft.

So I went up, we got them on the airfield just above Henley, and Benny Fisz said look I'm going to finish with all this. I said well just give me one chance to go out with them and see if I can get something. He said OK, you better get it quick. Anyway for the first time we got them actually blowing up within camera, and we had them actually with the camera right on them. And then we had one which blew up all around us, right into the camera. I saw the engine fly past the cameraman's ear, just about that much, the whole engine, they were quite dangerous things, then one chased me up the runway, hit me up the backside and the back of the legs with the point of the propeller, which didn't do me any good. But anyway we did get quite a lot of material.

And then we had another system of model aircraft, these were really biggies, these were the bombers, and models of Heikel 111, and they were something like 22 ft across the wing span, 18 – 22 ft across the wing span and they were designed to be held under a helicopter. The guy with the radio control in the helicopter, they were loaded with explosives and then, this was done mainly down on the beaches, and crashing into sea and crashing on the beaches. If you ever look at the film you will see they're rather good shots. I don't think anybody has ever detected they're not the real thing, but they were

quite big things and so they had a quick release, and the propellers were left just to turn with the wind as they came down which seemed to work very well and they glided after that. And then the guy was able to direct them down for their crashes into the sea or go in the beach and then we fired off the charge at the appropriate moment, very elaborate procedure as you can imagine. Not a cheap operation by any means.

Roy Fowler: Do you have an idea what the picture finally cost

Maurice Carter: I don't think compared with modern, I don't really

Roy Fowler: The problem as I remember was the script

Maurice Carter: Yes, the script was disconnected. You see I said to them originally, you know the huge problems with this is going to be, the need is to follow one aircraft, one pilot, one aircraft, and to follow it through a battle, and I said how do we do that. The only way to do it is to eithre to make numbers or some visual mark on it that you can follow it but nobody was very interested. And I had such terrible trouble with numbering aircraft because we were doubling aircraft and using them at various phases. And each one had to be correctly numbered, there was always some guy who had fought in that particular battle who knew it was 20602785, it was generally a pain in the arse picture.

Roy Fowler: It is typical of all those pictures that sadly they don't seem finally to work, but so much effort and money goes into them. A lot of it is not appreciated..

Maurice Carter: Enormous effort into that picture, enormous effort, especially the special effects boys

Roy Fowler: You say you were on it for 6 months

Maurice Carter: I had 6 months preparation and then I think we shot it, quite short shooting schedule, something like 18 weeks, something very short

Roy Fowler: Just the one unit

Maurice Carter: No, 3 units plus a flying unit and a model unit

Roy Fowler: It sounds an interesting experience

Maurice Carter: It's an experience I wouldn't have wanted to miss I say looking back on it but at the time I must say I felt so stretched, I had never been so stretched in my life.

Roy Fowler: It is quite a jump from that in terms of time and subject too, that is 68 and your next work came in 1970, so that is what has been occupying you

I'm trying to think of the airfield near, which is now the museum, Duxford. What was quite interesting, blowing up the hangar there. We, they bought for £5000 one of the

standing hangars there and the idea was that with the aircraft coming and the bombs dropping closer and closer and closer and eventually one goes into the hangar and inside was a Spitfire which used to be on skids, blown out through the doors as the bomb hit, on fire. And of course it was the masonry on the building, enormous, the stone piers were 4 ft square. Enormously strong building, so it was all drilled with hydraulic drills and these great charges, and eventually had tons of explosive in it.

So the shot started and they all started coming over and the bombs were set up to drop, he started the bombs out about half a mile away, we could see them coming and firing, he was firing, pressing the buttons and firing and firing. The cameras were turning and everybody was running, panic, came to the hangar blowing up, it didn't work, everything else had blown up. So it was back to the drawing board. Charlie. But he was a marvelous special effects man, he had doubled up everything, he knew this could happen, he had doubled up everything. I mean his manual was this size covered with buttons for all the various explosions. So they got this time and everybody was slightly dubious and they were looking over the top of the trenches, will it go up this time. But this time it went up with a real bang. And then of course we were bitterly chastised later on, years later, because they said you were the bastards that blew up the hangar that we could have had for the museum, the museum would have had so much space

Roy Fowler: So the air ministry, the Treasury got £5000 and it would cost them probably 2 million to rebuild it.