

RON CRAIGEN

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SIDE 1, TAPE 1

JS: How did you get into the racket.

RC: I went to the Regent St Poly from school, after failing to get matriculation, I was never any good at examinations and that would be 1930. My father said what do you want to do, I was very interested in photography, I always had been, I did a bit in an amateur way at school, and he said what about taking up photography professionally the, I thought that's a jolly good idea, why not. He said make a good start at it, we looked out for courses to do and Regent St Polytechnic seemed to be at the head of the list, it seemed to be the best school of photography at the time, 1930, and he said what about a 2 years full time course and that's what I went on.

JS: Before you go on when were you born.

RC: 1914.

JS: And where were you living.

RC: When I was born, Leeds. I don't remember it.

JS: When did you come south.

RC: My father was in the army and he got shot all over the place as was the custom, but my first memory of these things is after the First World War because he was in the Inter Allied Commission of Control and was sent out to Germany and took the family with him, myself, my brother who's 6 years older than I am, and we spent 3 and a half years out there, I learnt to speak German absolutely fluently of course, I can remember scarcely a word of it now unfortunately, and we came back in 1923.

JS: Where did you go to school.

RC: I went to Farnham Grammar School, I was there for 7 years, 1929 I left there.

JS: The Poly, you talk of it as a school of photography, was it mainly doing stills photography.

RC: Yes.

JS: Or had it got into motion picture photography.

RC: No, it did get into the motion picture side of it more seriously at the time I left unfortunately, I went there to study photography pure and simple, and that was commercial photography, portrait photography, all the basic elements of photography and to pass an exam on pure photography, I think I got a silver medal for that, City and Guilds I think it was, then the person there who was doing instructing as well, Lawrence Hibbert was the chief

then, and there was one fellow Gordon J. Craig, he was an instructor as well, after I'd done a two year stint, I spent 6 months messing around in the way as a part time instructor, and I did one or two jobs at their instigation, they egged me on to do something in the commercial line. I remember I did a few weeks with a furniture company in High Wycombe, Ercoll Ltd, they were in trouble because their photographer had left them and the studio was in a bit of a mess, and they didn't really know what they were doing and they wanted some nice advertising pictures and they seemed to think I might be able to help them, so I did and I spent about 3 months or that sort there, got their studio into some sort of order, taught them how to take pictures of furniture, uses of filters and so on, the good old furniture red. That would be 1933. What happened next, of course, I joined W. G. Briggs and Company, Studio Briggs, and there I did all the usual run of commercial photography, walked around with my half plate and whole plate camera, out on location, open flash and things like that.

JS: Lovely mahogany jobs.

RC: Yes, Watsons, not Sandersons, I don't know why. I did studio work and a little bit of creative photography, magazine illustrations, advertising illustrations,

JS: Did you run your own dark room.

RC: I did all my own processing of course, but we had a dark room and a couple of fellows who did the printing. I sometimes did my own as well, I learnt quite a lot about it actually, the arts of dodging and so on.

JS: Explain dodging because it's a lost art.

RC: I don't know, because I noticed particularly in the Independent newspaper who's picture editor I must say I have a great regard for because he gets the finest pictures of any of the dailies, but I notice a lot of them are very very carefully printed and you see dodging in that the sky is darkened down by a bit of cardboard, cotton wool, shading the foreground for part of the exposure to bring up the salient points and let the sky go dark

JS: That's the exposure in the enlarger.

RC: Yes, that's right, you dodge it with something, I piece of cotton wool on wire is very good. And you can hold back the exposure while you let other things go darker.

So I stayed with studio Briggs to the beginning of the war. 1938 they had to put us on half time, some had to leave, there were 3 camera bods, operators we were called, the firm was badly hit by things which were happening in 1938, imminent war and so on and business dropped off enormously so they put us on half time which was better than nothing. And come 1939, I decided the best thing to do was to join up. My father being in the army said I think it's probably the best thing to do, get in now whilst you've probably got some choice of unit to get in to, do you want to come into my corps, which was the Royal Army Ordinance Corp, I thought that's a good idea, but no parental influence I must say,

he said just apply for that and you'll probably get in, which I duly did. I was eventually sorted out as a clerk grade II, I came across my army pay book the other night my army number 7629240, and I can remember that number, Craig, R. M., Private. After doing the usual footslogging and initial training, in Portsmouth, during which time we were bombed once or twice, nothing hit me fortunately, it nearly did one day. I was promoted to lance corporal and then corporal and then I went onto OCTU [officer cadet training unit] at Leicester. Eventually passed out as a second lieutenant with shiny brass stars. After that I had one or two jobs, I think I was put in charge of a clothing depot up in the wilds of Northumberland. Eventually in 1941 I was sent on embarkation leave and went out to India, went out on the old Windsor Castle which got torpedoed on it's next trip back. It took us, what 3 months to get there, we went all the way round by the Cape, we spent 9 days in Durban, which was wonderful at that time, and I think they held us there because the Madagascar show was going on, until they settled that we were held in Durban, off to Bombay eventually, and then up to transit camp at Dealali, I spent a few day there

I was eventually sent to join an army ordinance field park, these are people who deal with vehicles and supplies. I had 90 vehicles on our strength, mainly transport vehicles, 3 tonners and things like that and a workshop vehicle, that sounds a lot, maybe it wasn't as many as 90, nevermind, then I helped run the thing, I was still a second lieutenant, it all became very wearing, and nobody seemed to know what we were doing out in India, obviously GSU knew nothing about us, they scratched their head and said an army ordinance field park, what are they doing out here, anyway eventually, the major in charge of us said you were something to do with films weren't you, I said I've always been very interested, he said there's a thing in Indian army orders this week, they're looking for officers with previous film experience to go to GHQ Delhi, something to do with a film unit, does that appeal, I said it sounds rather took to me, he said I'll telex them and you can go, and I duly went. I thought I don't know when I'm going to get back to my unit, I never got back to my unit again, straight off the GHQ New Delhi, I can't remember the name of the chap in charge of us.

JS: Wasn't it Alex Bryce.

RC: Not at that time, that was later. That would be about 1942 I suppose. Anyway I spent a week or two, perhaps it was a month or two, I can't remember now, then I was sent up to Bombay,

JS: Did you do any film work or any serious photography work when you were in Delhi.

RC: No I was waiting, the best camera they could supply me with was a single lens Imo. 100 ft Imo.

JS: Motion picture.

RC: Yes.

JS: Was that your first hit at motion picture, because you've only described so far stills.

RC: I go back a little bit, to my days with studio Briggs, because before I left them, about a year before I left them, 1937 or so, I got interested in films, and they got interested, they made simple commercial films and so on, the gov'nor had a Siemens camera, a magazine camera, a lovely job, we also had a Kodak special, a big treat, and I do remember doing one particular job, it was probably my first real film, on bookbinding, their clients was the Fisher Bookbinding Company, Herne Hill, and I made a little film there, I suppose it must have been a couple of hundred feet or so, put titles in it, black and white and silent, and made this little film. And I do also remember doing a little bit of very mild research work with his camera which went up to about 100 frames per second, or 64 frames, one of our clients was one of the large presses, Home Newspaper Presses, and one of their new presses, they were having trouble, the trouble was ripping up as soon as they got anywhere near their normal speed, this was in their test place in the factory, they used to start ripping the paper and they wanted to know why, so we said we might be able to sort something out if we run at 64 frames per second, so duly did that, banks of photo floods around and did this, and eventually it did solve their problem, they were highly delighted with it, I was perched on top of this machine waiting for things to start flying around, which it duly did of course, it was quite harmless, so that was another little thing I did, so that got me interested in the film side.

JS: That was before the war and before you got to India.

RC: Yes.

JS: They left you hanging around waiting to get unshuffled in Delhi, then you went to Bombay,

RC: I was posted to the Indian Army Public Relation Film Office which was nothing to do with AKS.

JS: What was travelling like in India at that time, it must have been a bit rough.

RC: It was. I went by train, which was not air conditioned, in Bombay, Caltech House, they didn't have very much there, a little bit of editing equipment. I was eventually sent over to Calcutta, where they established headquarters at , near the race-course, they were very nice, a house, a very nice place indeed, and I had a nice little flat out in Chowringee, in Calcutta. But you're asking about travel, I do remember the trip across from Bombay to Calcutta, we went through Naipur, the height of the summer and the temperature was 120, not at all funny, they had these big baths of ice blocks which they'd put in at various places, they'd shuffle them into various places, they soon melted. It was 2 and a half to 3 days.

JS: It hasn't changed much.

AL: Was Brian Langley up there.

RC: He was up there, I met Brian at Tolly and he was one of the cameramen, a captain,

SH: And you had your own laboratory.

RC: Yes, 35mm. We had Brian there, he was one of the cameramen, he was also an instructor, he was instructing the Indian sepoy, straight out of the trees, they were sometimes a little difficult to teach.

JS: What cameras had to got.

RC: Imos. I can't remember anything else, and what's more we scrounged those, some of those off the American forces who were also in Calcutta.

JS: What were you supposed to be doing.

RC: Newsreel, we were supposed to be turning out newsreel material which went into the pool which went in the newsreel pool in England, all our material was sent to England to the newsreel pool, and if anything was worth using they used it.

AL: Did you find newsreel coverage easy or difficult.

RC: It was fairly easy, it was fairly easy, I made captain some time or other, because all cameramen were automatically captain, we got sent around places, I was in Cairo at one time, I was also down in Ceylon, I went there to cover a story for the Royal Marine Base, MRNBO1, I did a little story for them, I was independent but everything was fixed for me through the army, and incidentally we were interservices outfit because we were all mixed up, there were pilot officers and midshipmen.

JS: Did you get to any warfare.

RC: Eventually on the edge of it, Assam. It was whilst I was in Assam, Mondor that the 14th Army push started against the Japs and all hell was let loose. I didn't get, I'm very pleased to say, I'm a little ashamed of it actually, but I didn't get involved in it, the most I saw of it was from a hilltop, I saw a bombardment going on from an observation post, and I remember there was a Pathe cameraman Boville, Oscar Boville, he had a Newman Sinclair, but we didn't actually see any action, there was just these shells bursting, these things were I think 25 lbers, and they were firing them over our head and we used to hear bzzgrump, that was almost all I saw of actual warfare, I very nearly got captured by the Japs because I went the wrong way, I had my own jeep and I was trundling around in this jeep and I thought I was on my way at dusk, on a completely lonely mountain road, and a head of me I saw two columns of platoons, or foot soldiers, one either side, and there was a corporal in charge, and he stopped me and said where are you going sir and I said I'm heading back to Mondor, and he said you're not, you're heading straight for the Jap lines and they're not very far away. So I thought christ. Hurried retreat.

JS: Were you entirely on your own or did you have a mate with you.

RC: At one time I had an operator but that time I did not I was entirely on my own.

JS: Talking about this shelling business, I remember lying out

in a field in Normandy once, very sleepy, and in a sleeping back and working it out if it went bang, wofle wofle wofle, wofle, wofle bang it was alright because it was ours and it it went bang, wofle, wofle, wofle, bang, it was not alright because it was their.

RC: Now I was brought back from there for some reason, I don't know why, to cover some other job. I went back to Calcutta, at one stage I had a dose of pleurisy and that was in Calcutta, and I think that was what started things for me because why I missed a lot, because pleurisy is not very funny, but fortunately it's dry not with liquid. And if it hadn't been for that I might well have been sent over the Himalayas to Tibet, because there was some army mission going to Tibet, Indian army as well, and I was told I might go there, I was jolly interested, because flying over there is pretty high, and they didn't think I would behave very well after a dose of pleurisy so I wasn't sent. Eventually I think I was sent then over to Cairo, again to cover some Indian army commission, went down to Nicosia, Cyprus, and spent a couple of days in Nicosia, then I went back to Delhi, no it must have been Calcutta, then I was sent across to Cairo, no I think I must have gone to Delhi, I can't remember why I went there but I was there for a few days in a hotel.

JS: Who did you get your orders and requirements from.

RC: At that time I think it was probably Alex Bryce because he was in Calcutta. All these instructions came in the first place came from GHQ Delhi, Public Relations,

JS: You must have been spending a lot of time in ships.

RC: No air. I did an awful lot of travelling around in DC3s and they were never furnished, you sat around on top of packing cases and things, and crates, I do remember one very interesting trip in a DC 3 when we were pretty heavily laden with crates and quite a number of people as well, this was Dumbula and it must have been in Ceylon and the airfield there had a slight upgradient in the way you took off, it was a bit disturbing, it came to a ridge at the top, a gentle ridge, and a sort of hundred or so yards beyond the fence was a big fence which made it a little bit dodgy. I do remember it struggling, the pilot coaxing this thing, the engines were going flat out and we were still on the ground and coming near the top and a few yards near the top it took off and everybody heaved a sigh of relief. It was an interesting little trip.

JS: How far into the war have we got.

RC: 43/44. Because eventually I was invalided back from India because I had a second dose of pleurisy, and they had a medical board on me and they said you'd better get out of here it's not good for you, the heat and the dust are just no good. And I was sent via Palestine as it was, went in a flying boat, short Sunderland, and landed on the dead Sea, that was interesting, I remember vividly coming in, over this arid land and gradually you saw the land dip away and there in the hollow was the Dead Sea and you're coming in down below mountain level. Then up to Jerusalem, I was recuperating in a way, I was sent off by plane via Karachi to the Canal Zone, I spent one night in Bazra in a

sand storm,

AL: I bet you stayed in Chateau L'Arab Hotel.

RC: It does ring a bell. And the Indian Army General Hospital as well, I think I was there 2 nights and we had a sandstorm every night, and we had these little sandstorm nets, nevertheless I managed to get sand fly fever, eventually I found myself in the Canal Zone at can't remember the name of the place, but it was a British general hospital, I remember going there in an ambulance, it's a bit hazy, I was quite ill, it was really out in the desert somewhere, El , I was there for a week or two and they were feeding me all the usual penecilin, it made me feel like death warmed up. After I recovered there I was shot off to Port Said to get aboard a troop ship.

JS: All this time you were trying to get back to England.

RC: Yes were getting me there in easy stages. Then eventually onto a troopship, Britannic I think it was, pretty awful, and we came back to Liverpool where I was still in a pretty dodgy state and I think I went down with something or other and I was in Broad Green Hospital for about a week or so. Eventually I was cured and sent off to a transit camp, eventually I finished off at AKS at Fox Studios Wembley, and joined the merry throng there, the usual thing, on training films and so on. I'm trying to remember the names of the people, Tubby Englander, Ray Pitt, our chief was Colonel Flicklestone at that time, Geoff Foote, Tilly Day.

JS: The Army Film Unit was being established at Pinewood by now, was it drawing on AKS for personnel, was it pulling rank.

RC: I don't think anyone pulled rank on AKS. I never got involved in Pinewood at all, I can't remember anyone leaving to go there.

AL: No they were two very separate distinct.

RC: At AKS we were training.

AL: We were propaganda.

RC: We had to go out and shoot films on Salisbury Plain, Lark Hill, gunnery place, and we had to do an exercise there at night, all by infra red, it's interesting, I think there were 5 Ks or 2 Ks with infrared black filters in front of them and Jenny, illuminated all this, and we were using a Mitchell, 1,000 ft, and we had to film the whole exercise and it was to see what was happening to the gun crew because they were getting in each other's way apparently, all the illumination they had was little cycle lamps, cycle head lamps, battery things, that was the only thing they were allowed to use, so they suspected that there was one man too many in the team, he was getting in the way rather than helping things, and we did this exercise and it all came out very well, it was the first time I'd ever done any infra red work, incidentally infra red focus is slightly different from the normal visual focus, and as a result of that they did take one man out of the team, they found out they got on much better.

JS: Where did you process from for AKS.

RC: It could have been Humphries or Kays, it wasn't Den Labs.

JS: We sent most of our stuff from the airforce to Den Labs until Ronny Pilgrim built a laboratory at Pinewood late on onto the proceedings.

RC: Another interesting exercise there, I remember a staging being built on the back of a tank turret and this was studying the gun crew inside the turret while they were firing live rounds, and that was quite interesting because all hell let loose, looking down into this thing, and the Mitchell perched up high and we had one or two plugs mounted inside the thing to give a bit of light

JS: Were you shooting synch with the Mitchell.

RC: No. I also remember getting shots of the blast, the flash at the front, what guns would they have on those, 70mm, and they had recoil reducers on the end so the flash instead of going out forward went sideways and you had to steer clear of that because it went out quite a long way sideways, I remember getting my trousers singed with the blow back of the flame of this because we were perched up fairly close to it, that was fairly interesting too. Other things at AKS, usual training films of various kind, humdrum studio stuff,

JS: Didn't you make a rather striking film called Kill or Be Killed.

RC: I wasn't involved in it.

JS: I remember seeing it and being rather frightened by it, it was made as a training film.

RC: I don't remember it, it may have been before or after my time. After AKS, they got rid of me, I went for demob.

JS: The war had packed up by then.

RC: Yes, this was 1946, going on 47. And I was demobbed at Skorton, some where like that, York, given my civvy suit and 6 weeks demob leave, and I went back then, what did I do after that.

JS: When and where did you get involved in mainstream documentary.

RC: After demob I know I spent most of the 6 weeks writing to people and trying to get a job which is not very easy. I think at the 5th week at the last moment, I was in touch with the Realist Film Unit, John Taylor, and who else was it, Basil Wright, and they decided to take me on much to my surprise, and I joined them, it must have been 1947.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Donald Alexander, I think he was there then.

JS: Jeakins, he was there.

RC: I think I must say at this stage that I think I got my order a bit wrong when I was in India, in the Far East, because I did in fact spend some time in Columbo, in the Hotel there, that was where I was attached and it was from Columbo I went down to do this thing on the Royal Marines. I've got diaries for all this I can dig them out. Realist, I did all the usual training films, I remember when I got quite involved was children, Margaret Thomson, I did quite a lot of work with her, I could never quite understand her way of working, it was Newman Sinclair then, she had the idea we'll just turn the camera on and well see what happens, I thought this is a little odd, but still it was the right thing to do, quite correct, she knew what she was doing. And what else did we do. I made a film about microscopy, with Parsons, Dennis Parsons, boffin type,

JS: He posed as a very austere scientist who just got involved in this filthy nonsense, the was really a scientist.

RC: We made a film on microscopy and shot most of it in the basement, the dear old basement, 9 Great Chapel St., one of the early things I made with them, with Basil Wright, a little short film, called Bernard Miles on Gundogs, I haven't seen it for 30-40 years, I'd love to see it, I was talking to someone quite recently who said I'm quite sure there is a copy in the Archive somewhere or other, and you ought

JS: I remember that film being made, because I was in Soho Sq at that time with Basic, I'd just left Shell, that was quite a nice little film to make, it was the only time I worked with Basil Wright. Other films I remember there was one made for the United Nations, UNO, and Lewis Gilbert was the director, a big name now but then he was just one of the up and coming bosy, I lke Lewis very much, I like working with him, he knew what he was doing and he seemed to know what I was doing too, and we went out to Norway together and spent a few weeks out there doing some sequence or other,

JS: Do you remember the name of the film.

RC: It was called Under One Room and it was made for the United Nations Organisation, he had another location in Egypt as well but they decided there on the basis of economy to get an Egyptian unit to cover that one. And there was another location, we did some sync shooting at a college, that was with Lewis Gilbert, I liked working with him very much.

JS: Did Lewis go out to Egypt.

RC: Yes, directed a local crew. Anyway Realist lasted until 1949 because things were getting a bit thin at Realist there wasn't a great deal of work around and I got a phone call one day from a bloke called Edgar Anstey, and he said look would you, British Railway Board, British Transport Commissioners they were in 1949, are going to set up a film unit and I would whether you might be interested in coming along. I said this sounds very interesting, I had met Edgar before, I met him in Norway, while I was with Realist we made 2 films in Norway, quite apart from this sequence for, with Gilbert, one of them was for the Louis de

Rochement of New York, which was called Farmer Fishermen of Norway, Human Geography I think they called it, a thing for schools, I never saw any of the rushes because all the film was flown straight back to America for processing, but they sent me glowing reports, marvellous stuff, keep up the good, all the usual American flannel, I was working there with photofloods and a clockwork Newman, they did send out to me a wire recorder, an American one, and I still have one at home today, they sent it out, a Shure microphone and a big accumulator to run it on, they sent the whole lot out in packing cases by air, and I gathered up a whole lot of non synch sound, just all the local noises as required, that was all duly shipped back to them and they seemed satisfied with it.

JS: I'm amazed we're talking 1948 that you weren't shooting sound on optical, even if it was wild.

RC: Not on location.

AL: They used to do some shooting on a disc, a mobile one you could take.

JS: What I'm getting round to is that people nowadays find it hard to believe what a paraphernalia shooting synch was with sound trucks.

RC: I find it hard to believe too. The 3 ton sound truck we had at AKS, all the gear inside, ultra violet recorder or whatever they called it, RCA.

JS: It was either variable area or variable density, and I can never remember which.

RC: It was area, Western was density.

AL: The copyrights were combination of area and density.

RC: It was a game. Then it always used for all the studio recording as well at AKS, it was parked in a garage next door, that was the sound, we're with Realist still, quite apart from that, also whilst I was there I made another film for Louis de Rochement in Czechoslovakia, was it the Russians that walked in, that was 1948, and it was heavily rationed and things were pretty difficult and we were sent out to Prague, I can't remember the name of the fellow who wrote the script but he had definite Communist leanings and he had a fellow out there who was one of the boys who was in the film business in Prague, Jiri Weisz, and we had attached to us a Czechoslovakian student fellow and he spoke quite good English and he acted as our interpreter all the time.

JS: How many of the crew were you from Britain,

RC: There were two of us, I was cameraman director

JS: Did you like doing director cameraman. I've always been very dubious about it never having done it.

RC: I found it jolly hard work, because the two sides were rather fighting each other, the director side said wouldn't it be

nice, we ought to have this that and the other, and the cameraman said that's bloody difficult, you better forget that, let's find a simpler way of doing it.

JS: Did you long to get away from the camera entirely and get onto the directing side.

RC: No, never, I was never keen on the directing side. I remember with Edgar Anstey on one occasion, he was egging me on to do a bit more directing, I thought you know Edgar, I'm not a director, I can't direct quite frankly, I can photograph things moderately well, but I can't direct so I much rather not, and he understood that. The technical side was always my side, I was interested always in lighting and the techniques of film work.

JS: Edgar got in touch with you when he was forming BTF -

RC: Yes, he was then at Film Centre wasn't he.

JS: He was a director of Film Centre but he was operating out of London Transport Offices in that great big building in St James' Park, 55 Broadway.

RC: That's right.

JS: Were you responsible for equipping the unit camerawise.

RC: Yes.

JS: What did you buy.

RC: We bought Newman Sinclairs, about the only thing you could buy at that particular time, 1949.

JS: Did you have a decent budget.

RC: Yes reasonable. And then, I'm going to go back, where I met Edgar first of all was one of the Realist Films when he was at Film Centre, this was when we made these two films for the Bergen Shipping Line in Norway, one was called Mountains and Fjords, the other one I can't remember the name of, but they ran concurrently simply because I shot so much material on one they made a second film out of it. This is the problem of making a travel film if you haven't been there already and make copious notes of where to shoot anything, always, the next thing you come on, this is better than the last lot, we must shoot this, this is terrific, and so you go on and you shoot 10 times more film than you intended shooting

AL: This is shooting without a script.

RC: Yes,

JS: And without a director.

RC: And this is where I met Edgar, he came out one time, and I had vivid memories of Edgar coming up a mountain for some location or other and the best we could equip him with was galoshes over his shoes, and he was in his ordinary grey mackintosh, and I do remember slogging up this mountain quite

happily with the crew, indeed I have an awful feeling I've got some 16mm film footage, because I used to carry a 16 mm camera around with me quite a lot, and I think I've got some shots of him going up this mountain. That's how I got to know Edgar and he phoned me at Realist to see if I was interested. And I do remember he said can you meet me in the Pillars of Hercules, I thought where's that, it wasn't Dean St but the next St, Greek St.,

AL: A little road that leads into Charing Cross Rd by Foyles.

RC: I met him there for a drink and it was all decided there, it was fine. And that's when I officially joined the British Transport Commission Film Unit which became known as British Transport Films and that was in July 1949. And then we were first of all based at 55 Broadway, and eventually we got premises in 25 Saville Row which were the old March of Times premises, first floor, and we took over their theatre, March had time had been disbanded, Edgar had been very involved with March of Times wasn't he.

RC: Yes. There was a short interregnum when we were moved out of 55 Broadway, just across the road into that flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, an ugly old Victorian tenement.

RC: That was just in the meantime, we didn't have any equipment or anything there.

RC: That was while Ian Ferguson was looking for somewhere and pitched on this March of Time place in Saville Row. Ian found it. I remember going along with Edgar to look at this place, I thought jolly good, a lot of it is ready made for us, the cutting room is there, the theatre is there, projection room and all the rest of it so that's where we went and spent many happy years there. How long were we there, we went in 50

JS: And I don't think we moved to Marylebone to 64/65, I guess, because I'd been away in the middle.

RC: I don't think it was till 65. And there of course I became chief cameraman, the British Transport Commission couldn't call me chief because chiefs were always officer grade 1 or you couldn't be chief, so you could be known as senior cameraman, that was alright. It was just like the army. And then we had Bob Paynter, Billy Williams, David Watkin, now David Watkin, he was then with the little Southern Railway Film Unit was it was, he was over at Waterloo in the basement, with Basil Sangster, he was the head of that unit, also there was Rhodes Johnson,

JS: He was part of that unit. And that Southern Railway Unit eventually got amalgamated with this outfit. Edgar just kidnaped it.

RC: David Watkin then was just the teaboy, he was the assistant fellow. And always remember going out with him on many occasions he went out as my assistant, and he was always interested in things, he would say tell me Ron why are you using this filter, what's this filter doing now, we were shooting black and white, well because, we were shooting on panchromatic film and these red buses do come out rather like grey, so what I'm using is an Aero

2, which suppresses the red of the thing and makes it a bit darker, umm I see, and that's when David got interested in things like that, the technicality of it,

JS: Who taught him to drape the whole place in butter muslin, because he did in the end.

RC: God knows, he did become a little bit of a flea in my ear to be honest about it, he was a little bit unconventional, but there you are, it paid off.

JS: For him.

RC: Billy Williams was more

JS: He was born in the trade wasn't he.

RC: His father. Jimmy Richie came to us as a cameraman, he only became a producer later on. Billy Williams he worked mainly with Jimmy, he was his protegee as David was in the first instance mine, but then they became cameramen themselves, then Edgar's policy was mainly to take on people, directors particularly, to have a nucleus of cameramen and camera equipment but for directors he'd like to take on different people for different films because he reckoned that way you got a different outlook, instead of treatment for film, Ken Fairbairn was one of our good old stalwarts, he stayed with us an awful long time, he became more or less a permanent.

JS: But he was never on staff, he was always employed picture to picture.

RC: Always freelance, but he was very good indeed at instructional, extremely good.

JS: But his great ambition was to make comedies, and he made one instructional which was a roaring comedy and it was the best instructional we ever made in that unit, Third Sam, with Stanley Holloway, and Ken wrote the Stanley Holloway parody for that. Ken's great ambition was to do a theatrical feature comedy. He had a great touch for it.

RC: He had a lovely sense of humour. There was at one time with British Transport Films, one summer we actually had 6 camera units shooting at the same time on location, that was the heyday which would be what 1965 and 70, we were very busy.

JS: I remember when I came back to British Transport Films in 64 after being abroad, I reckoned I had 30 project files on my desk at any time, 3 serials, some of them were nothing, a twinkling in somebodys eye, some of them were in the cutting room, some of them were in treatment, but my normal thing was that there were 30 things I was looking after, and I was one of 3 producers. Somebody did a statistic, last year you completed one picture a fortnight, I don't know how we did it.

RC: It was a very busy time. We originally had 3 Newman Sinclair, I had them eventually converted to I think it was Model M, something like that, or had turrets put on them, 3 lens turrets, that's it, great improvement, and then I had one, a new

one made which was an electric Newman, which was a scarce commodity, they were never terribly successful actually, the motor they put in them was terribly underpowered, and the magazines gave a lot of trouble, they jammed, I had one, I stuck to mine, I swore by it and swore it as well, but the assistants used to hate it, bloody thing,

JS: What was that, a 200 ft load.

RC: No, 400.

AL: They eventually produced the 400 but there was a 200.

JS: I think the standard magazine was 200.

RC: The clockwork Newmans were 200, with the small wooden core, the 1" core rather than the 2" core, that's how they did it. But it was then 400. My old electric one had a 400.

JS: We had a curiosity at Basic on our animation rostrum, we had a 1,000 ft Newman, it must have been the only one, it was upside down on an animation rostrum that Cynthia Whitney built and it took ages to learn to work upside down, it did everything right

RC: We also mounted one of our old Newman's on a rostrum, do you remember the one at Carlo St

JS: Made out of texion, no angle iron wasn't it.

RC: Eventually it was great solid girders, it never got much use but it was extremely difficult working upside down. The number of films I got involved as cameraman I just can't

JS: How many credits from Transport, ever counted.

RC: I did count at one time and it came to 60 or 65, over the 30 years I was with them, I was there 29 years 11 months, because I joined in July and my birthday was in June I had to leave in June. They denied me that last month.

JS: Which did you like best because you got quite a lot of studio in the early days at any days, we used to go in the studio at the drop of a hat, I remember a film that I made that you were lighting, Train Time.

RC: What was the famous line, I've got my broccoli on it.

JS: But we also had enormous location on it because we were doing one night stands in the country, which do you like best.

RC: Lighting, both really, I liked location because of the great variety of it all, you went all over the country, we covered the British Isles length to end.

AL: Did you get impatient waiting for the light.

RC: On location yes, in the Highlands of Scotland I do remember with John Taylor, we had our old Lee Francis shooting break, was it The Heart is Highland, that was shot on 35mm Kodachrome, monopack, and I do remember that because we never got any rushes

reports for 6 weeks, well we never saw anything for 6 weeks, we got rushes report after the first week or so, but all the stuff had to go over to the States to be processed, they couldn't do it at Harrow and I remember there waiting in this Lee Francis, a particularly bad bit of weather, it rained every day, every day, sat in this thing, smoking away all the time, days when we used to smoke, and fume filled interior playing cards and rain battering on the roof, and I remember climbing one particular hill to get a shot with one of the lochs, we particularly wanted this because it had young firs in the foreground, something to do with forestation of the highlands, we climbed this hill practically every day for a week because it look as if there might be a bright break, and every 5 minute break had to be grabbed because we must have it in sun and eventually we got it, but I do remember that so distinctly, but he's a great guy, John Taylor, to be with, never got flustered about anything, don't worry John it will be alright.

JS: It struck me thinking about that sort of thing because people were cheap and stock was cheap we weren't desperately worried about budgets the way people get now, I was never really agitated about a budget, but people get very worried about them now because things and chaps are terribly expensive.

RC: Particularly when colour came of course. Eastmancolor came along, when we first started shooting in Eastmancolor, I said this camera really ought to be fitted with a cash register, not a footage counter, that's another 2 shillings, 3 shillings going threw, it made us very anxious on the camera side how much to shoot, when to turn the tap off, but one became accustomed to it eventually.

JS: Do you remember it was Geoff Hermges wasn't it, our accountant, who was a man called Ralph Keegan was very hot on expenses, and he bullied Geoff Hermges on a hotel bill, extras for avocado pears, and Geoffrey Hermges said ever after that whenever a director calls cut, I say one avocado pear, two avocado pears, and then I switch off. But talking about waiting for shots, do you remember a shot we did on train time at the top of XXXXX Summit waiting all night for a train to come by, it's the most beautiful shot in the film, steam train, plume of white stuff coming out of the chimney, just at first light, and we really sat up all night for that.

RC: Fortunately it was in summer and a very warm night

JS: It was lovely, Bill Garrett won 5 bob off me at poker while we were waiting too.

RC: Another location, a similar thing not Bxxxx

JS: Sorry, this was Chap,

RC: and this other incident I remember was also at xxxx, and this was Barney Keene, and this was deep winter, snow, and I got some beautiful shots of steam hauled thing coming up the horizon, some were even double headed at that time, and brilliant sun and snow, I've got some still at home I took at the time.

JS: You did some amazing snow stuff very recently with David

Lockner on Wires Over the Border, on the roof of a wiring train, with wires being slung in a snowstorm.

RC: Yes it was a little bit dodgy, it was turning to ice, it was freezing quite hard and it was turning to ice under our feet.

JS: Were you hand holding?

RC: Yes.

JS: And you hand hold like a rock don't you.

RC: I don't know about that.

JS: But walking around on the roof of a moving train while they were slinging wires

RC: Every so often the arms that come out to hold the catenary and cables, because we were on top of the wiring train every so often we had to duck when one of these came over, because we were moving all the time, the train was moving, and the wiremen were fixing these things up all the time in front of us and every time one of these things, we had to duck underneath it with a camera, otherwise get your head knocked off.

JS: What were you shooting on on that.

RC: An Ariflex.

JS: And that was Eastmancolor, it's the normal thing.

RC: Yes.

AL: You've gone from a Newman to an Ari, what was your reaction.

RC: Of course it was wonderful to have an Ariflex, was the 1A the first one we had,

AL: Mirrored shutter, no parallex.

RC: That was absolutely wonderful, to see what you were actually getting, instead with the old Newmans, in the first one there was a prism in the side, you popped the prism in and if you were lucky you could see through the film because it was black and white in those days and you could just see through the film to focus, then pull out the prism and start shooting. But when colour came along you couldn't do that, because you couldn't see through colour film, it's got a black backing, it was wonderful the Ariflex, a prismatic device.

JS: But the Newman, straight line view finder on the back of it had a parallex adjuster, it slid up and down in a sloping slide and it could lead you miles astray.

AL: Especially if you didn't change the lens in front.

JS: I remember looking through as a director and being surprised by what we framed afterwards.

RC: That was the old brilliant finder on top of the camera,

which displaced sideways and upwards and clip on lenses. This does bring it back to me, you've forgotten all these things. Terrific. We had our Newmans converted, the later ones, to a viewfinder at the back, not on the front, then you could pop the prism in and take it out again. And we had then mirrored shutters.

AL: Not on the Newman.

RC: I think I must have been thinking of my electric Newman, it had a mirrored shutter, I'm pretty positive, yes it did because I remember having chats with George Hill and what was the name of the chap - Tweedledum and Tweedledee we called them - about the mirror because it got out of adjustment one time and it had to be reset, terrible critical the setting of the thing. Because the image in the viewfinder was dancing around a bit, it didn't keep still, I noticed the 3 mirrors on the shutter itself had to be absolutely accurate so that the image they threw off was exactly coincident with the last one, when you were running. You get the same sort of thing with the Ariflex. We graduated onto the Ariflex and then onto the 2B, what was the difference, that was an improvement, different motor on it I think, turret.

AL: The motor was not as the handle, the motor was at the back.

RC: That's right.

JS: Was that the blimp on the Ari.

AL: No that comes later.

RC: That was the 16mm Ari which had the motor on the back, surely, horizontal, I think the 35 always had the motor underneath, I don't think we had a 35 Ari with the motor on the back, that was when we went onto 16s.

JS: Tell me something about the camera department at Transport, you spoke to the people who were there ready made like David Watkin, but two people I worked with when i came back to transport in the middle 60s were Jack West and Trevor Rowe, did you train them from nothing.

RC: Yes certainly, because Trevor Rowe came to us, beside Trevor Rowe there was Trevor Walker, Trevor Rowe he was an accountant, he was always interested in photography somehow, and he somehow got in, I don't know how it was decided it was worth giving him a go, but I did train Trevor. And Jack West, he came out of the projection room, he was a projectionist, how he was acquired I don't know except that he expressed a desire to get away from the old projection room, he got fed up with it and it was decided to give him a go as an assistant and he was trained up as an assistant and eventually he was given a film to try his hand on and became a cameraman. Trevor Walker came into it at some time, I don't know at what stage, he was at university at the time, he was studying with the Central Electricity Generating Board, he was going to be joining them, but he couldn't face the fact, and he made 1 or 2 8mm films on his own, and he brought one along, he'd gone on a fishing expedition up to the North Pole or somewhere, Northern Waters, with a trawler, I don't know how this quite came about, but he did this as an exercise, and he came

back with quite a lot of 8mm material which he fashioned up into a film and put a commentary on it, and he showed this to Edgar Anstey, he wrote into Edgar in the first instance but I knew Trevor at one time because my daughter knew him, they were not at school together but they knew each other and that's how I came to know Trevor Walker in the first place. He showed this film to Edgar and myself in the theatre, a very presentable effort, and Edgar said I think we ought to take him on as a trainee. In those days we used to be able to take on trainees and he fashioned up very well indeed and he soon became my assistant and we worked on many films together, and eventually became a cameraman, and Trevor for some years now has had his own photographic business, he's running his own outfit, his own video camera, Sony, CCDs and all the rest of it, and he works on hire basis.

JS: We've turned out one or two from that unit.

RC: We certainly have. Yes, Trevor Walker is a very good bloke altogether, he's got a very good eye for a picture, he's an extremely good cameraman, very good indeed, and extremely dependable, this is the other thing, you could really depend on what he was doing as an assistant, he was absolutely meticulous, as indeed was the other Trevor, Trevor Rowe, he came to us I think through Frank Bryce our electrician.

JS: I think they were related.

RC: They were in some way, yes, Trevor married Barbara who was Frank Bryce's daughter. And I came across the negatives of the stills of their wedding which I took.

JS: Can I move onto another subject, you made a hell of a reputation for natural history photography, especially Between the Tides, how does that appeal to you, did you love it.

RC: I liked that very much. All the tedium of waiting in hides for a few days for ospreys to do their stuff, and an eagles nest, and all manner of things we used to do, I liked that work.

RON CRAIGEN

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

JS: The natural history film, I'm interested in Between the Tides, what were you using for that underwater stuff.

RC: We had the Ariflex and the aquarium tanks we had built for us especially, I think we had 4 or 5 different sizes, some very narrow, I also had inserts made so I could keep small fish to the front of the tank because it's terribly difficult to try and chase a fish around a tank with a long focus lens.

JS: You were photographing through glass.

RC: Yes, straight through glass and making sure everything was black of course,

JS: But where, in the range of tides on the Pembroke coast.

RC: No this was all done, all the actual intimate stuff of the sea animals was done in tanks, the other stuff on the beach and in the sands, that was done in real life.

JS: But the tanks were where.

RC: We did shoot some stuff in a laboratory, Plymouth, we did some work there but not very much, Dale Fort Field Centre is where I'm trying to remember at Dale Fort, Pembrokeshire, and we sat up there in a couple of rooms that they arranged for us, this was in the field centre itself, and I used lighting 2 ks and that sort of thing, you have to be awfully careful with them because of heating up the water. We did boil the poor old octopus on one occasion. Octopus are funny things because they change colour and they change very rapidly, and we noticed this one, I think we called him Orace, when he got a bit of light on him and warm, he began to go red, blush like mad, but turn the lights out he'd go back to grey again, you could never get him grey because as soon as you turned the lights on he went red. We had to be careful on to boil them. Eventually I had some thin tanks made, about 3 inches wide with glass say 18 inches square which would go in front of a 2 k with a special holder, and they acted as heat filters and it cooled the light down before it went into the

JS: I see, so you were photographing through 3 layers of glass and a layer of water and another layer of water.

RC: No the light was shining through heat filter, and we were just filming into a tank, which might have had another tank behind, very often did, and a bigger tank behind it, it had rocks and things like seaweed which made it look like the bottom of the ocean, and that was all the background, but I found it very difficult to get sufficient depth of field, it's amazing how much light you need to pump into a tank to get an exposure, it astonished me and most of the time I was working with a 75mm lens and you don't have much depth

JS: What stock were you on.

RC: Normal Eastmancolor, 64 I think.

JS: So you needed a lot of light.

RC: Well normally on a small tank I was concentrating 2 ks through the top, though the heat filters, even though you had to be very brief on it, keep the lights off as much as possible. Yes the other stuff, tube worms very interesting little creatures, you get them on the low tides, you see them mainly at the extremely low tide, that's the only time you see them, you go on the sands and see little holes and those are the tube worms, we used to dig them up at that stage, take them back with their sand, put them in a tank, then when they'd settled again, filled with sea water naturally, and left quiet, they'd then pop up, come out of the sand, and they're various colours, and they have large sort of fangs they put out that they feed with, gills, and they wave around in the water, they wave around in the water. If you so much as touch the tank, just a tiny tap on the tank, in a flash they're gone, back into the tube again.

AL: These aren't the things with long shells.

RC: No, they're razor shells, razor shells and the other one, a disgusting thing, pig

JS: I always thought Between the Tides was a particularly good editing job because everytime you began to say wow this is looking a bit artificial, it wasn't looking artificial, because you cut away. Am I being cynical.

RC: I never thought of it that way at all. It was John Legard who cut it.

JS: Did you do any snorkel or acqualung.

RC: Nothing like that. I'm not a swimmer anyway so I couldn't have done it.

JS: It's amazing that.

RC: The stuff we did then was just childplay, old hat. It's nonsense today, it looks pretty old fashioned.

JS: Do you think that, I don't, but it's obviously much more arranged.

RC: Although Oxford Scientific things do a very neat bit of work in there studio, which looks absolutely real and you find out it's not, it's shot in the studio. Wonderful stuff.

AL: But isn't the underwater stuff which is done nowadays rather exotic stuff, it isn't the in shore stuff of England.

RC: That's quite true, and things like these tube worms, you couldn't shoot them in nature, I'm quite certain. They wouldn't respond, you wouldn't be able to do it.

AL: Tell me when you're doing under controlled conditions were you using a meter.

RC: Yes, I was using a Western for most of the time, reflected reading, because it's not much use using the Norwood on the top, it didn't mean anything, you just had to stick it against the glass and take a reading that way. It usually worked out about F4 which wasn't very helpful.

AL: When you were on location did you use a meter at all.

RC: Yes, I've always used a meter and it's usually been the Western, Western Master.

AL: Did you follow the meter or did you use the meter to reassure yourself you were right.

RC: I used the meter and if I thought the meter was telling me a little fib I amended it, put it that way. But I did rely on the old Western pretty heavily, I'll say that, on reflected light. But of course there are occasions you can't use it you've got to use your own judgement, any meter has to be used with a pinch of salt and your own judgement. What was the other one.

AL: SEI.

RC: No I never used SEI, it was far too much of a tiny spot for me, I couldn't get on with those, no the successor to the Norwood, the present day one, incident light meter, it was originally the Norwood, made in Japan for years, and now it's called some thing different.

JS: Colour stocks have increased enormously in the last 10 years.

RC: In the last 10 years they have, i must say I'm completely out of touch with what the stocks are today but I understand it can be very fast indeed, fast enough for shooting night stuff with natural lighting. This is rather beyond me now.

JS: Have you ever done electronic, I know you do it as a hobby.

RC: Never, not professionally.

JS: You can do anything with that, catch cats in coal cellars.

RC: I'll give you an example. I've got a Sony Pro 100 - Video 8 which is very good, they've now brought out the 200 which costs £1,800, stereo sound and everything. I used it on somebody's birthday party a month or two ago and it was a crowded room, ordinary lighting and all the rest of it, and you've got an increased sensitivity switch on it, so I used that all the time, and I was absolutely amazed at the results I got, something down to 7 ft candles, that sort of thing, quite amazing. I've also got a little 100 watt battery operated floodlamp, it just clips onto the top of the camera, you sling the battery on your shoulder, it lasts for about 25 minutes, half an hour, and that one 100 watt, 12 volt lamp is enough to illuminate a room, it's astonishing, this is illumination not lighting.

AL: Coming back to your early days.

RC: Incidentally while we're on the natural history thing, Wild

Highlands, that was an interesting film to shoot and that particular time the highlight was the stagfight sequence, we stalked these deers and stags and things, of course we had a technical adviser who was himself a very good bloke, John Buxton, and he told us, we also had a game keeper, is it a gillie in Scotland, able to give us good advice about where the stags might be at any particular time, and we slogged way up a mountain and ensconced ourself with I think it was a 22" lens I had on the Ariflex, you might say the Ariflex was plugged onto the end of the 22 " lens, pretty big lens, and I had a special support made for it, because these things weren't available at the time, it's all old hat this stuff, but this is what we had to do, I had this thing fashioned, I think he was a black smith in Fort William, made it up for me out of steel girders, it did it's job well enough but it was hell of a weight to carry around,

JS: I bet your assistant.

RC: We devised a system of rucksack frames without the sack and tied the camera gear onto the back of these rucksack frames and slogged up mountains with those, I wouldn't like to try and do it today, anyway we ensconced ourself on a ridge and our adviser said I think there are some stags, there are some hinds there, this is the right time of the season, there'll be a stag or two around somewhere, so we waited and sure enough in came a stag and he nozied around a bit, and then John said I think we might see something here there's another stag coming along, we might get a fight. And this other stag came in and sure enough they approached each other and juggled for positions and we got a little scrap going, and I got all this on film, fortunately I had a new 400 loaded up and I just ran, I just kept on running, got the whole thing, and that at that time was quite a thing, what sort of year are we talking about.

JS: I'd have to look it up, I was't in the unit at that time,

RC: Late 60s. We got this fight and it was quite an achievement at the time, we were very bucked indeed with it.

JS: And then you got an osprey on the same film.

RC: Yes, incidentally, John Legard who cut the film later, he was very cunning, in order to change the angle, because it was just one continuous shot, he had part of it blown up into close up and then back again for the longer shot, it worked very well, very well indeed.

AL: What I was going to ask you in your early days, was there any particular person who made a deep impression, helped you on your way.

RC: That's a difficult one, I've mentioned Lewis Gilbert, I did like working with him, I would have liked to have work with him much more, Ralph Keene, he was very good, Jack Holmes, he was very good to work with.

JS: You weren't strickly a Grierson person.

RC: No, we haven't mentioned Stewart MacAllister who was my local sparring partner. Stewart and I had adjoining offices at 25

Saville Row, and there was was only one door and the one door from the corridor was into my office so he had to come through my office to get into his, but Stewart was a great guy, a real character, we used to have fights , but then he used to have fights with everybody did Mac. I remember he directed one of the films I did on British waterways, it wasn't called There Goes the Boats, only in recent years I've seen that film completely and was very impressed with it, a jolly good film. The other one was about motor barges

JS: I know he directed I am a Litter Basket, did you photograph that, a stop frame thing.

RC: No,

JS: With all the rubbish baskets on the station moving about.

RC: I think Bob Paynter was involved in that.

RC: I think Mac directed it, he was certainly involved, he produced it anyway, because we used to have arguments with Technicolor,

JS: Again.

RC: Yes, because this barge was blue and yellow, they were the British waterways colours, and when we got our first answerprint they weren't quite the right colour and we had arguments with Technicolor endlessly, Mac said this is not the blue we want, and Technicolor said in our opinion that is blue, well that's not blue in my opinion and so it went on. Eventually we achieved a compromise.

AL: This sound like the story, I forget what the film was but it was made in Ireland,

JS: The piller boxes

AL: They were all the wrong colour, they turned them red.

RC: They must have sweated blood doing that.

JS: Mac was a very very influential person, I've always said all the good Humphrey Jennings films were cut by Mac, and all the bad Humphrey Jennings films were not cut by Mac.

RC: He had very strange working hours, he could never work during the day, he would often come back to the office and work all night.

JS: That was a bit of a tradition, Archie McNaughton who cut a picture for me late in his career, who cut Nightmail, he preferred to work at night.

RC: Mac could never concentrate during the day, something would always interrurpt, as for his desk, it was piled 9 to 12 inches high with old papers, old newspapers, the Times and things like that, and also well bits of papers relating to the office and scripts, and I always remember one day one of the cleaners she thought this was terribly untidy, I've got to do something with

this, I'll tidy it up a bit, and Mac came in the next day and said who's been tidying my desk, I can't find anything at all, don't you ever do this again, because actually he could lay his hands on practically anything, he would say oh yes this was so and so, rummage down, lift up a few papers, here it is, this is the script. Incredible fellow. A good friend of mine, very good friend indeed. I'm very sorry when he died, it was cancer eventually, cancer of the spleen, he was in great agony for a long time

JS: HE was very ill. He was a great loss because you need these strong exacerbating, exasperating people

RC: Strikes sparks off people.

AL: Did you get involved at all at ACT

RC: I was shop steward for a while at Realist, a pretty awful one, I don't know how I ever landed that job, I must have been quite the worst shop steward ever.

AL: Can you remember who recruited you.

RC: No.

JS: This was when you were at Realist.

RC: I joined ACTT in 1945, I came across my card the other day, my number is 8055. It's a pretty late number. I can't remember how I came to join, I think at that time I was still at AKS.

AL: I think a lot of service people did come in about that time. Officially there was no such thing that there was no union shop in the services although there was.

JS: There's a thing in King's Regulations that they can take you out and shoot you for joining a union. You were in already.

AL: I was the forces representative on the general council.

RC: What number are you.

AL: 125. Did you hold any other positions in ACT

RC: No.

AL: Were you on any of the committees.

RC: No.

JS: I thought you were on the shorts and docs at one time

RC: I think I was.

JS: When Terry Trench was the chairman on it.

RC: I think I was. I'd forgotten all about that.

AL: Going back again, is there anything you wish you'd have done before you retired that you didn't do.

RC: I wouldn't mind have going on making films for another year or two, but British Transport did employ me to make another film after I retired, a safety film, a warning to school children not to trespass on the railway, and we made 3 versions of that, one for overhead electrification, one for third rail, and one for just normal no electrification at all, Ronald Watsit was the director. But I liked working with him because he was the sort of fellow who let you have your head. I never liked working for people who said this is the way you're going to do it, that went against the grain, I said I worked with a director, I don't work for him, I work with him.

JS: Did you let the director look through.

RC: Oh yes.

JS: If he asked.

RC: No, I was always rather keen on directors looking through the viewfinder because the thing I would say is this is what you've bought, is that alright for you.

AL: There's been a lot of argument going on and it's resurfaced again recently maybe in the documentary field you haven't experienced the situation where you have an operator,

RC: I've only had two films where I've had an operator.

AL: What was your feeling about that. Did you like that.

RC: We worked very well together.

AL: I mean did it help you to have an operator.

RC: Yes indeed. It all depends on what the situation is but if there's a fair amount of lighting involved then it's very useful to have an operator, because you've got your approximate set up and cameras arranged, the operator can go ahead on that, you light for it, and have a look through the viewfinder and see if it's what you want and you leave it to the operator, an operator is a valuable person altogether.

AL: This is interesting because there's Walter Lassally who hates having an operator altogether, which I think is very strange myself, having worked both in documentary and features.

JS: Do you say oh god I wish I'd really lit a big expensive money no object feature with lots of actors.

RC: Not necessarily as much as that, but I certainly do wish that I'd been given my chance in a studio to light something decent and big, because the small studios we used didn't have much scope, I do wish certainly.

AL: What studios have you worked in.

JS: We put Train Time into Walton. We did what 3 weeks on the control room set, it was the biggest set I've ever worked on.

RC: There was another one, Marylebone, never Islington, another funny little studio up in this part of the world,

AL: Carlton Hill,

RC: No, near Carlton Hill,

AL: St Johns Wood.

RC: Yes. We shot a mime thing, Jimmy Richie produced and directed it, they built a set there, it was all shot against the large white site at the back so it all went to infinity sort of the thing, we were trying to get the effect of no direct lighting so I used what space lights they had there, about 4 or 5 and a bit of extra until eventually they said I don't think we better turn any more on more because it's getting a bit overloaded on the mains and we haven't any more amps available. Anyway we shot there, quite a short sequence, we had a mime artist who's name I came across only the other day, John Glass, someone Glass, the mime king, he's quite well know, it was something to do with intercity travel, we had a perspective railtrack, I think it was painted onto the floor, we had to be awfully careful where we walked on this floor, it disappeared into the distance. I don't think I worked in any others. But going a long way back, before the war now, in my stills days, I did a whole lot of advertising stills, advertising stills for Marconi phone radios and we used a set at Elstree as the setting for the whole thing.

AL: BIP was it.

RC: I think so, and I did about a day's shoot there and that was the first time I'd been in a proper studio, film studio. Kandum lights and things like that.

AL: German lights yes, they followed after the xxxx arcs

JS: But wasn't there a lighting system called Klieg.

AL That was very early,

JS: Which you were warned against because you got Klieg eye.

RC: Open arcs.

JS: I remember it being a legend of my boyhood, you must never look at a light because you'd get Klieg eye.

RC: They didn't have any xxxxx on Kandum, I don't remember them till Moles

Al: Moles were the people who had the xxxxx lenses and that sort of put paid to Kandum,

RC: Kandum had little rings.

AL: then there was a pirate edition of Mole Richardson, Hewitts, I'm not sure but I think I'm right that Mole Richardson just said to Hewitts, you will pay us a royalty and stop manufacturing and that was the end of Hewitt's.

RC: Somewhere we had some Hewitt lights, I can't think where it might have been, the one objection I had to them was they creaked.

AL: They pinged.

JS: Tell me something, when you first go into a studio there's a whole way of working and a whole vocabulary and special names for things, where did you learn all that.

RC: You pick it up

JS: You could call for a nigger, you're not allowed to do that now, it's gobos.

RC: You pick up these things, nobody tells you them.

JS: It's always amazed me, the timidity I had going into a studio to direct something, I wasn't capable of directing a bus at the time but I got all the jargon in the first couple of days.

AL: Isn't that because there's an incredible cameraderie. You go in as a greenhorn and there are all these old timers around you and you start calling something by the wrong name, and they always whisper to you the right name.

RC: The dolly pusher will tell you.

RC: I do think the lighting cameraman's best friend is the gaffer, a good gaffer you tell him what you want, you say it's like this, this is a bright sunlit scene, and I want a nice strong sunlight coming through that window there throwing some shadows over there, and you go on to do something else and you come back and find it's three quarters lit for you, this is what I've found, most valuable.

JS: Frank Bryce who you were talking about, he came to us a very modest person, he was at Crown when I first knew him as an electrician, he could do anything, he was a could do anything man. You must have valued him enormously.

RC: Yes, of course, I worked with Frank an awful lot, and you'd say key light, I want the keylight up here and some background filler, he'd just go away and do it automatically. I also found one of the lighting companies we used to use an awful lot, one of their fellows, there were two fellows and they set up on their own, I think they were ex Mole, and they were two of the good ex Mole boys, and one of those fellows I found excellent on location, he'd size up the whole thing, what you wanted, knew what you wanted, knew the style of lighting you usually used and three quarters would be lit without having to say very much at all.

AL: It was a question of communication between you and the gaffer. You really needed some one who had good nouse or you'd been working with a long time.

RC: I think a lot of these good gaffers would make jolly good lighting cameramen actually, because they seem to know so much about it.

Al: Yes, but for the grace of god.

JS: I've also always wondered about training off the job, especially for camera people. I've always advocated for writers and directors that there should be a lot of museum study, that you should go and look at pictures and find out how the pre-Raphaelites put there light, and how they grouped things and so on.

RC: This was one point Jimmy Richie was always keen on, the studying old masters and the way they portrayed the light. I've never done it myself, I must admit, I must have picked it up from somewhere.

JS: Do you draw.

RC: No, I'm hopeless, I can't draw or paint, that is the one big regret of my life that I can't draw.

AL: Coming back to this business of studying, Freddie Young's great thing was that he always used to go and study the Dutch masters and I can see that but with me I suppose I must have seen a Dutch master as a kid but to me, to be able to do it was the only way of doing it, whether the Dutch masters made a deep impression in the subconscious, I wouldn't know, getting the lighting in one's own hands and directing the light to me meant a lot more than what I'd seen.

RC: That's the only way of putting it into practice.

AL: Is it what one's seen or what one thinks it should look like. If you talk to a director he will say this is what I want, and you interpret what he wants and hope you get it right.

JS: This leads onto something I want to ask you about, as a lighting cameraman you communicate with the gaffer, he was your third hand so to speak, how much do you communicate with directors, other than it's going to be a close up and he's going to be looking left, what else does the director give you as a cameraman.

RC: He directs the action to start with, but as for continuity, if you don't have a continuity girl and you don't normally have one with shorts, I find that the cameraman, or camera operator has to give the director guidance on continuity and remind him of continuity, you can't do that now because that won't cut, I think again cameramen must have a very good idea of editing, how it will cut and how it will not cut,

JS: Putting it in very black and white terms, the director's entitled to say well it's night and it's sinister but what more is he entitled to say to you, not much.

RC: It depends on the director, he may have very positive ideas about how a thing should look, and you do your best to satisfy him, and then as I said come and look through the viewfinder, is that what you want, is that what you want to buy.

JS: On shear technique, one sees work done where the light is

coming from 2 different sides, that's your job not to do that.

RC: That's a thing which worried me an awful lot in old features, and you still see it today, the thing I really hate is to see first of all, there is a very nice shot going out into the pouring rain, and brilliant light backlighting everything, and the sun is shining madly and there's a storm outside. That's ridiculous because it just doesn't happen in nature. My aim has always to be to make a thing, to light it and photograph it though it were natural, to photograph it looking natural, this is how it ought to be in life.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

RC: We were touching on the subject of double shadows, that I think is absolutely unforgiveable, and yet you see it in features still today, and you used to see it an awful lot 20 years ago. It's just nonsense, unless a room has many lights in it and lights which are obvious, that it is an artificially lit room, not coming from one single source, a window or something like that. If you've got movement you got change of location around the room, well alright the shadow will vary. The other thing I just don't like, in close up of people, if they're fairly near a wall, and you've got a shadow cast on the wall from the fill light, by the camera, and I hate that, it drives me mad.

AL: Isn't this what we've inherited to a certain extent from television.

RC: Yes, television had degraded lighting an awful lot. On the other hadn't there is a lot of television studio stuff, on these prestige things, beautiful lighting, you can't deny it.

AL: Isn't this probably because the money has come from the cinema end.

RC: But the typical on a panel game thing, it's just flooded with light, luminaires up on top and 5 ks, whatnot, illuminating the scene, there's no question of lighting it.

JS: I was going to ask, it seemed to me that having a job being covered simultaneously by 3 or 4 cameras and you're going to be cutting electronically between them, you're going to be doing my job by pressing buttons rather than cutting with a pair of scissors, must lead you to flat all over illumination and not to lighting.

RC: That's true, you make enormous compromises.

JS: Because you've got to be able to say come in on 3.

RC: I've never fortunately or unfortunately had the opportunity of working with 3 cameras, the idea rather horrifies me.

AL: In the early days of films, at B&D they had what they what was known as a tight 12 shot, locking the medium and close up, down to the waist, all shot at the same time, but you would agree that if you're lighting for film, for photography you can only light for one angle.

RC: True because if you go on the reverse angle it will look like backlit something, completely wrong. This may be why the prestige blockbusters which are put on the television, they are shot mainly with film and one camera.

JS: With film and one camera, not even recording on tape.

AL: No

JS: I'm pleased to hear this, this is awfully encouraging.

RC: Talking about tight 12, do you remember Peter Baylis' lovely story about the man who is doing a film about historical ideas of god and he was in the cutting room, one of those upstairs cutting rooms at Pinewood along the balcony, and he got to hear there was a man cutting a film for the BBC religious department in the next cutting room, so he went in and said how's it going, he said you haven't got a big close up of god you could lend me and this guy said no, I've got a tight 3.

RC: What I was going to ask Alan is do they use 16mm almost exclusively now.

AL: Yes

RC: Not 35 at all.

AL: No, and they blow up from 16 if they need to for cinema.

RC: Most of the things you see these days if it's shot for television it's on Panavision.

AL: That's right.

RC: Incidentally going back right to the beginning of BTF days, one of the very earliest films I ever shot was Journey into History, and that's the one and only film I ever shot on 3 strip Technicolor, with the wonderful Technicolor camera.

AL: And you didn't have Jack Cardiff.

RC: No, I had the assistant, the fellow who had to look after the camera, an awfully nice fellow, and he looked after the prism which came in red plush box, and handle with gloves on. That was quite a thing, the weight of those 3 strip magazines, and the weight of those cameras.

JS: There's one in the entrance hall of Technicolor now as a museum piece.

RC: Sidney Samuelsons used to have one in their place. They've moved haven't they.

AL: The office is still there, they've moved over to Greenford. but the head office is still there.

RC: Because Sidney collects these things.

AL: Or is it David, or both of them.

RC: Which reminds me of a story of Sidney Samuelson, in our early days when we wanted the odd cameraman, I don't think my memory serves me false but Sidney Samuelson came to us and as it were I interviewed him for doing work on something, I'm pretty sure about this.

AL: He came back from Africa, from the Colonial Film Unit.

RC: To put it mildly he came to us looking for a job.

AL: Did he bring his camera with him, his Newman.

RC: No, he kept it under the bed with his old Vinton. I wish I had a few shares.

Do you know I've got a complete run of BTF catalogues. I meant to bring one with me as a reminder but I forgot. Which reminds me in a fortnight I have to give a little show of railway films, I've got a few, I must dig some out from somewhere.

JS: I showed Train Time to a local society recently and they loved it.

AL: If you could have your time over gain would you want to change course.

RC: Not a bit.

AL: Why is that.

RC: I was going to say it's the glamour of films, but it's just because I happen to be very technically interested in these things, I've always been technically interested in film and that sort of thing, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I couldn't imagine anything else I could do. It was the one thing which worried me when I left school, I do remember saying to my father that there's one thing I never want to do and that's push a pen in any office, I'm going to do something else, I couldn't face that and that's when I got into photography.

AL: Did you father go in for photography at all.

RC: He was a keen amateur.

AL: Did he do his own processing.

RC: He did at one time. Worked on quarter plate.

RC: When I did stills before the war I always did my own processing, I mean my own private stuff, I printed everything myself, and yesterday I came across some prints I'd done before the war and they were as good today, and the negatives, they were clean, not a stain on them, as the day they were made, because I always insisted on fixing and washing properly.

AL: The number of prints one goes through at home from before the war which have been commercially processed with brown stains is nobody's business.

RC: Sepia toned themselves.

AL: Did you go in for sepia toning.

RC: Yes, I've done that. Not bromoyle, that was a bit beyond me but bromide and chlorobromes, and sepia toning with the sulphide process, that was a good old smelly process, and copper toning, I've even tried carbro printing and carbon printing, I've never tried platina types.

AL: That was Man Ray, he did that.

RC: Then there was a process he more or less invented called

JS: cellurisation. Wasn't that Man Ray.

RC: I don't know, it was a very clever process, where you developed it and then you whipped it out of the developer with the light on and put it back in the tank again, and if you were lucky it cellurised, and if you were unlucky as you usually weren't it just bonded.

I've got two prints at home printed tri-chrome carbro. And it was quite a thing to get them in register, these are in register, I shot them on my 3 and a half, 2 and a half Maximar plate camera, 4-5 tessar lens, and enlarged them to half plates and made the intermediates and all the rest and transferred them onto the celluloid backing, and transferred them back onto the final support and they're quite good prints even today.

AL: This is thanks to Regent St, Poly.

RC: Exactly, some people say what's the point of learning all this photography, it's not going to do you any good in the film industry, but it does because it gives you a complete grounding in the elements of photography, a lot of the chemistry of it and why things happen, and why you should do something and why you should not do something else, it gives you the basis of the whole thing, most valuable.

AL: Can you remember any of your early tutors at the Poly.

RC: Harrison, I remember the name,

AL: Harrison was quite a name.

RC: Quiet spoken genial sort of fellow with thinning hair

AL: Didn't he make films.

RC: No, that's not the same one. What was the other fellow's name, I believe he finished up a few years later as the head of the school, the one I'm thinking of, he was quite a go getter, he was a commercial photographer himself. He taught the elements of commercial work. There was a Miss someone who did the retouching.

AL: That's an art in itself.

RC: Yes, sitting at the retouching desk and pencilling out lines in people's faces, making them look pretty. I remember some

nice days with the girls there but that's another story. One of the dark rooms, I don't know how many dark rooms they had at the Poly, about 4, an ordinary door which used to look like the door to a cupboard, and they used to call this the cowshed for some reason or other, and you could bolt the door on the inside and it was quite fun when you got one of the girls in there as well. JS: I remember Bill Pollard telling me about one of the dark rooms we packed up at Pinewood, he was doing some stills in there, he said one of these AC3 orderlies opened the door at the critical moment and said can I empty your rubbish bin now and he said yes, and you can put this entire batch of prints into it.

RC: The one thing I do regret is that at home I do not have the facilities for a dark room, I suppose I could now with a bit of conversion, because I'm on my own in a 4 bedroomed detached house, my aunt has died recently, I'm not married any more, I'm divorced, I'd love a dark room again to do some more printing, I did some prints earlier this year for the Sutton Talking Newspaper, they're bringing out a new brochure, they said you know something about photography, could you take some pictures for us, and I thought where do I get some decent black and white prints made and nobody could tell me. So I thought I'll do them myself, and I dug out my old Balloy enlarger, and luckily I still have the Resalux lens for it and I fixed that up and did it at night time in the kitchen when it was dark at about 5 o'clock, and it was a paper I'd never used before, plastic coated stuff, very fast in processing, 30 seconds in the developer and whip through the fixer and wash it and that's it and the results are very good indeed. It didn't take me long to get into the habit of counting seconds properly, I got me egged on again, because I've got so many, it must amount to thousands of negatives at home which I've never printed, I've many hundreds of negatives of India, Taj Mahal, and Niagra and place like that, and I've never printed them, and they're as good today as they were