CHARLES CRICHTON

Charles Crichton, director, interviewer Sid Cole, recorded 15 December 1988,

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

SC: Let's start at the beginning, tell me when you were born and where you were educated and so on.

CC: I was born in 1910, in Wallasey which is just opposite Liverpool. My father was a sort of middleman businessman in Liverpool and when I was 4 he went off to the war. Don't remember much about the war except it seemed very unpleasant. He fell down a hole, got wounded, because we used to go to France for my holidays, and this damn bandage would come out, and you'd have bom, bom and you had these great marches which my father led and he was always introduced as our brave comrade who was gravely wounded by falling down a hole, which he did

SC: Did you go to school in Wallasey?

CC: I was one of Baker's Buns as they called it. It was a little prep school, down the road was the river Mersey which was full of ships, particularly in those days it was full of camouflage ships. We were given the afternoon off once to go and look at the first camouflage ship that ever was seen in the Mersey. We also saw the Royal Irish and the Royal Daffodils coming back from the Battle of Zeebruge, they were a bloody mess. And on November 11 1918 we were given a half day holiday to celebrate and we went down onto the shore and dug trenches and fought our own little war just to continue things.

SC: After that schooling.

CC: Then I went to a school called St **Pyrens** which is at Maidenhead which was quite an experience. It was meant to be quite an advanced sort of school and it was in some ways because the headmaster didn't get on with his wife and had rather an inkling for the matron. And very funny things happened, the school caught fire one night. He used to come into prayers in the morning with a black eye sometimes. We used to call him Bisto because the smell of whisky as he swept up the aisle was so strong. It was a very reputable school.

SC: What were you doing at Maidenhead.

CC: It was supposed to be an advanced school, father sent me down there.

SC: It was a boarding school.

CC: And my grandchildren are there actually. It's perfectly alright now. But he, the headmaster, was found with his car upside down in a ditch with whisky, so he ran away with the matron in the end. He opened a hotel in Masle where he became the greatest drinking companion of the **Blewitt** and they were buddies.

SC: We'll explain about Blewitt later. What did you study at school.

CC: General education, but I went to Arundell which is meant to be an engineering school, but that wasn't my line. Then I went to Canada for a bit and then I went to Oxford, New College, where I studied history.

SC: Did you take a degree.

CC: I did, I actually passed. After I was at Oxford, I was wandering around wondering what my life was going to be, trying different things, seeing what it was like being a journalist and so on. Then I suddenly thought, to hell with it all I'm interested in films.

SC: When did it start this interest in films. Did you go to movies much while you were young.

CC: Yes, quite a lot. And

SC: Do you remember the earliest films you saw.

CC: Terrible films, awful films. I used to drag my mother and they were always switched, I went to films quite a lot. Rene Clair and things like *Les Millions* and *Sur les Toits*, I used to go and see several times. And there was a film club in Oxford too. We didn't used to make films but we used to show very avant garde type of films. Puffin Asquith I think originated that, but he wasn't there when I was was. So the Kordas came to Oxford to make a picture called *Men of Tomorrow.*

SC: Directed by Leontine Sagan.

CC: That's right. So I went to see Sagan, who was very unhelpful, but there was this funny chap with his hat pulled over

his eyes, Hungarian, who turned out to be Zolly of course.

SC: Zoltan Zorda.

CC: Eventually he said what does he want, Sagan explained, so he gave me a job.

SC: What was the job?

CC: Oh, carrying tea to Mr Young who was their editor, Harold Young

SC: An American

CC: Yes, who was later replaced by Bill Hornbeck who was very much my mentor. Really marvellous editor.

SC: Were you just on that film and then there was a hiatus, or did you carry on with London Films?

CC: It was London Films, and London Films was expanding, there were one or two very awkward moments when we went home unpaid, in other words there was a break. But after Henry VIII things began to expand very very quickly and I was lucky because I was carried up on the tide as it were.

SC: When you started with Korda what studios did you first work at.

CC: That was Wembley. And I remember arriving at the station to go to studio and asking the ticket collector where the studio was and he said you see that column of smoke, that's the studio.

SC: What had happened?

CC: They'd had a fire.

SC: It didn't burn the studio down.

CC: It burnt quite a lot down.

SC: It still survived right down to the television era. What were your first jobs when you were at Wembley, were you still floor assistant carrying cups of tea.

CC: I was in the cutting room.

SC: You'd gone into the cutting room.

CC: I'd been in the cutting room all the time. They didn't like

me very much because I'd been put in by Zolly without consultation. So for the first three weeks I was given nothing to do. And worked from about 9 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock at night doing nothing. I stood there very patiently, then at the end of the three weeks Hal said Charlie we didn't want you here but you've stood 3 weeks of doing nothing, now we're really going to give you a job.

SC: What was that.

CC: Oh rolling up cuts, but they wouldn't tell me a bloody thing at first.

SC: After Wembley

CC: We moved to Boreham Wood, B&D. But they did make a picture at BIP once too. They were only making quota quickies at that period.

SC: I can't remember the one you did at Wembley but it was the beginning of those young ladies.

CC: Yes all those lovely little girls,

SC: Joan Gardiner, Merle Oberon

CC: Incidentally, you wouldn't have known, Eileen Corbett who was continuity girl at that time, I got a letter from her saying she sees Joan **Gardiner** quite often.

SC: I didn't know her, but

CC: Eileen lives up somewhere in Norfolk.

SC: When did you get promoted to be an editor on your own.

CC: The first credit I got was on *Sanders of the River*. I didn't edit it on my own, Bill Hornbeck supervised it. But from that time onward I was given more and more freedom and I worked on many of those pictures.

SC: Tell me about Bill Hornbeck because I know he was a great influence, not only on yourself but other people.

CC: He was a big influence on John Jympson who cut *Wanda* actually. And he was ~~in the union~~ at Ealing on John Jympson. Bill, I don't know much about his early career but he was certainly an editor on those Mack Sennett comedy things, before sound ever came in. And he had a very direct approach to editing which was matching doesn't matter, he couldn't be bothered with fitting, he said you

could cut from a man standing up to a man sitting down or from a lady standing on her head to a lady sitting down, as long as the thought goes through nobody will notice the match or anything of that nature.

SC: Continuity of thought rather than action.

CC: And of course there are a lot of editors who worked under him, I think Robert Hamer worked under him, Cornelius, can't remember any more.

SC: Very interesting that, because being an editor too, I know in my very junior days when I started there was a great thing about matching, at BIP for instance it was considered rather important, and it took me quite a few years to get over that, because I was constrained by something which in Bill Hornbeck's terms was totally unimportant, well not totally

CC: He was exaggerating but sure.

SC: Your first picture was *Sanders of the River*, did you meet Paul Robson?

CC: Yes, I did. He didn't like the picture at all, I don't know how Alex sold it to him but on the first night he stormed out of the cinema, because I think he thought he was making a picture about the marvellous cooperation between the two races, but of course poor old black Sambo turned out to be very much the underdog.

SC: Years ago I interviewed Paul Robson for *Cine Technician* and he talked about that picture and it wasn't so much he didn't know what it was like but he hadn't realised, he was beginning to realise his position as a prominent black American and what the rest of black Americans thought he should be up to. I remember him saying that after he made *Sanders of the River* when he went back to New York a deputation met him as he got off the boat to say what the hell were you doing on that. He was beginning to be aware of this. After *Sanders* what did you cut next.

CC: I was on, there were 3 editors on *Things to Come* for instance, there was Bill supervising and then there was an American editor called Pete Lyon and myself. But of course the pictures in those days went on and on and on. I can't remember how long it took to make that picture. It was very disappointing of course because it wasnt a successful picture and Alex really had put his heart into it. But things were so chaotic in those days because 3 night before it was to open, at the Leicester Sq Theatre, after the main picture was over, something like 11 o'clock at night, with all sort of important people like

Churchill, and the first thing which happened was, in the opening reel, every town is being bonged, guns are going off, people screaming, rushing around the streets, Piccadily collapsing under attack and so on, suddenly a great big fish appeared on the screen and blew bubbles, this was because we never had previews or anything like that, we were always working right up to the last minute, and nobody had seen the picture all the way through until that night. Nobody liked the picture much soe came out, bundled it into a car, and we all knew what was going to happen. We went back to the studio and we didn't go to bed again until we'd recut the picture, in 3 days. I don't mean recut it obviously but [unclear]

SC: Was the reason it took so long in those days that Korda was making changes.

CC: He was always rewriting it. And then of course there was the other thing, every picture started off and the first week was thrown away always. I never remember any picture when the first weeks' work wasn't thrown away and we started again. Usually with Alex now directing second hand. From behind the scenes.

SC: What other pictures were you on.

CC: *Thief of Baghdad* which of course was almost finished when the war started so they packed it up and finished it off in the States, but it was 99% shot in this country.

SC: Did you go to the States.

CC: No

SC: Did you get a credit.

CC: Yes.

AL: We were talking about the trick work in *Thief*

CC: Technicolor had just said the tricks that Alex used, flying carpets, horses galloping in the sky, all this sort of thing, they just said it was impossible and wiped their hands of it so they had, Alex had a very good special effects man called Ray Butler, and he solved the problem for them. But according to Technicolor the picture was impossible.

SC: Technicolor were very difficult in those days.

CC: I imagine so, I didn't have anything to do with them.

SC: There's that story about *Wings of the Morning* about changing

the greens to reds.

CC: In Ireland you mean.

SC: How many pictures would you say you worked on for Korda in those years

CC: It's funny because the main Alex pictures, about 5 I would think, but then Denham was being built and pictures were being made everywhere and I worked on several others which were disastrous. This was the time when Alex was rushing around trying to find the money to keep the studio going rather than making pictures himself.

SC: You didn't do Rembrandt.

CC: No.

SC: You were saying *Things to Come* was very much to Korda's heart, and Rembrandt was too. Yet they were too pictures which were very much less successful

CC: I liked Rembrandt.

SC: which I suppose he did with his tongue in his cheek like Henry.

CC: I don't think that was tongue in cheek. I think Alex really should have stayed a director.

SC: Tell me about *Elephant Boy*. I remember you telling stories about Zolly trying to get as many pieces of elephants, in the cutting round scrambling around, a few more frames of this and that.

CC: Zolly used to cut with his teeth, he would grab a piece of film and bite it, and say hold that Charlie. Then he'd say, then he'd put it into tins and write on it cuts made on April 3rd 1935 or whatever. We tried keeping them in order but we couldn't so when we came down to fine cutting it we were trying to find trims, and all we could do do was go to the vaults and all these tins were labelled April 3rd, Wednesday 4th, 4 pm on such a such a day.

SC: It made life difficult.

CC: The whole picture was difficult, with these 3 directors. Flaherty went out first and shot some of that marvellous exteriors, then theyh sent a crappy American, Ican't remember his name, he was typical, like a quota quickie type American, and

then they send Zolly out and of course there was no script at all. Well you know the story about the cable, after Flaherty had gone out and nothing came back, they started sending urgent cables to him, what the hell's happening and he sent cables back he was spending all his time trying to find the boy, Toumi, time went by, no film came back, so more cables. Cable came back, have found boy, production starts immediately. Nothing happened. More cables, cable comes back, elephant unfortunately trod on boy. That is quite true. In the rushes you can see that Flaherty had heard this story that you could put a baby on the floor and the elephant would avoid it. There was this shot in the rushes of this poor little baby on the floor and the elephant's foot is just going to squash it into the dust when a rushes in and manages to snatch it out the way

SC: Is that in the picture

CC: No. And they all came back together within a day or two. And I had a big long cutting room with two doors. Flaherty would put his nose in and say Charlie I am the director of this picture, don't take any notice of those other two cunts. Then Zolly would come in just like a cuckoo clock and say Charlie, Flaherty doesn't know what he's doing. That went on and it was nightmare.

SC: Beyond all I suppose that Alex was taking an interest.

CC: Alex was rewriting the story all the time. The interesting thing was that there were all these Hungarians together, Alex, Biro, Zolly, and about two others and they would all be arguing the toss in English and their English was extremely bad, none of them could understand each other at all. You sat in the middle knowing bloody well if they'd only speak Hungarian they might reach some kind of agreement.

SC: What was the last picture before the outbreak of war.

CC: That was *The Thief of Baghdad*.

SC: What happened to you now there was a war on.

CC: I worked for a little while on a propaganda film at Denham, one was waiting to be called up. Then Cavalcanti wanted me to go and cut a little film called *Young Veteran* at Ealing and apparently my work was satisfactory because they wanted me to go on and on and so I became a reserved occupation and I stayed at Ealing

SC: If I remember rightly you had to be 30 and a certain grades. Did you know Cavalcanti before he asked you to work on this film?

CC: No, I'd never met him, I just got please go and see him and that was it.

SC: How did you get on with Cav?

CC: Very well of course. In a funny kind of way he had the same sort of approach to things which Bill Hornbeck did. On *the Young Veteran* for instance which was supposed to be about a young chap returning from Dunkirk, we go and see a whole lot newsreel material including that French series that they made before the Germans walked in, I can't remember what it was called, we had got the negative over here, and he would select all sorts of things like troops skiing everything which to me had nothing to do with his theme, but somehow or other he managed to find beautiful images to illustrate what he was getting at, if that makes any sense to you.

SC: It's a very creative way of editing, binding different things together with a theme. So you were an editor at Ealing for a while.

CC: An editor. Then I did start to direct, the first picture was a propaganda picture of course, called Those In Peril, where we rushed around the Channel in high speed motorboats, boats which were used for picking up crashed airmen and so on. It's a horrifying thing to say but it was very exciting rushing around the channel in highspeed motor boats.

SC: And dangerous.

CC: No, it wasn't, not very.

SC: That was when.

CC: 43. And that was the first picture Douggie Slocombe photographed, except that he didn't photograph the interiors.

SC: Who did

CC: Ernie Palmer.

SC: What were your particular problems on that, you say it was quite exciting and it wasn't dangerous but you must have had some problems.

CC: Just hanging on to the boat. You know we were warned beforehand that if a crash call came, they'd take no notice of us if anybody needed help, and we got a crash call once and excellerated from just ambling along at 5 knots to something like

45 knots in no time at all, how we didn't go overboard I don't know. Mind you, we rather enjoyed our predicament sometimes because the first time we went out we really tied down the camera, it was a very narrow little boat. And we had **Ted Lockhart** who was an old sailor and we thought we were absolutely safe, the way everything was done. And we could see them all grinning up in the wheel house, because we were up in the bow, and we came out of the harbour at considerable speed. And of course once we got past the jetty we hit a wave and we all fell over. The camera went blomb, you know, we had managed to strap ourselves, we were careful enough to make sure we had ropes.

SC: What camera were you using.

CC: Probably a Newman Sinclair.

SC: It wasn't damaged?

CC: No.

SC: You said there was no danger.

CC: The big danger was Dougie Slocombe because. One day we went out and arranged all sort of things like Spitfires diving at us and actually firing at us. And it was an extremely rough day and all ships were confined to port except the film unit because they were mad and expendable anyway. So we were tossing about in the Channel and these Spitfires were coming and we were trying to get the boats with machine gun bullets hitting the water and so on. And Dougie was in the wheel house saying can't you shoot a bit closer.

SC: And they did.

CC: And they did. Then we made *Painted Boats*. A more docile peaceful experience.

SC: That was the one about canals which I seem to remember because I was at Ealing at that time, you enjoyed very much, was Bill Blewit on that one.

CC: Yes.

SC: Tell me about Bill **Blewit**.

CC: Bill Blewit was the post master at Masle and Harry Watt and Cavalcanti, I don't know, the documentary boys had used him quite a lot before the war. He was a natural actor, enjoyed his drink, was a rogue and a lovely person to talk to, to be in his company. He would sit in the pub at the side of the canal and tell a

fascinated audience long stories about his early days when he was a boy on the canal, well he'd never seen a canal before, but everyone would believe him, absolutely rapt attention.

SC: I remember he was a great story teller. I remember on one occasion at our local pub, the Red Lion, at Ealing, him persuading people he wasn't Bill Blewit but his twin brother. He was as you as quite a natural actor. And who else was on, Jenny Laird was the lead in that. So after that your next picture was one I was associated with, *Dead of Night*.

CC: Yes, that's when we started to know each other, to our mutual advantage or disadvantage.

SC: Tell me about *Dead of Night* from your point of view.

CC: I was just lucky to be given this comedy sequence to direct with Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne. And my first day's work was appallingly bad, I was trying to slow them up in their delivery all the time. I was looking at it more from an editor's point of view really.

SC: I remember that first day's rushes. It takes me back and you will remember it too, I saw the rushes with Mick and we felt it was as you say, you slowed Naunton and Basil down, and we came on the floor and as I heard it, certainly it must have been from you, Basil Radford saw Mick and myself coming onto the floor and he said aha here come the angry boys. So you reshot that first day.

CC: yes, that's right

SC: But that's the sort of thing one learns by. You can be told a lot of things in theory but you learn them in fact by making your own mistakes.

CC: Absolutely. But one was lucky to be in a place where one wasn't instantly fired which happens to people. They don't get their second chance.

SC: *Hue and Cry* was after that, which is a very famous picture and was very enjoyable to make I should think, certainly enjoyable to see.

CC: Making any picture is a rather masachistic experience but yes, it was I suppose.

SC: What about the famous shot where you and Cornelius, who was producing, worked out how many kids you could get into one taxi.

CC: I didn't, that was Corny. I had always envisaged that the taxi would stop at a place where we could conceal a whole lot of boys and we would open one door and boys would poor out and be refed into the cab. But Corny shot that shot, I was on the bomb site at the time shooting other stuff and then I saw him doing this shot. And the taxi came and without stopping or anything, it obviously didn't stop at a preprepared postion, he had just cramed about 50 boys into one taxi, to hell with what they thought about it.

SC: It's a marvellous shot. By the end of *Hue and Cry* you must have beginning to feel very sure as a director.

CC: No. You're never sure. Quite honestly, the first time I ever had much confidence was *after Lavender Hill Mob* because I began to feel it was all done by the associate producer plus the camera man plus the operator, because they were good. Then I went to do a picture outside called *Hunted* without any of those people and I found it was still successful and that gave me a lot of confidence because I was disassociated from all the people who helped.

SC: You've just mentioned this feeling of support directors had at Ealing, tell me something of your feelings about Ealing in general.

CC: Well of course the way we worked is well known, the way all directors and associate producers, the associate producer being the creative producer as opposed to Micky Balcon who was the executive, so all the asociate producers, directors used to read each other's scripts, criticise them, see each other's rushes, each other's rough cuts. And there were those monthly meetings. I wouldn't like to call it a team effort because it can't quite be a team effort, but for instance, one of Sandy Mackendrick's contributions was that he always found ways of suggesting that we should always do exactly the opposite to what we wanted to do, the result of that was that it forced us to clarify our own thinking about something in order to defend ourselves against his harsh and rather cruel criticisms.

SC: People rubbed off against each other, by throwing ideas around, some you accepted and others you didn't. It could be on the rebound that you would be forced to justify what you were doing.

CC: But then Dougie Slocombe would contribute ideas, it was a very nice way of working.

SC: Do you remember on the end of *The Dead of Night*, which already had in the script a recurring dream idea, which finished

the film in the script and it was the projectionist at the studio who when we were running the completed thing, Percy Moss was his name, he always liked to comment on the picture which was good, he said why don't you carry on, it ought to go on longer at the end. And we looked at him and said what a marvellous idea, how right you are

CC: And the end should be the beginning.

SC: That's why we repeated the whole of the beginning under the end titles instead of leaving it with just John selling corn, I think I've been here, that was symptomatic of the way I think anyone could make suggestions at that time.

Then we did *Against the Wind* together with a lady called Simone Signoret. Do you remember the first time we met Simone in Paris, it was at the George V I remember

CC: I don't remember a great deal about it except that she was a very attractive lady and strong minded about what she wanted.

SC: I remember that occasion, we have to explain that Simone wasn't known in England at all at that time, and we met her in the bar of the George V in Paris, the door opened and she came toward the table and I checked with you afterwards, but as far as I was concerned by the time she was half way to the table she got the job. I remember asking you about that afterwards and you agreed, and then she sat down and spoke in very good English, in fact I think she'd been to school in England for a while and had an extraordinary aura about her. Tell me about *Against the Wind*.

CC: You were on it for the whole period

SC: I was on it the whole period, but I was comuting between *Scott of the Antartic* with Charlie Frend. So I used to dash between Switzerland and Belgium. I saw it on the box again recently, did you watch it.?

CC: No.

SC: Do you have any special memories.

CC: I didn't want to make it, I was against making war films.

SC: Did you feel the time had really gone by.

CC: It wasn't very long after the war, it was 1947, and I thought anything which glorified war in any way was a pity to do. However.

SC: Do you remember going to Paris when it was so desolate and cold and dark.

CC: Oh yes but the place absolutely brimming with food and light was Brussels. You weren't in the car when we were coming back.

SC: No. Tell us, about Lionel Banes

CC: We'd gone down to find locations in that very very hard winter, frozen ground and everything, going through from Brussels and the Ardennes there was this marvelous cafe sort of place with inviting red lamps in the window and I'd always wanted to stop and have a drink but I think you insisted we press on, associate producer style -- coming back after we'd shot in the Ardennes in the spring, and it was as hot as hell, and transport was difficult in those days, I was sitting with Paul Beeson on my knee, we were absolutely crammed into cars just to get us back to Brussels. And we were all thirsty, and I said wait there's this marvellous cafe, so we all waited, they waited and we got there and there was this beautiful lawn and parasols and you could sit out and have a drink in the sunshine, we piled out and Lionel sat at one table and most of us went to the back of the cafe to have a peep, and as we looked up at the back of this cafe there was a naked woman in every window. We turned round and there's poor Lionel, and there were at least 6 ladies with their bosoms hanging out and we thought he was going to take his drink from the wrong source, but we had a nice cool drink and went off. I remember when we got to Brussels, the unit had a day off the next day, the electricians all came round to our hotel, because we were going to get into a bus, we were going to sightseeing or something and they all had huge grins on their faces and we found out they'd all been lodged in a brothel.

It was the winter of 46-47.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

CC: *Against the Wind* was the picture you rightly tried to demolish the hotel.

My memory of it is that you had a point to make and I thought you were wrong and you thought I was wrong. And we had an argument in your bedroom or my bedroom, I think it swept out in such a rage, slambed the door and the washbasin fell off the wall. Very powerful man. Very powerful man Sidney Cole.

SC: La patron came running upstairs saying Monsieur Crichton, Monsieur Cole, quesqu'il arrive.

Could I revert to *Against the Wind*, we made a piece of casting which we thought was rather ingenious at the time but rather misfired, Jack Warner.

CC: We chose him to play the main villain part, a double spy, we chose him because he was so charming, nobody could possibly believe he could be a double agent. And as you remember just a week before we were due to start shooting Jack said this isn't going to work, people aren't going to believe that I can be a villain, and we talked him into staying with us and it turned out we were quite wrong because the whole thing misfired completely. Nobody could believe that dear Jack could be a double agent.

SC: I remember we took it to a preview, we couldn't tell much from a preview audience but we went with Jack into a pub after the preview and there was a little man standing at the bar who looked at Jack and said you're Jack Warner aren't you, and Jack said yes, and the little man said that he had been to the picture and it was all wrong, that had quite an effect I think on Jack. Although the intention was good, to surprise the audience. But certainly Jack had too pronounced a persona of what he was, which was a jolly nice chap, for it to really work.

CC: Mind you he played the villain in *Hue and Cry* but that was a comedy.

SC: I think he played it well in *Against the Wind*, the scene between him and Simone Signoret when she hears that's who it is. I suppose that sort of scene would probably work better these days, audiences have got more sophisticated. Can I go back on your career to a film called *Nine Men* on which you were the associate producer. And I was supervising editor and Harry Watt directed.

CC: I didn't really produce it. I was credited but all I managed to do was wangle the rights to the story from the poor

author for an incredibly small amount of money. And he offered to bash me up when he found the picture was so successful. But that was a mistake. I wasn't really creative on that picture at any level.

SC: I think you were on the editing. I seem to remember the combination of our editing talents, if I can put it modestly on behalf of both of us, Charles, the combination of our editing talents, we would work alternately on sequences on that.

CC: But in the sense of working on the script or working or helping Harry Watt in any kind of way, I don't think I helped very much. The only thing I ever did to help him, it was during the war and the trains were terrible and he rang me up about half past nine at night, he was shooting in Wales, he said he was in terrible trouble and could I catch a train immediately and come down. I said but Harry, it's only 20 minutes before the last train goes. He said you must come, you must come. So I put my clothes on over my pyjamas and rushed out and managed to catch the train - I got to Paddington, I got one of these terrible night trains which was absolutely crammed with people, no seats or anything, I sat in a bog all the way, the only place I could find a seat. The train driver didn't know what he was doing. It was a nightmare journey, get to the hotel, won't go into that, piss pots under the bed and everything, clean myself up a bit, get down to the location about 9 o'clock in the morning, walking across the sand towards Harry, he looks at me in amazement and says what the fucking hell are you doing here.

SC: Had he completely forgotten?

CC: He'd forgotten all about it.

SC: So you took the next train back.

CC: No I stayed and did some second unit work.

SC: Travel during war time was very difficult. The next picture was *Train of Event*, another anthology picture like *Dead of Night* which I produced. Tell me about the sequence you did. It had three stories in it.

CC: My god I've almost forgotten it. The interesting thing was that we rehearsed it, there was John Clements, a stage actor, Irina Baronova who was a ballerina and and Valerie Hobson who was a cinema actress. One of the difficulties a director always has is trying to get every body's performance to gell at the same time. So here we were with these 3 peole from different walks of life. John Clement's performance improved improved improved, all the way through rehearsals and it improved on the floor. The

ballerina, her performance was stuck, she got it was far as she was going to go. She never changed. Valerie Hobson got worse and worse and worse the more we rehearsed because she was a film artist and used to doing it instantly.

SC: You also had two interesting supporting characters, Gwenn Cheryll and John Gregson.

CC: Yes, I've nearly forgotten the episode.

SC: *Dance Hall* was the next picture. Who was in that

CC: There was some very famous people, there was Diana Dors, Petula Clark, a dark American chap, Bonar Colleano. It wasn't a film I particularly wanted to make but was quite interesting. I saw it again quite recently. And the lovely Michael Trubshaw.

SC: The friend of David Nvern. Then a real peak film, *The Lavender Hill Mob.*

CC: I was sliding before I, it rescued me I think. Because you know, Dance Hall didn't do too well.

SC: Who's original idea was *The Lavender Hill Mob*, Tibbi Clark wrote it.

CC: What happened was that Tibbi had just written the police story, *The Blue Lamp*, and Mick wanted to repeat the success of *The Blue Lamp* and he was sent off, and he couldn't find an idea but he found this idea about the gold bars and the Eiffel Tower. And he sketched it out to Mick who was doubtful about it by the way, but Mick sometimes would allow people to go there own way. So Tibbi wrote a treatment which people liked very much. Michael Trueman was the associate producer. Tibbi's original story after they had successfully turned all the gold to Eiffel Towers, in the original story the plot followed what happened to each Eiffel Tower so that a whole lot of new characters were introduced. It was Michael Trueman was the one who said this would be disastrous, you must follow through the central characters. And eventually Tibbi did find the sollution, they made a mistake about the top of the Eiffel Tower so we were able to follow the main characters rather than that new subsidiary ones.

SC: That was a very important contribution indeed.

CC: That's what associate producers used to do for you.

SC: It was an enormously successful film which is still repeated. Do you ever look at your old pictures when the're on

the box.

CC: Sometimes. I haven't seen that one for a while.

SC: After that you were away from Ealing.

CC: *Hunted*, that's when I got more sure of myself.

SC: That was Dirk Bogarde, how did you get on with Dirk.

CC: Very well.

SC: That was one of the early pictures which made you realise what a really good actor Dirk Bogarde was. Having been in some of those Gainsborough potboilers, very successful ones a film like *Hunted* gave him a bit more scope.

CC: At that particular time he was absolutely fed up with playing sneaky boys in mackintoshes. There he was in the same part he felt at the beginning, he didn't really want to do it but he was contracted. And then this, we had from Scotland playing the child in the picture, he began to have an affection for this kid, he got out of his mackintosh character, and I think he enjoyed making the picture in the end.

SC: What was the name of the boy

CC: Johnny White.

SC: And you had quite a lot of locations on that film.

CC: Yes we always used London, various scenes on the railway, then we were in Scotland, near Stranra, a place called Portpatrick.

SC: Your family is Scottish, do you feel Scottish yourself.

CC: Yes I do, I'm against being English, I'm British. I feel at home in Scotland.

SC: You're very keen on fishing and you often go

CC: That's another thing, no I like Scotland. I feel at home with the people there.

SC: I remember you and I, going forward many years, you and I having an interesting trip to Lewis and Harris on a project which was never realised but was very pleasant, we had a very interesting time sampling the Scottish malt whisky.

CC: We arrived on Saturday night, the whole back wall was covered with different malts, the barman said you must not leave this hotel until you've sampled every malt. That was Saturday night and we were leaving on Monday morning. So we did what we had to do on the Sabath day and then we got into the bar on the Sabath evening and we did our best to satisfy the barman.

SC: 14 of them I think.

CC: I don't know, we did pretty well. The next year I was fishing across the strait between Harris and North and some people that had just come from this hotel they said on this table now there was a notice saying owing to the fact that some guests had abused their privilege of having a dram on the sabath day, in future only one dram will be served per guest.

SC: Our contribution to the history of malt whisky industry.

CC: But we went to talk many years before that to the writer

SC: Eric Linklater. We went to see him in the Highlands, a story which didn't get made. We didn't make it, it was made by Group 3. Tell us about that adventure.

CC: I don't remember much about it.

SC: What happened was that you went off

CC: Oh that, he was very stiff, he didn't like me very much. It was pissing with rain one day, the Orkneys, we got onto the river, we were supposed to be fishing sea trout, he got into this salmon, he'd never caught a salmon before in his life, and we hadn't got nets or anything, and he played it down the pool and so on. And eventually it was coming in, and he'd always called me Crichton, Crichton this, Crichton that. And he said to me, do you know how to tail a fish, I said I don't know, he didn't know either, how to take your fish out if you havent got a net. So he tried to explain it to me, but I went in, I got the riverside of the fish, it splashed and got away and he brought it back again, I flung myself at the fish and flung it right up onto the bank, about 20 yards and got absolutely drenched in the process. There was Linklater and he took his glasses off, and he looked down at the fish and he was crying and he wiped his glasses and he put them on, he said look at this fish and said well done Charles.

SC: My story was connected with that, because that happened inside the incident I remember which was we were due every morning to go off with Eric to find locations for this story, and this particular morning immediately after breakfast I was standing outside the hotel and Linklater arrived and said he had

permission to fish a certain stretch of the river and I said but Charles, Eric, we're supposed to be finding locations. And Linklater said the certain ambiance, atmosphere of salmon fishing is terribly important. So I looked at him, he said well anyhow we must go and fish. Off they went at about 9 o'clock, I went off on my own in the car to look at things, and I came back about lunchtime, I enquired about Mr Crichton at the desk. No they hadn't see him, so I had lunch and went off again in the afternoon. I came back, went upstairs, had a wash, changed, went downstairs to the bar, had a drink, and thinking what has happened to these people, I was just wondering if I should send out some sort of panic call when these two drenched, tattered dirty characters came in beaming all over their faces. And I said what's happened, they said we've caught a salmon. I said did you not have anything to eat all day, oh we didn't bother about that, they hadn't had anything. This was about 7 oclock at night. Your story you've just told was in the middle of that

SC: The next picture was one which was a big success particularly with railway enthusiasts, *The Titfield Thunderbolt*, you must have enjoyed making it.

CC: The worst thing about that picture was that Dougie Slocombe had a little 16mm camera and he was making his own picture of the picture being made, and every time I said Dougie I think this is the best set up for what we've got to shoot, he'd say no and talk me out of it. When I saw the film he had made, he had used every set up that I wanted for his amateur film. It was a fun picture in some ways. One American critic said I didn't like it very much, I just think they like playing trains. And I think he was quite right in a way. But I remember the first day I went onto the footplate of the Thunderbolt itself, there were all sorts of weights hanging down from the nob on top of the boiler. I said to the driver what are all those weights for. He said to keep the safety valve down, otherwise we won't be able to pull the train. How it didn't blow up.

SC: It does appeal to that childish boy thing about elaborate train sets as toys, when you can have a real one to play with and get paid for playing with one.

CC: And such a pretty one.

SC: *The Lover Lottery, The Divided Heart, The Man in the Sky* are the next three I've got.

CC: *The Love Lottery* wasn't successful, I quite liked it. Perhaps it was too much a whimsy whamsy thing.

I was deeply emotionally, involved with *The Divided Heart*. The

story was that there was this child of a Yugoslav mother and father and the father was in the resistance and was shot, and the mother was put into a concentration camp, into Auschwitz. The child who was about 2 at the time, because the Germans maintained Yugoslavia was part of the great Reich, the child was taken by two really nice Germans actually, and was brought up as their own child and he couldn't even speak Slovene because he believed he was German. But after the war when they were trying to reunite families, they discovered this boy and there were a series of trials to decide whether he should stay in Germany or go to the Slovenian woman who had survived Auschwitz. And the child was really put through the mill. It was very very sad. And at the end of teh 3rd trial he was sent back to Slovenia which I think was a desperate mistake and I think the whole thing was politically motivated, but it wasn't the right thing for the child because he was very happy with his foster parents in Germany. And his mother was really a bit of a slut and he had to learn Slovene and learn to love his mother actually.

SC: Who played the part.

CC: A young actor, he wasn't very good really. The German lady was Cornell Borchers who played the German mother, and Armin Dahlers was the father, they were very good. And an English lady whose name I've forgotten played the Slovenian lady and she was good too.

SC: How did the picture do.

CC: Just about broke even.

SC: Did you shoot in Yugoslavia.

CC: Yes, quite interesting.

AL: That wasn't an Ealing film.

CC: Oh yes. *Man in the Sky* was after it. *Man in the Sky* was with Bill Rose And that didn't do particularly well either and I think the reason was that the climax was an emotional climax rather than a physical one,

SC: Yes you expect a lot of action in a film all about aircraft. Who was in that, was it Jack Hawkins.

CC: Jack Hawkins.

SC: A nice man.

CC: Very nice.

SC: He was one of the people we used quite a bit at Ealing wasn't he.

CC: Yes. I think that was the only time I worked with him. But you worked with him several times.

SC: Very nice man, it was very sad about what happened with his throat busines..

Law and Disorder.

CC: That was after Ealing. The producer was a clot of the first order, he didn't know what he was doing. I had to fight him all the time, and in the end, and of course he had the privilege, he cut out a sequencey without which the end of the picture is pretty incomprehensible, no matter how much I fought him on that he got his way which was a pity.

SC: Who was that

CC: Soskin, Paul Soskin.

SC: *Floods of Fear*, it was a transatlantic thing. Wasn't that supposed to take place in America.

CC: Yes, it was Mississippi in flood. The whole story was about the Mississippi in flood. What I'm proud of in the picture -- I'm not proud of the picture but I'm proud of is that it looks like the Mississippi in flood and it was all shot in the studio at Pinewood, or near all. Technically I think it was quite an achievement actually.

SC: It seems a very odd way of going about it, did you do it for an American company.

CC: No, it was Rank, and the producer was, it's marvelous how clear your memory is, it doesn't matter. I had to make it because I wanted money. It had a writer who was so awful that the producer said you take half the book - it was from a book - and I'll take the other half, you write that half, I'll write this half. And we only had a little time to do it. So I wrote my half and asked him where was his half and he said I haven't started yet, you better go on actually.

SC: So you had to rewrite the whole thing.

CC: Yes. And it just wasn't a subject which I would have chosen for myself. Cyril Cusack was in it and that lovely American, who sings, big man

SC: That was my main impression, I was very impressed by the way this American locations were amazingly done in the studio.

CC: I think part of the credit goes to the cameraman, Chris Challis and partly goes to me. But Chris used very little light. There was suggestions rather than,

The way Lionel X would have lit it, everything would have been flood lit and you would have seen the [unclear]

SC: So by being low key Chris made it really acceptable.

CC: Yes. It was suggestion rather than

SC: Yes I can vaguely remember some of those flood scenes which were very effective indeed. *Battle of the Sexes.*

CC: Monja Danischewsky wrote the screenplay but it had a previous history that Harold Hecht sent for me to go to America to make it. So I got my ticket, flew over, I had no dollars with me, got to the other end, nobody to meet me, usually bit of red carpet, borrowed 25 cents from a fellow passenger to ring up the studio. Some gasp at the other end. Eventually a car comes for me, I go to see Harold and he said didn't anyone tell you Charlie, we've given it to somebody else.

SC: This was in LA.

CC: Anyway, they were going to combine it with another story. I said you'll never make it and they never did because the combination was impossible. Then Danny hagot it and Danny wrote this particular script which I think was very good. I think we slightly miscast with using Robert Morley in the main part because it was unreal, but I think it was about the best performance Peter Sellars ever game in his life.

SC: I know it was very good. It was fairly successful wasn't it.

CC: I still get £30 a year for it.

SC: That's what, 30 years ago. What studio did you use.

CC: Pinewood I think. I can't remember.

SC: The next on was *The Boy who Stole a Million*

CC: That was pretty simple, nothing much to say.

SC: What I don't have in this list is when you went to America.

CC: I must have gone in 1960, and I got fired, that was by Burt Lancaster

SC: Tell us about that, because Burt Lancaster sounds like not the easiest person to get on with, because didn't Sandy Mackendrick also

CC: Oh Sandy fought him all the time. I think possibly my mistake was that I didn't fight him and oh it was chaos.

SC: What were you going to do with him.

CC: *The Birdman of Alcatraz*. Very interesting of course and I wanted to make it. But we'd have a script conference and all sorts of things would be decided and then Burt would go off for about 3 weeks to play golf and come back again and it was as if nothing had happened, we just started all over again, there was a sort of vacuum, and we only had half the script the week before we were due to go on the floor. And he said we're in marvelous shape aren't we. We've never been in such good shape as this before. Of course, remembering the Korda days I should not have been unhappy about that. Anyway I think he decided he didn't want, by the way even before, that was Harold Hecht too. And I said to Harold are you the producer or is Burt the producer because if Burt is the producer I don't want to go and if you're the producer fine. Oh yes he was the producer and then I got to America Burt had all the power. And I know he wanted me off even before we started to shoot actually. So I did a week which was just marking time for them while they got another director. Then I went to New York to make another picture and walked out of that one because it was terrible, really terrible.

SC: What was that one.

CC: I can't remember.

SC: Were you under contract to Hecht.

CC: No, I was a bit obstinate, I thought alright I am going to make a picture. And I just got on an aeroplane one day and left and said I'm not coming back.

SC: Do you think you learned anything from that.

CC: Yes, I learned to be jolly careful about going to America.

SC: *The Third Secret*.

CC: *The Third* Secret yet another picture I really made because I needed a job. I think it was quite an interesting picture. They still show it at the film school, you know. Well they show it because of the music on it, and for some reason the kids like it. But what happened to that one, it was about madness. Jack Hawkins was in that too. The top man at Fox changed just after we finished shooting it, Zanuck got in and Zanuck decided he wanted to make pictures for the family, and this was a strange mad picture, so he cut out most of the mad bits which didn't help. Another reason for not going to America.

SC: Were you having a more difficult time, I notice the dates have gaps. Because *The Third Secret* was 63, the next thing I have is a picture in 65, *He Who Rides a Tiger*

CC: That was a bad experience too which I prefer not to talk about. All I can say is the producer was a shit, a cheat and a bastard. This is the sort of thing that happened. I had been paid according to my contract, a cheque one day, quite early in the week, Friday night we had a crowd at Marlebone Studios and nobody had been paid and nobody was being paid, the crowd refused to leave until they were paid, the producer arrived about 9 o'clock with a bagful of money, he said I want to talk to you afterwards, have a drink with you afterwards. So he paid the crowd and we went to have a drink. I said what's so important. He said you know that cheque that I paid you last week, well I managed to stop it, that's how I paid them all.

SC: So you said thanks very much.

CC: Thanks very much, ha, ha, ha.

SC: Did you ever get your money.

CC: Eventually.

SC: Did it take long.

CC: Yes, there was the hell of a blood row, we stopped shooting one time, and they came to the rescue, the film finance people. Bloody marvellous.

SC: The National Film Finance Corporation.

CC: Do you know by the way there were two films from the school which are, one is *Veronica Cruse* which is Miguel Pereira, who was one of my pupils, and I saw another picture by one of my pupils the other day. And I'm taking all the credit of course. But I

mean marvelous.

SC: This is the London International Film School. Round about this time you were teaching at the same school but with a different name, it was called just the London Film School. And you were there at a time when I was also tutoring there. I remember checking with you, talking about the couple of years we spent at this school, that one found it very strenous describing to the students things which had become a matter of professional practice in one's own professional life, to start talking theoretically about them to the students was very hard work but enjoyable.

CC: It's enjoyable when you have students who give something in return, very exciting.

SC: The ones you don't, it's a bit like banging your head against a brick wall. I remember the climax of those years as far as I'm concerned. I got asked to produce a television series called *Black Beauty* and I got you in on that because one needed, had you done any television

CC: Oh yes, I did *The Avengers*, another one you were concerned with, *Danger Man*. *Black Beauty* was fun, I enjoyed it, again I needed money. The idea of shooting *Black Beauty* I remembered the book, it absolutely horrified me, alright I've do it, I need the money. But we had a bloody nice time. I enjoyed it.

SC: Of course it wasn't anything like the book.

CC: It was nothing to do with the book.

SC: But it was very nice because we had this marvelous location near Rickmondsworth which is only 18 miles away out of London, with a farm, that farm was very good because you had 360 view of nothing but countryside, and it was just outside London, and the kids were nice, it was all about kids

CC: And the stories were good.

SC: I did two years on that.

CC: Bill Lucas said at the end it's became a way of life and it's very funny to be deprived of it.

SC: Because we used the house for offices and shooting. You'd get turned out of your office in order for a scene to be shot there. It did become a sort of a way of life. It was very pleasant. Tell me about *The Avengers*. Who was the girl

CC: It was Diana Rigg and then there was another girl after her, a pretty girl.

SC: They were fun too.

CC: They were but the schedules on those things were always too tight but apart from that.

SC: They were standard, the half hour ones would be five days. But as I remember on the whole series we did go a few days

CC: Some second unit.

SC: Second unit and extra shooting.

Did you feel when you started doing those tv series you were somehow slumming after features.

CC: It's a difficult question, I'd been slumming on features after all.

SC: The ones you didn't really want to do.

CC: Provided the story was ok, sometimes provided the story wasn't ok there was always the interest of doing the best one possibly could with the material, which is always interesting.

CHARLES CRICHTON

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

SC: Our paths crossed again on a series called *Dangerman* with Pat McGoohan, you did a number of those, how did you get on with Pat for instance.

CC: I think we got on very well together, actually, I hope. My feeling was that we did. Very emotional man. We got on so well that later on when he had his own series he kept on saying you must come and do one Charlie but he never actually invited me to do one.

SC: That was *The Prisoner*.

CC: Yes, mainly we got on fine, a very good actor of course.

SC: He was one of those actors to me who never quite fulfilled his full potential somehow. Did you feel that at all. It was personality acting.

CC: That's what I would have said, there's too much of himself in what he does. He doesn't spread himself into other characters very much.

SC: And I suppose *The Prisoner* was the apotheosis of that, he was trying to do everything. Did you find any great difference between doing features and doing telelvision series.

CC: No, shooting with one camera, as far as I'm concerned the techniques is exactly the same. Usually there's one right place for a camera and anyway we were working on film after all and we weren't using multiple cameras.

SC: Multiple cameras one only tended to use in terms of fights. *The Charge of the Light Brigade* or something, otherwise you're quite right, the point of film is that there's only one place to put the camera and the same is true of whether you're working on film for television or film for the cinema.

CC: And you've done much more than I have.

SC: It's interesting, when tape came in originally all those years ago there was a feeling that tape was going to supercede film but it hasn't. Did you have any experience of tape.

CC: Very little. My problem with tape would always be the

editing. You haven't got that touch that you have when you've got film in your hand. Backwards and forwards and all that kind of thing, you're not touching it.

AL: You can find the exact frame with film.

CC: Yes.

SC: You still can't really on tape can you.

CC: You want to look at another shot so you have to whiz forward, and then, I can't explain it, its like a sculptor not being able to hand his clay.

AL: You can't break it down and hang it up in the bin.

SC: I'm sure you felt that way when you became an editor, certainly it was true for me the first moment I actually handled the stuff, 35mm film in the hand, making movies which I'd adored before in theory, became absolutely real to me, because this is what Chaplin and Eisenstein worked on. Did you feel that when you first became an editor.

CC: No, I don't think so but I do feel film is much easier to handle than tape

SC: There were some interesting films you've done over the past few years, that's industrial films, which is how you first met John Cleese, tell me about those industrial films, management films.

CC: The whole point of them, Video Arts is that they conceived this idea that you can teach more easily by being amusing than raming points down people's throats and they have had enormous success as a result, so much so that other people are now trying to emulate them.

SC: How did you get involved.

CC: A long time ago I worked on a script with John, which wasn't made for various reasons, but we got to know each other pretty well and like each other.

SC: Tell me why it wasn't made.

CC: The producer was David Frost and he couldn't get it financed I think because he was being a little bit greedy about his own participation. This is a guess. So he sold the rights to Ned Sherrin, I have an epithet for him but I'm not going to use it, Anyway Ned Sherrin didn't want me on the picture. He had this

sort o theory that if you are going to appeal to 18 year olds it's good to have an 18 year old director.

SC: Who knows nothing about making movies.

CC: Ned Sherrin didn't want me, therefore John and all the other artists who included Graham Chapman, Ronnie Barker, Ronnie Corbett, they all said they weren't going to be on it if I wasn't going to direct it which was very noble and very kind of them. Anyway the picture was made but it wasn't successful.

SC: That's where you met John Cleese and that led you to

CC: And many years later, I think when we were doing *Dick Turpin* together, John rang up Paul Knight, and said is he moribund or alive, is he capable and can he walk. So Paul gave me a clean bill of mental health I suppose and I went off and made not a particularly good one for Video Arts, but the relationship between John and me grew and over the years we've made many of them together. Which lead to, years ago he said we must make a picture together. And one day we made a picture for Video arts in which John is God, John is not God, John played God, John struck me down for this blasphemous picture and I got this trouble in my back,

SC: As a result?

CC: Absolutely as a direct result. At exactly the same moment John was having a holiday in the south of France in a nice villa with a swimming pool, so he asked me to come down and start talking about a picture. So I struggled down and lay on my back besides the swimming pool and we started to swop ideas. Swop ideas, most of the ideas came from John. Then over a few years the picture developed, I say over a few years because he would go off and make a picture in America and we would also make pictures for Video Arts and I did other things, I did some things for you probably, I'm muddled now, anyway this script therefore took bloody near 4 years to develop before the money was found, and I think that was very valuable because instead of just sitting down and bang bang bang it went into one's head and it was mulled over and reconsidered and reconsidered and reconsidered.

SC: Then what happened, how did it come into actuality.

CC: *Wanda*, well John gathered it, John, he's a very tall man with very long arms and he gathered it together. And he met Kevin Kline in America on *Silverado*, and he met Jamie and he admired them and he began talking to them about it and he even began to get ideas from them about the characters. And then he'd come back and we'd argue the toss and so on. And then one year I

said if we don't make this film next year, we'll never make it at all. He said we're going to make it next year, so then he really got down to putting it down on paper, because all the dialogue of course was totally his. Then he went to America with the package.

SC: I didn't know that about Kline and Jamie Lee Curtis being already interested before he promoted it.

CC: Very much so. One of the ways the film developed was that we had a read through in November of one year at his house, because both Kline and Jamie were here, and now it was July of the following of the year before we started the shoot. So we had that read through, more ideas came through, more rewrites, and then we had 2 weeks of rehearsal 3 weeks before we went on the floor, and then more things happened, and this meant we had 3 weeks to cope with these in the writing, so the whole thing had been talked about and examined with the both main artists long before we actually started to shoot.

SC: And how long was the schedule.

CC: 10 weeks.

SC: And you made it in 10 weeks.

CC: 10 weeks and 2 days but no overtime.

SC: But you did a bit of extra shooting.

CC: Yes, after we had sneak previews in America, it was quite clear the Americans didn't like the amount of cruel torture that John Cleeves revels in so we had to cut some of that out and also the end had to be adjusted because they really wanted a happy ending, Now John and I were slightly wanting a cruelish ending. So we had to just soften the character one little bit so they could get together and possibly live a few weeks quite happily together.

SC: The way John would have had it was Jamie Lee Curtis would have gone off on her own.

CC: Oh no no, they both got over the plane together, but, it was a brilliant scene which John had written and we never shot in which Archie comes to Wanda's flat and says I've got to break it, break everything up and all Wanda can think of is we've got the key to the money, so it's double talk all the time, a double talk scene with one saying one thing and the other thinking about something else. This therefore made, it was impossible for Jamie and Archie, Jamie and Archie really to get together

properly at the end of the scene. Well we never actually shot that scene, we had the script and it was still, Wanda was still a little tart who would do anything for money and therefore you couldn't quite believe they would live happily ever afterwards when they got on the plane. So we softened Wanda's character a bit, that's all.

SC: I think you still feel that. You feel it's going to be alright for a while so long as Wanda can live with it.

CC: You can take your choice.

SC: What was interesting to me was that you and Cleese had these series of private previews in London and then America.

CC: You went.

SC: And Richard Carpenter was at one.

CC: And gave us a very good idea.

SC: Which one.

CC: He said we had two climaxes more or less, there is the climax at the airport, the one upstairs where he shoots the tabs off and then there is the one on the tarmac, and he said it was basically the same scene. So we purely by editing we could try to run the two things together.

SC: Where did that idea come from at the end which wasn't there when I saw the preview where Kline appears at the window.

CC: From a preview I think. We were sitting having dinner afterwards with John friends I think and somebody produced this idea.

SC: Who's idea was the title that he went to South Africa and became minister of justice. It produced a great hoot at my cinema.

CC: That was John's I think. This came out of the fact that if we were going to soften the end in terms of Wanda and Archie we still wanted to have a little twist at the end.

SC: I think you're right because it salvaged any weakening there might be from their getting together, then you get a cynical thing to finish off.

AL: I wanted to get your impressions, what went wrong at Ealing eventually.

CC: I think to some extent that everyone at Ealing towards the late 50s was beginning to feel ab it incestuous, but this is not why the studio closed. Why the studio closed must be a secret that Micky Balcon has taken with him. Whenever encouraged by good trade unionists like Sidney Cole, we asked for more money he always said what are you talking about this is your studio, I'm getting old, I'm going to retire, and then the studio will be yours, so don't bloody well ask for any more money. And then suddenly I wasn't there, I'd left already, suddenly one all those people who thought it was their studio, were told that's it chums, fuck off. And people like Charlie Frend were absolutely shattered.

SC: It was an interesting thing I think you might have forgotten Charles, but there was a moment at Ealing when everybody started thinking that alright everyone was going on year by year but we weren't getting as much money as we might get outside. And there was a meeting of all the directors and all the associate producers which finally deputed Cavalcanti and myself to go and talk to Mick about money.

CC: I'm not forgetting that. When I said when encouraged by good trade unionists

SC: Ah, but it was interesting because I went and saw Mick about it and I think Mick was very frightened by these modest signs of revolt, because I think you'll agree Charles, Mick had a sort of family feeling, we were people, to be fair he had promoted most of us, and he suddenly got quite frightened at the idea we might be deserting the ship, anyhow it wasn't too difficult to get him to give us a bit more money. Mind you they probably could afford it, he and Reg Baker, but I'll always remember that for personal reasons that having finally, Cav sort of dropped out and I concluded the negotiations and fixed the fees and I neglected for a time to sign my contract as a result. Finally one day Mick Balcon sent more me and said I realised I should have put you in the top echelons which I haven't, please if I give you that other £5 a week will you sign your contract, which I did, but I hadn't meant that at all. But that was a symptomatic thing about Ealing, because Mick was a very divided person, wasn't he.

CC: I think he was a very mean person in money terms, I think, and yet he was deeply emotional about one making films and about this being his studio and we being Michael Balcon's young men in the second hand clothing. We did have second hand clothing for the simple reason we were paid bloody little until you and Cav went and stirred things up. I was earning £25 a week for making feature films.

AL: *The Lavender Hill Mob*

SC: Oh no not *The Lavender Hill Mob* but to begin with.

AL: So you were starting to get better money, but what went wrong towards the end. You said it was getting incestuous.

CC: That was one thing, we were beginning to feel a bit incestuous, but what actually caused Mick and Reg Baker to sell the studio is probably a scandal. I don't know if I'm right in saying it or not but the theory at the time was that Reg Baker's son had committed some rather nasty crime and needed a lot of money to bail himself out, Reg Baker needed the money and therefore the studio was closed. Whether this was true or not I cannot possibly vouch for.

SC: I think the things might be related because I remember, and Reg Baker had my sympathy because his son let him down terribly, I remember having brief word with Mick about it and him saying Reg needs all the help he can get at the moment, so that might lead on to what you were saying. Also there was a contributory thing, for the record, the chap who was in charge of the accounts at Ealing who had been there for years and years and years, Palmer, they suddenly discovered that some funny things had been happening to the accounts for many years, and they didn't prosecute so what I'm saying could even be regarded as possibly libelous and should be repeated by whoever is using this tape for archival reasons, but for the record it's true. Mick and Reg Baker decided not to prosecute but to cut their losses and just say good bye. But also there is the factor of the distribution set up in this country, because I remember that film which Harry Watt made in Australia, *The Overlanders*, and that went out on the Rank circuit but it went out with and American picture and the American picture was getting top billing and top revenue, whereas the reason people were going to their cinemas, in the days of double features, was to see overlanders which had got enormous notices.

CC: It was put out as a second feature. That situation was rectified over *The Overlanders*.

SC: I know it was.

AL: But what I was wondering was had Ealing lost it's touch, its way of making films which were successful.

CC: I don't think it's possible to answer that one, Basil Dearden was always making financially successful pictures and when he left he continued making them, it's difficult to say.

SC: It's interesting you say that about Basil, I thinks it's true, his films on the whole were consistently successful

CC: Less critically successful and more economically successful

SC: Which is the right basis for a studio, you need pictures which make money to enable you to do the interesting things,

CC: Alright, you were allowed to make a picture which wasn't at all successful, but that partly because of the excess profits tax. But at that period there was more feeling of experiment at Ealing than later on actually.

SC: Perhaps Alan is right that the impetus of what is now know of the Ealing pictures, that has developed a kind of mythology, tails off.

CC: I don't know if it tailed off or not, all I only know is I felt I wanted to fly from another nest which I unsuccessfully did, I plumitted to the ground immediately and bloke my bloody neck.

AL: Was new blood brought in at all.

CC: No. There would have been, what was very unhappy for people like Michael Truman and Seth Holt was that they were just about to get their chance when all this happened.

SC: Didn't they

CC: They made pictures but they didn't make them with the protection.

SC: Sure which is a great shame, because they were both extremely good and promising.

CC: Absolutely. So if Ealing had gone on, this is what you're talking about, that new blood might have recreated a new Ealing.

SC: One few people of our generation who might have gone on doing interesting things was Robert Hamer. It was sad that Robert departed us when he did. Do you have any thoughts about Robert.

CC: Not any that I want to express, and that's not a mean remark.

SC: Among all the people you've worked with, you've mentioned Bill Hornbeck who was a great influence on you, is there any other people who had a particular impact on you in the course of

you career.

CC: There's Sidney Cole.

SC: I mean people like Cav

CC: I think Cav was an enormous, I think he was the really creative thing about Ealing. He always was talking about the necessity for truth, and he didn't mean you couldn't make a comedy but he was always looking for sincerity. It's very difficult. The word is too small, sincerity, but we always knew what he meant, and I think he had an enormous influence.

AL: He never really made it did he.

CC: I think Mick was jealous of him for one but knew of his value. Would any of you talk about him as a director outside, he didn't really make it but he was an enormous influence on us.

AL: Why do you think it was he didn't really make it.

CC: No idea

SC: I think it's what you just said Charles, basically perhaps his best function was as a

CC: As a producer.

SC: As a real creative producer, to encourage people. I think the best film he made in England apart from those documentary things was perhapsthe one I cut, *Went the Day Well*,

CC: Very good but also

SC: which still survives and has that thing you were talking about, sincerity, stylistic sincerity, if you're going to do it, you do it the best you can, truthfully and on it's own terms, if you've decided to make a thing, you mustn't do things which don't belong to what you're trying to do. Do you agree with that Charles?

CC: Yes I would. Also what about *The Dead of Night* sequence, the Dummy sequence.

SC: The best thing of all is the dummy sequence *in Dead of Night*.

CC: Brilliant

SC: It's absolutely brilliant.

AL: You were talking about Cav as a producer, how do you see a proper producer's job, as opposed to the director's job.

CC: The way it worked at Ealing was really this that there would be the writer, the associate producer, the creative producer, and the director, and we would all through the script together. Then the time would come when the director went on the floor which was what we had discussed, talked about and put on paper and we would put it was put on film. Now the associate producer never came onto the floor practically speaking, but then he saw the rushes and he was assessing, shall we say, whether the rushes managed to put onto the film all the things and the hopes and desires we had been talking about beforehand. He would criticise them from that end, whereas the director was more detaily involved. Therefore he had an enormously important function. For instance there was one sequence in *The Lavender Hill Mob* which Michael Trueman thought we hadn't quite achieved what he'd hoped for and we talked about it and we looked at the rushes and we shot it again and the only change we made was that we put the camera about a foot lower down than it had been in our original shot. And in point of fact it did make a very strong difference to the scene. That was the function there and in fact I think that is the correct function.

AL: So he takes an overall view of everything that has been discussed, and he makes sure it gells.

CC: More or less. But some producers like to interfere more than that, but I think it's right they should keep off the floor. But they can say what they bloody well like about the rushes,

SC: But as a director you need that detached thing of someone, because always, doesn't the odd thing happen Charles, sometimes on the floor, it seems right to you when you say OK cut, print, that's the one, and when you sit in rushes it might still lack something which you didn't see at the time and and that's where a producer and indeed the editor very often can say, point out something that you know maybe is lacking and needs someone outside to mention it to you.

AL: Have you worked with the other type of producer

CC: Yes, Paul Soskin.

SC: On the positive side, and you came up with Cav, anyone else who had an impact on you.

CC: Working with John is quite interesting.

AL: You must get enormous enjoyment working with him, he's creative.

CC: Yes, it was interesting between John and me, because he started off from a short sketch television thing, *Monty Python*

SC: So you helped him in the senes of extending. Some of the critics while saying what a wonderful picture *Wanda* was, they were saying it was a kind of resusitation of Ealing. I'm not sure that's right

CC: I don't agree with that either but of course I was Ealing and I suppose there's a bit of me in it.

AL: Isn't that so with any director.

CC: Well of course it must be. Actor, anybody. But apart from the fact that Mick would have thrown a fit.

SC: Would have thrown it out.It goes far beyond, even the most extreme things like *Kind Hearts*, *A Fish Called Wanda* is a different so to speak kettle of fish.

CC: It's more surrealist than Ealing,

AL: The comedy's blacker.

CC: Well the black side, anybody can go a little bit blacker, a little bit blacker, I think the word surrealist is, because the early Monty Pythons were very surreal. Well this it isn't in that style nevertheless it has a bit of that in.

SC: What are the biggest differences in the course of your career which started in 1932?

CC: I think leaving out subject matter, I think the biggest differenet is the camera is infinitely, the camera basically is so much more mobile. You remember we had prime lenses and it used to run along a railway line, and in fact when I first started it wasn't even that, it was static set ups all the time, and I'm sure you had the same experiences. Then the camera became a little bit more mobile and then the zoom lens started and there were all these marvellous kind of dollies with miniature cranes so that if you had a long emotional dialogue sequence you can let the actors just play it through and the camera can be with them the whole time in a way which never existed before and this I think helps the actors enormously and you're still getting your close up when you want it and your long shot when you want it. Therefore very shortly if we're good enough we'll be able to get

rid of editors altogether.

SC: Says you as an ex editor. Did you have any experience of Independent Frame.

CC: God That was the most dreadful thing, the most incredible waste of money, wasted against the advice, because the Rank Organisation asked the advice of directors and producers everywhere and they all said it's a load of shit, but nevertheless they spent all the money on that, and it was a total failure which it would have to be.

SC: Did you work on that

CC: No, of course not, terrible

SC: As you say, Charles, it pinned everybody down.

CC: Exactly.

SC: Directors, and you need more freedom, you need to be able not to think about the mechanics of the operation, to be able to just concentrate on the creative positive things

AL: It was a great ego trip for David

SC: Well intentioned.

CC: Yes, but why did they list to him and not

SC: I don't know. He must have been a very persuasive character. I suppose.

CC: You see all that money which they spent on it. We were talking about at the time about the need for more mobility for the camera, why didn't they spend the money that way instead of the other way

SC: In pinning it down

CC: You know, things like the forest of lamps that we used to have to contend with, all these things make the whole thing not just easier but more successful I think, the fact that film is faster, that the lamps instead of these great arc things, its so much more mobile.

SC: It's interesting what you say, half in fun, but half, perhaps more than half, seriously about doing away with editing altogether, but doesn't that mean with this enormous ability of mechanical aids to shooting, means that the editing takes place

in the director's mind.

CC: It always has done.

SC: It has but he's previously had to rely on editing as a separate process, with all these thing now one can edit as it were inside the frame.

CC: Well definitely you are editing inside the frame but I'm not sure what your question is.

SC: If you look at your latest film it has a lot of very good editing in the traditional sense, so you'll always need that, won't you

CC: Oh yes. Let's put it this way, Hitchcock who was always desperately experimenting, so alright you make a film in 8 or 10 moves or whatever it is just to show it could be done, but it wasn't particularly successful, because why throw away perfectly good techniques

SC: *Rope* and *Under Capricorn.*

AL: And it wasn't all that new. They did it at B&D when they did *Thark.*

SC: If you had to start your life all over again you wouldn't change

CC: I'd start at the top, and go down.

SC: I'm sure you're terribly delighted with *A Fish Called Wanda.* Did it amaze you the picture was so successful.

CC: No, I knew the script was something I liked, I knew John, and of course I knew the cast was good, so I assumed it. I just crossed my fingers and hoped I would be good But for it to be the big success it's been, no I didn't expect that.

AL: I think to finish with the story about this American tv show who wanted this new young director

SC: Which shows you're young in spirit

CC: What kind of spirit.

SC: Well malt. Thank you.