

BEHP 0143 T Sidney Gilliat

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

RF: You came into the industry through Walter Mycroft, going to BIP in 1928?

SG: I actually came up with him in his little car on New Year's Day, 1928. It was his first day and my first day.

RF: The story about him was that he was a fairly astringent critic and maybe Maxwell or somebody at the studio thought it was better to have him inside than outside the tent. Is that true?

SG: There may have been an element of that, I think the reason was, you have to allow for the fact that Maxwell, the men he appointed, pretty well everybody else with one or two exceptions knew nothing really about making films when it came to a new quota act. And consequently it occurred to them that people who write about films ought to know how to make them which is a tremendous fallacy. I don't think one of them really worked. Mycroft was only one. And he had done a little work with Hitchcock. And therefore he, also he was a founder of the Film Society so he did have what you might call an interest in films, but the others really knew nothing.

The man appointed to the head of Elstree, full name John Heppleby Thorpe was a salesman, a distributor. He knew nothing whatsoever about making films. And they built the studios and had one possible two writers there. They then engaged people, sometimes without having the films, that's not new, it's old but not new. And they had one overall writer called Eliot Stannard who used to complain, "I'm the only, I have to rewrite everybody else's scripts, I'm the only really completely professional writer in the building apart from fly by nights and I've got a floating liver." And when you look at the credits of that time you'll find Stannard's name in nearly all of them. Then, of course, you have to remember the business was completely international. So when you walked on the stage, as I did on that first day, the two big stages, with no sound, of course, before that, so you saw a big stage with even five films being shot on. And a babel of noise and contrasting music and everything else. And each one of those could possibly have a different nationality. Dupont was making Moulin Rouge. Norman Walker was making Tommy Atkins. Hitchcock was finishing off The Farmers Wife. Syd Chaplin was doing A Little Bit of Fluff and Arthur Maude was either shooting or preparing a film with Jack Buchanan called Toni. They're all going on on either the next stage or next door, the same thing. And it was far too many, too soon, supervised by people who didn't know anything about it.

RF: Why was that do you think, was the pre occupation of the producers with the literary aspects of British cultural history, they felt it had to be based on books and play rather than original writing. That's one. The other subject is the influence of the distributors on the production industry. Let take the first one first. Was there kind of ethos that only the printed page was respectable.

2

SG: I think that's always been the case. A book or a play, I mean, putting it the other way round from my point of view, if you wrote original stories it was regarded as part of your job, whether you were asked to do it or not, if you did it in the bath on your holiday it was their property. And this was unthinkable with a playwright or novelist, unthinkable. They may have bought them too little, but as you say the printed page or the spoke word in the theatre was the things which counted. And it may be one reason why they looked to critics, because they regarded them as high priests in those fields. But they weren't, because Mycroft, I realise now that Mycroft had no idea what to do when he got there. He was officially scenario editor but he'd never been one before and he didn't really know. He had to make it up as he went along. And learn from a lot of people.

RF: Had he been solely a journalist, had he been a published author of any sort? Had he written books, had he written plays?

SG: I don't think so. He was a sub editor on the Evening Standard and they doubled up jobs a lot in those days, my father was his boss and he said Mycroft was the best make-up man in the business, making up the page. I think Mycroft who was a hunchbacked dwarf, he had to overcome a very grave defect and the way he did it was to try and go up market mentally himself. So that if he studied the piano, he'd affect to play Debussy, which he couldn't play, he'd play a few chords and say "I love Debussy." In other words it was an affectation to protect his own position. And in the course of it he learned quite a lot. He was well read and tremendously keen on films and was really a high brow.

RF: How did that attitude affect the films which BIP then made once he had gone in?

SG: Well Mycroft didn't really know what he was doing except with Hitchcock, because he had been doing a little work with Hitch. He found the difficulty of all these films on the floor and he didn't know anything about them and he tried to insert some authority and made me a spy for a short time. He'd say "Get the continuity sheets, I don't want you on the floor but get the continuity sheets, compare them with the script and report to me if there are any changes." I was very glad I didn't have to go onto the floorm which was the first idea, because I would have been a marked man in about 10 minutes. So I did that. That lasted a short time, I don't know why. Equally he didn't know what to do with me which was from my point of view naturally meant that I got a slightly distorted view of things. The blind leading the blind.

RF: You were obviously a very adept learner, was he?

SG: Up to a point, I was there 10 months and I never worked with Mycroft again.

RF: When he tried to make you his spy was that studio politics or part of a rational system?

SG: There was no rational system at Elstree at that time. Thorpe was an ignorant man and he, like a lot of ignorant men, he took his ignorance out on the weak and the newcomers and the

3

young and tried to blunder his way through with the rest. He was a totally uncreative person and he was certainly pretty beastly to me and fired me in the end. But he was a man I could not respect. Look if he'd said "I'm learning, I don't know much about this," it would have helped. But his way of simply trying to conceal ignorance didn't work. But the truth was that they hadn't got the material to go on the floor.

RF@ Was there an incessant warfare between post-production stages and the front office.

SG: Yes, of a kind, but the thing which struck me, and not altogether with surprise because of the nature of the press comment over the years, what really surprised me was the authority and latitude that directors had. It was not uncommon for a director, to say come in in late, have a look at the set up, the scene, have a word with the artist or somebody and then say "Well, I'll come back and do this later." and go away and leave the whole unit standing there. And come back at maybe at six or seven and work till three in the morning. And this was not uncommon, especially with the continentals. Temperament was part of it, you see.

Consequently, I never knew when there would not be a unit shooting. And I was never told what days I had off. I used to play rugby and try and get away on Saturdays. But it was impossible to tell whether I could or not, there was always something shooting, all day on Saturday, and I never knew if Mycroft would be in or the rest of the office would go, I just took Saturdays off whenever I could, Saturday afternoon. But it was chaotic really. And one day, it may be in the book but I'll mention it again. My rugby had been cancelled so I worked on and I was alone in the reading room of the scenario department, a fairly big room. The door burst open and in came Thorpe and Maxwell. I'd never met Maxwell. They were both extremely rude to me.

RF: For what reason?

SG: They said "Where's everybody?" I said "They're not here." "Why aren't they here?" I said "I don't know." They said "What are you doing here?" I said "I'm carrying on with the job." "Where's Mr Mycroft?" I said "I don't know." "Why isn't he here?" I said "I don't know, I think he's gone to the matinee at the theatre." "Oh, well what subjects have you got here?" And that was the nub of it. They were facing the usual nightmare of empty space and nothing to put in it and they walked down the row of books on shelves and they'd take one out and say "Is that any good" to me. And I'd say "There's a full report in the card index." They'd open that up and just pick a card at random, Maxwell in a rage all the time, "We've got to get a picture in, we've got to get a picture in. What's this, what's this?" I'd try and explain what it was. "What's this one with a French title?" I'd say "Oh, there's a report on it there." And then they all marched out and that was that.

RF: Where did your reader's reports go? Did they go all the way to Maxwell, did he take an interest in each individual subject or was he only concerned that the studio was operational?

4

SG: I don't think that he took an interest in all the subject, filling space, getting people in, that kind of thing. Where the stories went, there was a lady called Mrs. Boyd who ran the department and we were allocated stories to read and report on. Those reports went to Mycroft. If Mycroft felt that they were worth it he would give them to different directors or unit controllers and the various units. For instance, I did a report, I think, on Under the Greenwood Tree and they asked for it chapter by chapter and that went to Harry Lachman, who made one picture before that. And Harry Lachman worked entirely from the chapter by chapter synopsis.

But before that, it's in the book, I was given the tripe heap which had accumulated over two years, unsolicited manuscripts and I was told to go through those. I picked one off the top and said "I think it will make a good film." Nobody paid any attention. And they'd say "Don't recommend it, just give an idea of the story, three lines" which I did. I then took the next one and the next, total abysmal rubbish, a waste of everyone's time. And this went on for about two weeks and I was laboriously writing these accounts, not synopses, because they didn't think I was up to that. Then Mrs. Boyd make some remark to me, I forget what. I said "This is a complete waste of time, it's quite right when you call it the tripe pile, but the first one I thing is still good." She said "Well write a synopsis but don't recommend it." So I wrote a synopsis but I did make it clear I thought it was a good film, property. And that was bought and that was Harry Lachman's first film, before Under the Greenwood Tree. No one said thank you or anything, no one what a clever fellow to pick it out of the tripe pile, except Harry Lachman remembered and he was always very nice to me.

RF: You said he'd made one film before.

SG: The film he'd made before Elstree were all shorts. I think in association with Rex Ingram's company, Micky Powell acted in them, travellogues

RF: This was in Nice.

SG: Nice and North Africa. Micky acted in it, played a young traveller, for travellogues.

RF: And Micky was now a stillsman at Elstree.

SG: Yes. He also played a part, a small comic part in Rex Ingram's film, The Magician which I think had Paul Weigener as the magician. And Micky came as you say a stillsman to Elstree and they called Harry Lachman a technician, some broad term like technical consultant.

RF: Had he not been a photographer?

SG: I'm sure that Lachman must have been a photographer, and a painter.

RF: He's a somewhat mysterious character in that he was around a great deal in the 30s era, and Hollywood

SG: And France. His best regarded film was a French film which

had a vogue following called

for Paramount in Paris.

RF: What are your memories of his as a person?

SG: I was very fond of Harry. I was a junior of juniors earning 50 bob a week. He would use terrible language, I would put my head in his door and he would say "Get to hell out of here you cock sucking son of a bitch." I'd say "I'll come back later." He'd say "Come in, what is it?" And I'd tell him what it was and he was nearly always helpful. And the picture collapsed, that's Under the Greenwood Tree, because of seasonal problems. It cost me my job indirectly. And Harry would send me little notes because I had a gag in it which got me my next job. And he would write little notes saying "I shot your gag yesterday, it looks a bit long, I hope it will be alright." And then "I'm cutting your gag into the picture." And finally "I'm sorry I couldn't keep it in, it took up too much space." He always let me know.

RF: How did you get bits into the film, did you have to do it through the director?

SG: In that case they gave me the script, I think when they didn't know what to do with you, they gave you the script and I did a little bit of junior collaboration if you can call it that with the script writer Rex Taylor, who thought I was quite mad incidentally. But he was nice to me too.

RF: Why mad?

SG: I think because I wrote an opening for another script, a Betty Balfour picture called Paradise, which he was working on and I came to him with this idea. And it was all full of symbols, lots of symbols in those days, and of course I didn't realise until afterwards that he probably thought I was a bit mad because there was a black cat in it which kind of indicated ahead that she was going to win a lottery or something, I've forgotten exactly what she was going to win. And of course the black cat means the opposite in America which I didn't know at all. But he was very nice to me and Harry was very good and in the end I did the costumes for that picture. The one and only time, for Under the Greenwood Tree. And most of them we used on the picture when it was restarted in the spring.

RF: We had a chat with Harry Miller a little while ago and Harry remembers Harry Lachman on location insisting that a tree be taken down and taken to the studio and it blocked the traffic to Boreham Wood that day. Does that ring any kind of bell?

SG: It would have been afterwards because we started shooting silent in October, possibly November. And Harry was a very literally minded American. A very odd chap in many ways. Harry started shooting, but before he started I remember a note he sent me "What is a greenwood tree? I want an actual greenwood tree." I sent a note back saying "See Shakespeare, under the greenwood tree." "To hell with Shakespeare, what does it mean? You goddam bastard, what is the point of giving me stuff like that." So I'd say "Well, it's a generic term." "Speak English." I said "Well it covers trees in a forest, green wood tree. Come with me lets get into the forest." "I think there's a greenwood tree, so you find out where I can find a greenwood

tree." And eventually it was a giant oak in Ashbridge Park and a good deal took place underneath it.

It had a slight handicap for late October, November, in that any sun which was about wouldn't get through the oak and the story was that in the end they were tying leaves on it because they were falling off too fast. But I was fired around that time, just after that time so I only went one day on location. And that was when, they got there and we were working and the sun was out, it was about their first day, and suddenly the leading lady had no costume and they all turned on me. And I said "I don't know anything about it." "You did the costumes." "I didn't do the leading lady's, I had nothing to do with it at all." "Well you should have seen that it was there." Harry blew up. The leading lady who was Russian by origin, in spite of being Dorset by the book, she threw a temperament. I was sent back to the studio, I went back to the studio, collected her costume and brought it back. I'll never forget Harry came out, away from the unit when I got out of the car, and took the box. He said "I've told that cow to take more interest in what's she doing and what's she wearing in future and I've put the delay in the diary down to waiting for sun." I always liked him for that. He was a good chap. He was an extraordinary undecided director. He was quite capable of walking off the set and coming back. But he did it genuinely, he felt he had to have the right decision and it took him a long while to arrive at it.

RF: Did any director prepare a picture in those days. It all sounds rather off the cuff.

SG: They worked from a script. The only organised one was old Tommy Bentley, with his close up machine and his scripts coloured for different days of the week and that kind of thing, different sequences. But he was a very old fashioned director.

RF: To you coming into the business which seemed the better method, the seat of the pants method or the coloured pencils bit?

SG: Well, I think it's very clearly divided. There was the mad, the genuinely mad, the ignorant and the wishful thinkers which sometimes covered all categories. The mad ones were people like Dupont who had enormous set tos with Vaudeville and didn't really know what he was doing with Moulin Rouge.

RF: Had he known what he was doing with Vaudeville at Ufa.

SG: The picture looks like it, I think he would have done. But again what you said, script. They told me that in Cannes that they are doing a complete reprint with a score by somebody like Colin Davis for Moulin Rouge. I said "It's a terrible film, nothing could make that into a good film." What can you do with a film where the hero decides to commit suicide by tampering with his own car so it looks like an accident. He then hears that his girlfriend has taken the car, goes into a dead faint which inhibits him from telling anybody. He wakes up from the faint, remembers what has happened and before he can do anything he goes into another faint. I don't think anyone can make anything of that but it will be interesting to see.

RF: I suggest that it's all very German, quite literally, because this was the era of expressionism, which was not only in sets and photography but also in acting and plot construction. It was all a bit peculiar to our notions now. The other thing I wanted to ask you about the studio at that time. It sounds a very fraught atmosphere, was everybody a bastard, especially to the juniors. And again it sounds like the survival of the fittest, was that part of the course?

SG: Yes, of course you have to realise right up to the first year or two of the talkies they were ambitious. So the films were in conception, not unimaginative, as a blanket term. Some were very imaginative, others were old fashioned British stuff like Tommy Atkins. But they were not unambitious. When they really ran out of money because of the huge cost of things like Atlantic and Piccadilly which was a total disaster, they then brought their horns in, what were really quota quickies, not much better. That led to a complete change in the character of the studio with Ernie Lottinger and that style of thing coming in. And the writers became hard working hacks instead of wandering from production to production I suppose. A different world, what after 1930 really, it gradually turned over to cheaper product in every sense of the word.

RF: Would the depression have had anything to do with that? The economic condition of the country?

SG: It might have had, I wouldn't know enough about that in relation with films. But I think the chief thing was talkies, we were so late with talkies that by the time I left there wasn't a foot of sound shot or any sound system in the studio. And when did the Jazz Singer come up.

RF: 27 in the States Here I don't know, 28 really.

SG: Most people thought silent films would go on, when I was there. So did I

RF: In Hollywood, studios such as MGM were making silents into the very early 30s, two versions. A lot of cinemas weren't wired for sound, they couldn't afford to be. Going back to a personal thing. You had come in with ambitions specific to films, you'd wanted to work in films?

SG: No, I' came in, did you ever see a film by Sascha Guitry called Le Roman d'un Tricheur, in which at the beginning a little boy performs some peccadillo like stealing an apple or something, with the result the numerous family of 13 or 14 won't let him share their supper. They sit him in a corner with a bit of dried bread while they have a mushroom supper. The next shot is 13 coffins going up the street followed by one little boy, the sole survivor from which he draws the lesson that dishonesty pays and honesty doesn't. I came into films by accident through a piece of dishonesty. It was only a peccadillo. But I went to see a film which happened to be John Ford's Iron Horse, I rather enjoyed it.

I went home. We lived in the suburbs then. And I found to my surprise, Walter Mycroft sitting with my father over a cup of

coffee. I don't think he'd been to the house before. I don't know what they'd been talking about. He knew me because I'd done office boys jobs from time to time at the Standard in the sub room. So he said "I hear you've been to the cinema." He probably called it the Kinema in those days. I said "Yes." He said "What did you see?" I said "The Iron Horse." "Ah!" He always did this "Ah, what did you think of it." And I was going to say I enjoyed it thoroughly. And I remembered he'd said something like it lacked panache or something, typical Mycroft phrase. So I said "Well, I quite enjoyed it but it lacked flair." And he turned round to my father and said to my father "George, this boy ought to go into films." And I found out afterwards this meeting with my father was to secure a release from his contract, to go, not to Elstree, but to Gaumont. And in the end, through Hitchcock, I think, he went to Elstree and took me with him. But I had no idea of going into films I loved films but I had no idea of going into them at all. It never entered my head I'd be much too frightened.

RF: The 64 million dollar question, if those little threads hadn't all come together, like almost in one of your omnibus scripts would you ever have found your way into films do you think?

SG: I was destined for journalism, but I hadn't done any journalism. Equally I hadn't done very well about preparing to get into journalism either. And I think my father thought this is one way of getting him out into the world and he kept on at Mycroft. No one wanted me. I seemed to arouse enormous distaste in everybody. Only two, the first was at Gaumont Co Ltd, Gareth Gundry, and the second was Appleby Thorpe

Both of them seemed to dislike me on sound. But then Mycroft having ditched Gaumont, then had to come to my father again and help to cook up some excuse why he couldn't go to Gaumont. So he could in fact go to Elstree. I never knew what that excuse was. I know he consulted my father. And my father must have said "What about Sidney?" So I did go to Elstree.

RF: You were part of the package.

SG: I was part of the package. Reluctant on their part. Not all that enthusiastic on mine. I was terrified. But that was how. I loved films. I saw films from the cradle upwards. I was a great enthusiast but I hadn't thought of going into them.

RF: It's surprising that you hadn't working in films if you had that love for them

SG: I can't recall, I think I was too frightened to go into rather an exotic background like that with a lot of people who rather intimidated me. And I had strange ideas of what the film business was like.

RF: That baptism of fire didn't put you off, the fact that you were underpaid, over worked, much put upon dogs body, didn't hurt you.

SG: I was fired for pointing out that you couldn't, that I didn't know anything about films, this was in the corner of a

railway carriage, and I didn't know it for six years, but Thorpe's secretary was sitting in a corner and I hadn't seen her and I said "I know nothing about films but I don't think I would start a film shooting some exteriors under an enormous oak in the middle of November." That was reported and I was out the next week, having been reprieved, Mycroft told me, the week before.

RF: What had been your previous sin?

SG: Nothing, redundancy, the fact that they probably didn't like me but they hadn't anything against me, that they could hold against me.

RF: It's difficult to believe that you had personality problems, you sound as if you were very willing and amenable young man.

SG: I was very callow and that was the word Mycroft used. But Hitchcock, I did a bit of research for, Hitchcock played his rather silly practical jokes a good deal and one of them was to send a penny dreadful across to Mycroft, I remember the names, the Fearless, they used to be about this big and they were known as penny or penny dreadfuls, he sent it "Would you kindly review this for me." And Mycroft came out with it, it went to the reading room where I was and he said "Gilliat, this is Hitchcock's idea of humour, do something with it that I can send back to him, say anything you like." So I wrote a review of it, without reading it of course in which I really synthesised it as the story of Madame Butterfly and finished up with odd remarks, she was attracted by the healthful glow of his countenance, Cocosan does and does that and they finish up sharing the same kimono. And this goes back to Hitchcock. What he said I've no idea but when, I did hear one remark from a colleague that when Mycroft read this, he was in a script conference, and by then they'd got two more writers and he threw it on the table and said "This is the boy they're trying to take from me." So he was always against my being fired and told me so. But there it was, he couldn't do much.

RF: You got the bullet for saying that you knew nothing about making films but, did they start to make sense to you in terms of learning your craft and the craft, how long did that take.

SG: I don't think I learnt an awful lot there but I learnt in a slow way through my next job with Walter Forde, because moving from the almost grandiose, totally cosmopolitan atmosphere of Elstree to the little Nettlefold Studios was as big a contrast as you could possibly think of. And I learned that you could do a lot with a little there. And I never found many people learning that lesson in films.

RF: Had you done creative writing of any sort before this, had you envisaged yourself as a writer?

SG: I wanted to be a writer. I had a sort of urge to write stories but I think I looked on my self as a journalist to be more than anything else. But I didn't like the idea of being a reporter. I thought it would be nice to review books but I've only reviewed on book in my life.

RF: Even the Kinema was considered a little infra dig at this

10
time, it was not what a well brought up young middle class gentleman would do.

SG: No, I don't think that bothered my father in the least. But it bothered some people I think. It was certainly not an upper-class thing. I think you went down to films. And of course even in an ordinary middleclass suburb, to go to the pictures was not upper class, it was lower class. The common people went to the pictures.

RF: As indeed later on one only had television in the servants hall I believe.

SG: I didn't know that. But a very apt comparison.

RF: Just as a side line I remember Sandy Watney once in a meeting saying that he never saw television, there was a set but it was in the servants hall. And then he betrayed the fact that he'd seen a programme so he was not exactly being honest. You've mentioned Hitchcock and his sense of humour which was rather malicious was it not.

SG: It was always at somebody's expense.

RF: Was it specifically aimed. This was presumably a problem of his that he had to be getting at somebody all the time.

SG: Yes, particularly again the ordinary people on the floor. His prime butt, and he was not so beastly to him, his prime butt was Dicky Beville who was his production manager or something, awfully nice chap. And he'd play all sorts of jokes, say "We're going to a reception, you'll wear full morning dress." And then take him down to Wapping in a little motor boat with himself dressed for the docks but Dicky Beville in full morning dress with topper. That kind of joke.

RF: It sounds very puerile, was it puerile at the time or was it considered funny, did it crease people?

SG: A lot of stories are told about Dicky Beville, the famous nasty one about getting the chap in handcuffs which we all heard at Elstree, did happen, it happened after my time and to a prop man or something of the sorts. It was a shocking thing to have done really. His jokes with Dicky Beville were on another level really, he was fond of Beville, but he was a butt, Dicky Beville told many of Hitchcock's jokes and the jokes he played back again. He invited Hitchcock to dinner and told him it would be white tie and tails and appeared in a tweed suit and there was only a wife and a friend, also informally dressed and Hitchcock made no comment, ate his dinner, retired into the drawing room, lay on the floor and went to sleep for the rest of the evening. That was the sort of defence Hitchcock would put up. He never dared do it with me or Frank. The only time he tried it he got the worse of it. It upset him, he did get the worse of it.

RF: Was that a specific incident on The Lady Vanishes?

SG: It was about the Lady Vanishes but it happened when I was working with him on Jamaica Inn, it actually happened. And he knew that we were very sore because an article appeared in the

11

New Yorker, and Hitch said to me one day when I was working on Jamaica Inn, "I should tell you I think that I'm the first Englishman to have a profile in the New Yorker, and it's two halves which is unusual so I'm in two numbers. I also want to tell you that in it, because I've seen it, in it is a reference which says Hitchcock always writes 99.4 per cent of his own scripts, the scripts of his pictures. I want you to know I certainly did not have you in mind when I saw that sentence. If they quoted me it did not refer you or to Frank." Well it could only have referred to Charles Bennett who was much too good a fellow, still is, for that kind of remark to apply. So anyway when Lady Vanishes came out, a fairly big critical success, this was simultaneously, roughly by chance this article appeared in two issues and was quoted by somebody else and then picked out by Castlerosse in his diary stuff that he did for the Express and quoted this percentage. So I said to Hitchcock "This is very unfair, I think that you should correct it." And Hitchcock wouldn't do anything about it. Jim Williams wrote a letter which was part of the writers' campaign to get attention for writers, we had a press campaign, and Jim Williams, J B Williams wrote a letter in which he said quite truthfully that he'd seen the script of Lady Vanishes 18 months before Hitchcock had seen it.

I was working with Hitch and had the embarrassing thing of next day finding Hitchcock in a rage which meant Hitchcock getting very quiet and very contained and standing with his back to a wall and his hands against it, which he always did. And he said "This is a terrible thing to have written, and so on, are you going to protest about it." I said "Hitch it's true. and Frank feels the same." So Hitch did an extraordinary thing, the next day or there about without saying a word to me he sent a telegram to Frank, in those days you sent telegrams, purportedly from his mother, I found out it was indeed his mother's name, "My son Alfred says that the article you referred to first appeared in the New Yorker on such and such a date." signed Emma Hitchcock. Two hours later another telegram, no I've got it the wrong way round, he worked it backwards, he said the reference referred to was in Castlerosse's article and signed it Emma Hitchcock. Two hours later the reference was taken from x, whatever the intermediate quotation was, some other paper. Then another telegraph saying "My son Alfred says that the original article appeared on such and such a date in the New Yorker." And then there was a fourth, fascetious, in the same vein.

Frank phoned me up and said "What do I do." He said "I think I should do something." I said "Well, I don't know what to suggest, it's embarrassing our working with him." He said "I think I should reply." I said "Okay." So Frank rang me back and said how about this "My son Frank says that your son Alfred is a big bully and steals all the marbles. Yours Martha Launder." The next day, Hitchcock is back to the wall, "Frank has sent me an awful letter. Awful letter, how could he do it." I said "Well, didn't you send him something first." "Oh just a joke. And explanation really." You could never persuade him to make one statement. I never have from that day to this. Never have.

RF: Did you have any pet theory about Hitchcock, what made him tick?

2

SG: I haven't. I think that he was a very complicated person indeed. I think that he must have a great fundamental insecurity because when in a very secure position he always betrayed, he always behaved, it's very hard to describe, he had to be the patron and not the patronised, that was very important. And he was very unhappy if he didn't get his own way and he would find his own way of pointing it out. He told me that when they were doing The Paradine Case, Selznick was a notorious interferer and had interfered a good deal on Notorious, I think with success. Hitchcock did The Paradine Case and told me "I have tamed Selznick to the point where he sends me a note, can I come on the floor?"

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Selznick trained to the point where he would write him a note saying "May I come on the set, I want to talk about this or that." And Hitchcock would say no or yes as the case may be. And once, Selznick came on the set without permission, Hitchcock simply removed himself and his chair to the corner of the stage and sat himself in the chair facing the wall, a foot or two away, like a naughty schoolboy and refused to come out until Selznick left the set.

When I first knew Hitchcock he was very friendly with John Appleby Thorpe who probably got him a job there, or certainly engaged him. Thorpe was a notorious malanpropist, he was drawn by Douglas Furber the only man who can drop four hs in the word hollyhock. And Hitchcock met him years after they quarrelled and years after Thorpe's brief reign was over and he'd become a salesman again, Hitchcock met him in Wardour St, couldn't avoid him. So they fell to a brief chat and said "Well John," for something to say, "if you ever think of coming back into film production," He said "Hitch, I've often thought about it, I've often thought about it. I've had propositions and I've always turned a sceptic ear to them." He was the man who in a film told the butler not to 'and a letter to the people who were his employers in the story but to go out and bring the letter in on a silver saliva. And I myself heard him refer to the areas of Flanders in one of the numerous World War one pictures. So much for Hitchcock.

There is still some more about Hitch. I was working with him on Jamaica Inn. The Lady Vanishes was about to come out. It was our script and existed, having been written for another director quite some time before Hitch ever saw it. One day he said to me while we were working on Jamaica Inn, "I ought to tell you this. I'm the first Englishman to have a profile in the New Yorker magazine. And they've done me proud. They're given me two issues, half in each. And I ought to tell you also that in it that I'm quoted as saying I always write 94.6% of my own scripts. And I just wanted you to know that that kind of remark doesn't apply to writers like you and Frank." I thanked him for that. At the same time I didn't say anything but he had worked very successfully with Charles Bennett an old friend of mine for some years and I do not think that Charles Bennett only contributed point 6 or whatever it was that that story allowed him.

Anyway the picture came out and some periodical, it might have

been a trade periodical quoted the New Yorker, and Lord Castlerosse and his column in the Daily Express picked it up and made a reference to Hitchcock always writing 96.4 of his own script. And the picture came out and got very good reviews but several references to this. And I said to Hitch "I think it would be fair, I'm surely you'd like to make it clear that in this case it was our script." And Hitchcock would never do this, he would not do it.

Meanwhile we were forming a press association, press subcommittee within the Screenwriters Association. And a group of us were writing letters to the press, doing everything we could from time to time to increase the importance of the screenwriter. And one of our colleagues, J B Williams wrote one in which he pointed out that he had read the script of The Lady Vanished 18 months before Hitchcock ever saw it. And Hitchcock was very upset that this letter appeared. He complained about it to me. I told him that in fact it was true which he didn't deny and I said that Frank and I were on the subcommittee and Frank felt quite strongly about it.

The next thing which happened a few days later, Frank rang me up and said that "I've had two telegrams from Hitchcock, they were signed Emma Hitchcock. The first one reads "My son Alf, would like you to know that the reference to my son's 96.4% of his scripts was taken by Castlerosse from the Daily Film Renter or whatever it was." And it was signed Emma Hitchcock which was his mother's name. The next telegram said "My son Alf says that the item in the Daily Film Renter was actually taken from the New Yorker." And then a third one, I forget what it was but three telegrams in all. And Frank said "What shall I do?" I said "Nothing." He said "I think we should send a telegram back." I said "I'm busy, you think of one. But I agree with you, I think we should." So he wrote a telegram back which put an end to the whole exchange. He wrote it as coming from his mother and it read as something like this. "Dear Emma Hitchcock, my son Frank says that your son Alf is a big bully and steals all the marbles and belittle our 3.6%" or whatever it was. The next day Hitchcock said to me standing with his back to the wall, his hands against the wall, the palms of his hands against the wall as he often did when he was embarrassed or angry, he said Frank has sent me an awful letter." I said "Well, Hitch, I think it was a telegram." He said "It was awful, telegram or not." I said "He has a point. you know." I didn't know the text but I knew he was going to send one. "We have got a point. One reference would make it better." But no reference ever came at any time.

RF: Was he ever referred to as Alf, other than by his mother, or was it always Hitch.

SG: I should imagine he was, because he certainly was from time to time by people before it became Hitch, or as he used to say 'itch, without the cock. He was a very strange man, very strange man.

RF: Why was Jamaica Inn such a mess, I know we're jumping ahead.

SG: I'll give you the real reason, which I'm convinced is right and it never has been given at any time. And that was a quite

simple one. Hitch was going to do Jamaica Inn, he agreed to do the subject for Mayflower who owned the rights. Mayflower, which was Erich Pommer and Charles Laughton, they did the usual American thing of sending their script to the American censor, or the book I think it was, I believe Clemence Dane did a script but it was very mysterious, nobody ever saw it. And the American censor flatly refused to have another parson being the villain because he had Dr. Syn, he let Dr. Syn go by with George Arliss as a smuggling piratical Dr. Syn, he let that go by but said no more sinful clergymen. So they accepted this without argument and by the time I came into the thing, because I came in only to do a repair job, with Hitch, they had decided to make him a kind of regency squire which I never thought was adequate and I said "Couldn't you have another go at the censor, because nothing is as good as the parson in that part." And they didn't or wouldn't or couldn't. And I think that took the edge off the whole subject from the beginning because Laughton, I think to be fair to Laughton, none of us had a completely clear picture of the squire.

Hitch and I both saw it as melodrama, unashamed characters who were melodrama. Laughton used to go on about he must have one hand in the soil you know, he would use all sorts of totally inappropriate expressions. I remember one night at Ciro's Laughton said you have to feel the seats and the sweat on the whores body, there wasn't whore in it of course. But he meant getting down to earth, getting to the nitty gritty. And, of course, he never did that with any character. The nearest he got to doing it was with Hobson's Choice. Laughton was an actor of instinct who had to make himself believe that he was an actor of reason, that's why Laughton never got better in any take because of what was up here, mainly because what was in here.

And I think, the other thing was that Hitchcock fell in love with the first scene which was the coach arriving at the Jamaica Inn at night with the girl and the men refusing to drop her luggage anywhere near Jamaica Inn, throwing it down on the lawn, and then the scared face of Joss the innkeeper, her uncle by marriage, with the candles, the oil lantern, he saw all that in pictures. And as more than one person pointed out, if there was a viewpoint in the picture it was not the girl's, it was the Robert Newton part, the policeman, we called the officer of the law because there weren't any policeman, he was a law officer and he was the one whose eyes it should have been seen through.

RF: Do you think that there was a double standard of censorship in those days, that the production code administration would be only too happy to find a reason not to have a British picture succeed.

SG: No, I don't think so. The trouble was with the American system which to some with degree influenced ours, if you ever worked with it, and I did in America briefly, they went entirely by the book. We of course never had a written constitution, the Americans had a written constitution and a written code as well for film. And they stuck to it. Your best with a foreign film of avoiding that was simply to shove in your film without a word, through Rank and certain enemies of ours, we had to submit a script of Rakes Progress to the Hays Office. And it was then the Breen Office, it had just become the Breen Office. And it was

rejected, the number of objections covered nearly two pages of tightly typed cablegram and would take the whole guts out of the whole thing. It seems incredible today but it's true. I showed the version to David Lean, Ronnie Neame, Powell and Pressburger, all the people at Independent Producers and they all agreed that the film was immensely damaged by the cuts. We took all those cuts and submitted the picture as it was with, we made small modifications which didn't do any harm and it was sent to the Breen Office and passed to him following Monday when Joe Breen came back from Palm Springs after the weekend. But he never reinstated all the cuts, in other words we would have been justified utterly in putting the script, the film in with no script being submitted beforehand because what happened would not have been anything like as bad as when we did put the scripts in beforehand. I mean Jessie Sherlock, who was English, who was his deputy passed it without a cut.

RF: Was that an American version or the released version.

SG: It was our version, but you could say to be fair there were one or two suggestions caused by the Breen comments but they were very small.

RF: And they were what, essentially points of Catholic morality.

SG: Essentially they were points of divorce, divorce through adultery must be punished, a person must not profit by it. There were many others, you couldn't show a chamber pot being put on the top of Martyr's Memorial; , you couldn't have a husband say, when Rex Harrison says to the husband of the wife he's been sleeping with, he realises the husband knew what she was like all along, he says "What are you going to do now Sandy? And Sandy says "Oh, I don't know, be fool enough to take her back I suppose." Breen wouldn't have it, condoning adultery. So, that he stuck by, he stuck by that when he came back from Palm Springs, so in the end I couldn't get Rex but I got Griff Jones to do his part and when Rex asked him the question "What will you do Sandy?" He says "Oh, I don't know." What can one usefully say. That's the whole approach

I don't know what can you usefully say, there's nothing you can say to please the censor and that went in the film. But it was cut up a lot and the chamber pot became a collapsable opera hat, he bangs on the side and he puts it on, not very funny, quite a few things. And they changed the title, Notorious Gentleman

RF: Was that the worst instance of Hays Censorship you had

SG: I think that was about the worst. The worst I had in any censor was a film which has never been seen and that was called A Night in Marseilles, and was taken from called The Last Tango, long before Marlon Brando's film and it was a quota quickie and I ghosted it for a friend who didn't manage to get round to it. And Albert de Courville directed it and he put everything in it, scenes in a cafe he turned it into a brothel, and when I went down to Walton where they were making it, I went there on something else entirely and poor Bill Lott the studio boss said we've a letter from the censor, he used those exact words it's banned as sordid, squalid and totally unfit for public exhibition.

RF: That was the British censor.

SG: That was the British censor, Brooke Wilkinson. It was never shown.

RF: Because in the very early 30s the Hays Office was the more benign and a little more tolerant until they came unstuck on the Mae West picture.

SG: They began to get everything written down, that's the great thing to avoid, because they go by the book there and that's what they did with The Rake's Progress. And it's a great mistake of Rank, the trouble was that Rank too thought that The Rake's Progress was immoral because his wife did and the people around Rank like old Jimmy Sloan who became the converted Methodist I believe, they were not particularly friendly to us and they did their best to get it stopped and the method, when this went around that it was an immoral film, can you believe it, the answer was sort it out between Rank and our agent, was send the script to Brean . And by the time the reply came back we'd been shooting four or five weeks and it was too late, we told Rank we would observe the cuts but it did affect the end product.

RF: Mind you, they probably needed to have a production code seal on the film to get the release in the States, but you would submit the film once it had been shot.

SG: After a long experience, I shouldn't think more than once have we submitted things to the censor and there always has been trouble when we have. We've seldom been in trouble when we haven't, it is a practical that's it, there is nothing beyond it, that's it. Whereas with a book or a script they have to visualise what's going on.

RF: Did you ever adopt the tactic of putting in a great deal which they would argue about and you could yield and still keep stuff in?

SG: I suppose we might have done once but we never did it as a conscious practice. And I think what cuts were made were generally stupid anyway. But we had very little trouble in that respect. The worst trouble I got into was Green for Danger and what happened there was rather stupid. We had a production manager under, the question arose from me, at one time they wouldn't have any scenes in an operating theatre. And I mentioned this to who was a production manager, I said "I wonder if we should check on the present attitude of the BBFC over operating theatres and perhaps have a word with them." He said "I've got a girl friend who's up there. I said "Just slip her the book on the side, I just want a little guidance, I don't really want to take it to the censor yet. Well, she must have managed it very badly and he told me, he read me a letter, I didn't actually see the letter which said "a most undesirable film to make at all." I don't think we had started making it, the reason being that the hospital in the book was a military hospital and there are many, many wounded soldiers still in hospital and they might be terrified because the guilty party in the story was a nurse, they might be terrified of being murdered by a nurse. So he couldn't allow it. We went ahead and made it

12

because I thought this was from one of his cronies up there. When a long time later I saw the letter it was signed as clear as anything J. Brooke Wilkinson himself. Anyway when the film was shown to Wilkinson, he put forward so many cuts we couldn't have shown the film at all.

So our chairman, George Archibald got together and he was very critical of my role in it, he thought I should have had a session, so anyway, there's only one thing to do, take him out to lunch. So we got him the best black market lunch then available and pointed out that indeed we had listened to this letter, the hospital was not a military hospital but an emergency hospital which would take anybody, and no soldiers were shown in it at any time, so we'd taken very careful note of that. And we went through it point by point and he didn't want any affair between the doctor and the nurse, even if it was only slightly indicated, we talked him into all of them. In the end he said I must insist on one cut because of the operating theatre, it is too close, too close, so take that one out. No, It's too close, take that one out." So we took it out and then it got the certificate. And when it got the certificate and he'd consumed a good deal of our goods, a lot of brandy, all the best wine, everything, I rang him up and said I've been looking at the film again, Brooke, and I really can't see any objection to that scene, would you be kind enough to look at it again if we re-insert it. Certainly certainly. Looked at it and rang me up and said "I'm sorry I must insist that that cut is adhered to." I said "May I ask why?" And he said "Yes, it's too comprehensive, too far away." The exact opposite of what it had been. That never got in, but it didn't make too much difference.

RF: So lunching the censor didn't only begin with John Trevelyan, it had a long history before that.

SG: Oh I remember having lunch with Watkins but not on that line. But quite honestly, in my view, the lunch with Brooke Wilkinson consisted of two qualities only, offended vanity and authority and just getting his own back, just those two things, getting his own back and offended vanity because we hadn't told him we were still going ahead.

RF: They had to justify their position too I suppose to some extent, to give themselves a reason for their existence

SG: But the whole attitude of the man I thought was odious because at the end of the lunch he got hold of George Archibald's sleeve and said "Well George, we're all there to help each other, aren't we. The Board of Censors is really there to help you and we'll see what we can do for you." He was all, and then of course, this is the top up, within a few days the Royal Command Performance, the picture for the Royal Command Performance was A Matter of Life and Death which had detailed, no operation ever takes place in Green for Danger, it's all in the preliminary. But a brain operation takes place in A Matter of Life and Death and in colour and the scenes he objected to were all in. And afterwards I ran into George Archibald, we still hadn't heard from the censor then, we still hadn't got his final reply, and we happened to be passing up down the aisle together and George said to me "We'll have no more trouble with Green for Danger from Brooke Wilkinson, he hasn't got a leg to stand on."

RF: Did you ever hear tell of the BBFC as a corrupt institution?

SG: No, I don't think it was corrupt. Alright you could influence people, yes, you could talk them round, and I'm sure that applied in America too, but we never took quite the letter of it here like they did in America. They would absolutely observe the censor in America but no doubt lunch could take care of it.

RF: What possible influence did self censorship have on the choice of subjects and the way in which you treated them?

SG: No doubt about it, that figured. But I think the really pernicious days of the censorship were already beginning to go by. I was told that when they made The Stars Look Down, and I don't know if this was adhered to but I know he was not allowed to let anyone, any character to put in a plea for the nationalisation of the coal mines which I think Jim put in and he had a lot of trouble with it. Whether it did stay in the film in the end, I don't know, I was not connected with the film myself. But there was definite political censorship.

RF: There were two classical instances. That was one and the other was Love on the Dole, they weren't allowed to make that for years, the censor just rejected it totally until the war.

SG: I think those should have been fought, whether they fought The Stars Looked Down I don't remember, I was only consulted on the phone about it.

RF: It's interesting you make point of difference about the way it operated in the States and the way it operated here, there it was all spelled out, here it was the British thing of behind the scenes and nobody knows what the general rules are.

SG: I'm sure some things were smoothed over. I'm sure our instance with Brooke was an exceptional one because he was offended and we had been discourteous, without, I never realised the letter read to me over the phone, until I saw it, when I saw it a year later, the signature was as plain as a pikestaff, but I don't think there was much in, after say, after the war really,

RF: The start of the war or after the war.

SG: They eased up with the war.

RF: And your films had indications of affairs and adultery. The Lady Vanishes is really a political film, by inference set in Nazi Germany, did you intend it to be more overt.

SG: I forget what the political thing in the book was, The Wheel Spins, it was something to do with the government but she wasn't a spy was she. I've forgotten. We were certainly not influenced by Munich over Cecil Parker's part where he waves his white handkerchief and the critics said it was a comment on Munich, Munich hadn't happened when that was in the script. I think there was a feeling, a reaction against dictatorship generally but it wasn't meant to be a political film, not really.

RF: It reflected the times in that there was a liberal viewpoint in this country.

SG: There wouldn't have been any pressure, I think the kind of pressure put on was if you were to advocate a point in labour policy, like nationalisation, the censor would have jumped on it like mad; otherwise I don't think, I don't know, I haven't read the books that have been written about censorship but we never had much trouble, but perhaps then there wasn't much to be troubled about.

RF: I got the impression that the censor here wanted to avoid trouble here as much as anything.

SG: It's the same exactly as the civil servant, you know what he wants to avoid, he wasn't to avoid writing letters. He knows he's got to read them, he wants to avoid answering letter which are going to lead to a long correspondence.

RF: He wants to make sure he makes the 4.05 every day.

SG: We cut a little episode in a St Trinians, just a little flash of girl, you just saw her topless for a second in her middle east night club, and he cut it out. And we went to see him about it. John Trevellyan it was and that's exactly what he said he said I don't give a bugger, you can show every thing as far as I'm concerned but I shall get so many letters, film for schoolchildren, a pair of tits in it. My life will be made a misery, that's the way he saw it. "I'll look ridiculous if I say you can't show public hair and somebody else did and got away with it. I don't want to look ridiculous." I think he was a very pliable censor.

RF: Yes and he seems to have made an effort to shift the ground too, to lighten it up a bit. DID YOU EVER HAVE ANY PROBLEMS WITH TREVELLYAN.

SG: One we had never got published and I think is very worrying, and very amusing in a way. I had a relative through a then son in law some information about the Lonsdale spy case, the Russian spies, what they called the Portland case because it happened down at Portland. And we were trying to improve the quality of making pictures to make them co features because our pictures were going out with the most diabolical junk and we were trying to, it failed as a gesture but we tried it for about a year at British Lion. We made several pictures and one of them which we hoped would be a first feature that was made to improve the general quality, Frank christened Ring of Spies and it was about the Portland case.

We got all the secret stuff, if you can call it that through a newspaper, through my son in law. And we also got hold of Chief Superintendent Smith who conducted the case and we got confirmation of some of this from him. He was very careful to say that there are certain elements here which obviously come under the official secrets act, I can tell you nothing at all about those and if you ask me a question I will simply say I can't answer that. And you won't get anything more out of me at all. The rest therefore we took either from newspaper accounts or stuff my son in law had got, some of which was true and some probably not,

20

some questionable. And Frank and Peter Barnes cooked up a script which you might call faction, the new jargon, partly almost documentary with some invention in it of a harmless kind. We were making this film. My brother was producing it, Frank had knocked off a script with Peter, and Robert Tronson was directing it, quite a good director, mostly television.

And I went to lunch one day at Shepperton and John Trevellyan was sitting there and he had those long boney fingers, he said "Sidney, you haven't sent me your script, I haven't had a copy of it yet." I said "What. He said " I said "John, we never send you a script. I think we know." He said "You realise that's dangerous territory. I said "In what way is it dangerous territory?" He said " A lot or secret equipment." I said "I can tell you who made our secret equipment, a little electrician in a back room at Twickenham. I can give you his address if you want." He said "Oh, I think you should have submitted the script." I said "I can't quite see how we would be in trouble." So the next thing is that our chairman who is Arnold Goodman said "I had a call from John Trevellyan the other day, he thinks you shouldn't make this film. It's not fair to the relatives of the condemned people and against the public interest or something." I said "What did you say? "I told him his job was not to pronounce upon what sort of films should be made but to censor the films which are put before him or the script occasionally. But from that standpoint that is not his department at all." And I said "What happened?" "He didn't seem satisfied."

So we go on shooting, finished the film or very nearly. And a letter is sent to the producer of the film signed by Joseph Simpson, Commissioner of Police, top man in the Metropolitan Police, threatening us with prosecution under a breach of the officials secrets act saying that if Superintendent Smith, retired, had given us information which contravened the Officials Secrets Act, we might be interested to know that his pension would be immediately suspended and that in his belief we had committed a libel on some of the characters. And he demanded to see the film.

We put it up, Goodman being a lawyer got the best libel man on it. But while the script was being we received a letter from noneother than the solicitor representing Gordon Lonsdale, a Russian spy called actually threatening us with libel for invasion of privacy, an action not liable under English law. And no sooner had we received it than a letter arrived from the solicitors of Gee and Houghton who were the two spies convicted, threatening us equally with libel and invasion of privacy. It was a put up job.

The libel lawyer wrote a pretty comprehensive answer to the letter saying we would certainly show the film to Sir Joseph Simpson and anyone he nominated that we couldn't see that an action laid by a convicted criminal who at the most would get a farthing damages and there was no such action as invasion of privacy. And that we did not believe that it in anyway contravened the Official Secrets Act and as for Chief Superintendent Smith he had made it clear from the beginning that he did not in any way broach that even in conversation.

They immediately made an appointment to see the film, one thing

they were very strong about was, we had shown the police taping the guilty couple, Houghton and Gee, and we had a shot actually outside the Dorsetshire Police Station and then the chief constable inside with his men listening to this bugging. Luckily purely to speed the thing up we'd cut the exterior of the police station out. And when all these fellows came out, six official branch men, each about 7 ft high, and Sir Joseph came out of the theatre, they said "Well we have no objection to this film going out but for one scene. We insist, as we have done throughout that no bugging took place by the police. You have a scene where the police are listening to the bugs. There is only one scene, one shot which identifies them as policemen, because they're in plain clothes and that's where a policeman knocks at the door with 12 cups of tea and interrupts the whole thing. He said we love that touch, we all enjoyed it, it was very true but you must take it out, because the police did not bug. If you take that out there's nothing to show of the police." So we did that.

Meanwhile however, and this is where I think it was so wrong and immoral, they wrote to ABC and Rank cinemas, to the heads of the circuits and told them if they ran this film they'd run it at their peril and were liable to prosecution under the Officials Secrets Act. We were not on the best of terms, needless to say, with the circuit. Each one wrote back, couldn't wait to write back and say we never had any intention of showing this film. They'd never seen it. So we never got a decent release. We thought at the time that the Admiralty who had come on the whole things extraordinarily badly had been pulling strings to get the whole thing hushed up. But, of course, we knew the real reason a few weeks late when Gordon Lonsdale was exchanged a for Greville Wynne.

RF: So, it wasn't just the amour propre of the police, all sorts of things were going on.

SG: MI5, MI6, the whole lot on that. This is where the ordinary tax payer, had some person in authority simply gone to Arnold Goodman and said "Look, we have a little problem coming up in a certain direction, can't tell you what it is, but when is this film coming out?" I think the date was dangerous, could you put it off for three weeks? If it wasn't they could have said nothing. All that elaborate, and in my view immoral, pressure would have been unnecessary. As it was we never recovered the date.

RF: I suppose they prefer not to be quotable.

SG: Nobody knows that story in full, but there's no doubt that was the reason.

RF: The film was more or less a write off.

SG: It wasn't a write off but it was balancing between first and second feature, and what they did, they took two of our films, because of the press row about our not getting a fair deal they took two of our films and tried them in different orders, one top of the bill one week, I've forgotten what the other film was, the other top the other week. And they got a very limited release both of them. They were quite wrong to have replied as they did, the theatres. The theatres should have said they would deal with

21

the situation if and when it arose.

RF: Did you have much to do with the circuits.

SG: When we joined British Lion, I have never much understood this story but when we joined British Lion, indeed, when we started to make films through British Lion which was from 1948, Arthur Jarrott was the head of British Lion distributing arm and he had undoubtedly a special arrangement with Jack Goodlack of ABC and our films all got booked. They had varying fortunes, but he had no trouble with Goodlack, the terms were good generally. When we came in this continued for quite a time but our relationship with distributors and exhibitors was never that good, we made too many complaints and it gradually cooled of and I think Goodlack came near to retirement and we lost the contact that Jarrott had established. But I would say constant fiction with exhibitors because all the dice are loaded in the favour of the cinema. A good question is when, if ever, has the structure been altered to give a better deal to filmmakers.

RF: And the answer to that is never. Other than what with misguided efforts in the 30s with the quota acts.

SG: Well I can tell you a bit later than that but when we started with Independent Producers, I suppose if we'd asked, we'd have been told, but I can't remember ever asking what the terms were even. We, the distributor charged 25% which is not excessive, is excessive but it wasn't considered excessive generally then, but what the theatre terms were in terms of break figure and that kind of thing and what our percentage was of the take, I never knew on the films we made for Rank to begin with, like Rake's Progress

RF: But that was internal bookkeeping for them.

SG: If you got a special film, alright you might take the standard figure, you might take 40% or 30% to 35% of presumably the net takings, and the theatre would take the remaining 45%. The best that anybody got that I remember, although there may be been others later, certainly were, but 50-50 was an excellent deal. And you only reached it on the top break figure, so the theatre had all the benefits from sales, at least half the proceeds and generally more and only paid for routine advertising, all special advertising was paid for by the picture or the distributors.

RF: And then the distributors were next in line and came in for a sizable cut.

We left you about to get the bullet from BIP, was that in what, 31?

SG: Yes, I got the bullet.

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

SG: I got fired for that remark about taking midsummer exteriors under a tree in the middle of November which from time to time I've been doing ever since myself, things being what they are. And I wasn't told that I was going to be fired. And a youth arrived in the reading room and handed me some insurance cards and I said "What are these." And he said "Your cards." I didn't know what it meant, hadn't a clue what it meant. And shortly afterwards a letter arrived from the cashier telling me that owing to reduction of staff, my services were not really required.

I felt this utter disgrace and I went to my friend who had moved to British International Pictures, drove straight up there in my little car and told him what had happened. I said "I haven't dared tell my parents. And he said nothing very helpful but he did say that they were looking for a story, and it was more or less like a competition, people being asked to write one and he was writing one himself, he was a writer, would I like to write one. So I wrote one in the next three days and I sold it. In fact, his was rejected and mine was accepted. So I only got £25 but as I was only getting 50 bob a week I made a handsome profit by being fired, because I was averaging nearly £8 a week. I was only out of work for 3 weeks. When I told my father he said "we'll have to try another film critic. And Mycroft's successor was Clive McManus and poor Clive McManus got landed with the task of suggesting who would interview me. And he suggested Nettlefold's which was a tiny studio at Walton, owned by Archibald Nettlefold who was a bit like Arthur Rank in the sense that some people said was the fool of the family with a good deal of family money and really interested in other things like the theatre and films and owned Nettlefold Studios.

So I was interviewed by the general manager, Bill Lott, in the office on top of the Comedy Theatre. And he asked all the usual questions and I made all the usual answers. The end was the same as it had been before largely, they already had somebody to sweep the floor and I don't think that there will be anything just yet. As I was leaving the room he said "Before you go, you've been at Elstree, do you know a good gag man, Walter Forde wants a good gag man." I said "Yess me." He said "You've written gags then." I said "Yes, several. I've just written one or two for Under the Greenwood Tree." He said "Tell me one." I told him this gag which took quite a long time to tell and quite a long time to shoot and Lott said "You must meet Walter." that was Walter Forde.

And he took me down to Walton Studios where he introduced me to Walter Forde and said "Tell him your gag." Walter heard it and made no particular comment and said "Come and tell it to Culley." That was his wife. So I told it to Culley. He then said "Let's tell it to Harry Mear, by then an hour or two had gone by. And at the end he said "I think we'll give this boy a trial." So I had a week's trial which went like a bomb for the first three days and like the stick of a rocket the last three days. No one said "You're engaged." They didn't even say goodbye. So I went home and I thought I better turn up on Monday. And when I turned

up on Monday no one said anything so I stayed there for two or three years and became an assistant director, not a very good one.

RF: How did your salary get determined?

SG: I daren't say anything until I was asked point blank. And I thought I must get more money. They said "What were you paid at Elstree?" And I said "£3 a week." I put myself up by 50 sh and then worried for days in case they checked up with the studio and found out that I was getting 10 sh a week less. But they agreed to £3 and a year or two later they put it up to £4 without my asking.

RF: Do you think they intended to take you on or was it just your presence around the studio

SG: They intended to. Walter was not an encouraging man. He'd give you one encouragement and two rebuffs and then after I'd been there a year or two, it was a totally different world Silent, of course, still, tiny, very improvised, no plaster work so if you looked at a set you could always see the joins between the ceiling and up the walls, not like here with a sort of cornice, a straight right-angle.

RF: They had ceilings?

SG: They had ceilings, but you never saw any plaster, not a scratch. And it was all a little family, a very small unit working in the old Hepworth Studios, still a bit of old Hepworth equipment lying about. And the office I had was the one Hepworth had used for developing, or whatever you used hypo for, it stank of hypo so it had. Across the road was the house where Hepworth lived, or had lived, and the whole thing had an air of very early British cinema about it.

But Walter was a good technician and he used all kinds of tricks to create the impression of size. He would use people or things to mask the camera, cover the camera; for instance we had a wild party supposed to be going on, champagne and all that, and a long buffet table. Well he'd line up the buffet table, wine everything to eat glassware, candle sticks the whole lot, as much as the studio would take, then set the camera up on tracks and start at the end, the beginning. And the camera would dolly along and when it got to the end of the studio, the table, a waiter or somebody would step in front with a dish and just block the camera. Then if you got a bit of blank film, you would then go to the front again, redress all the people, all the things on the table, bring in a bit of fresh business and do the thing again with something else, maybe a big cake or something blocking the camera. So in the end you appeared to have 35 yards of table.

And he did the same thing at Shepherd's Bush in Rome Express years later with pillars in the station for the Gare du Nord, beg your pardon Gare du Lyons. Whereas in Hollywood they'd build the whole station and you track past these pillars, there the pillar would give and you'd go back the begining and redress the set to get the full length of the train, right up to the locomotive. So you learned a lot about ways of saving money there. And it was a fairly happy place.

RF: How did Nettlefold see itself, what were they aiming to do? Were they turning out quota films or did they aim to be more up market than that.

SG: Quota quickies came in with sound, they didn't come in during the term of silent films, not to any extent. We made all films for Walton for Butcher's Film Service and the whole thing was so parochial you couldn't imagine it today. An elderly gentleman called Harry who had been an ex music hall comic but could easily have been a bishop, or even the Archbishop of Canterbury, he sat in a little office, generally in his overcoat, a big bald dome of a head and he would copy the returns of the films such as Chapel in the £3/10, very small sums. They were presumably for the front office, all written up by hand. And when he hadn't anything to do they would send the old boy round making an inventory of everything in the studio, and that kind of thing, and the staff was very very small in numbers. The property man was called Harry Weeks and he'd been orderly to Sir John French in the South African war and had come into films through Cecil Hepworth when he played the part of a trooper, a cavalry trooper, in a recruiting film, about 1912, and he came in and stayed in films as property, and a good property man too. And it was just a little family. Then they said we must have sound. The first comedy I was on, there had been others before, was "Would you believe it" that was sound. The next "You'd be Surprised." The first had been "What Next" so they were all exclamatory phrases. And they decided they would make "You'd be Surprised" a part talkie, sorry, they made in between one called "Red Pearls". And that was the watershed there between silent and sound, they made "Red Pearls", it was the one that got burnt.

It went up in smoke but they decided around that time, it was a narrative by somebody, so they'd make it even more of a narrative by having a narrator's voice telling the story, starting to tell the story in a London club, and then you would go into the silent action and the voice would continue where necessary. And in the last scene was also going to be retaken, reinvented as a talkie.

And we got rather inappropriately as it turned out a sound system over from New York, it was the one they did the early Micky Mouses on called Parlo Cine Phone, it was totally useless. And they put it in a truck under the stage, because they'd two stages on the first floor. There was a tiny kind of garage port where they put this New York truck with a little engineer about four ft high called Mr Monks and he had a field telephone communicating with the floor. The trick with Parlo Cinephone was A) you had to speak loudly, in other words shout; and B) you had to be very near the microphone and C) you could never rely on any consistency whatsoever. So you would have a voice saying "Mr Marston you must consider very seriously. You never knew."

So little Mr Monks used to buzz on his field telephone and then come up and say "can't they talk louder and one of the actors would say "We're shouting already, do something about the mike." So the mike would be up here, had to put it "Carpenter make me a whole in this table and put the mike underneath." So the chap gets Along comes Harry Weeks department, "Hey this tables ours." The microphone is put underneath and they play the scene again which was in a condemned cell and you have a

condemned man and his solicitor, "Mr Marston, unless you give me the information which as your legal adviser I'm entitled how can I possibly defend you?" And there's bee buzz, buzz on the field telephone "I'm coming up." "Can't they talk more into the microphone?" In the end

In the end, it was unusable because you only got about half the dialogue coming out. There was a Japanese actor called Kiyoshi Takase who was really a contortionist, wrestler, knife thrower, a very nice fellow and a very good silent actor. But Harry Mear who wrote the dialogue had been an actor in companies and the dialogue was very prosy and he had a scene for some reason where this Japanese pearl diver arrived at Scotland Yard in full morning dress, no reason why, and was interrogated by the commissioner himself. And there were two characters, one was called Martin Radshaw and the other Gregory Marston and the commissioner would say "How do you know Martin Radshaw was still there, he's supposed to have died." And the line from the Japanese pearl diver was "Believe me Mr Commissioner, Martin Radshaw would have been the first man to resent being buried alive." And this poor chap couldn't even speak English properly; he used to put the article in like the in front of a name.

We'll take it again, it never got any better. In the end, the writer played the commissioner and that made it even worse, because the trouble was really the diver and we went to the only cinema for miles which was equipped with Parlo Cinephone and about one word in three came out and that was the end of Parlo Cinephone.

RF: Where did Butcher's films get released, was it up North or in the suburbs.

SG: Small houses. All over the place, small houses. And they were still going, what in the 60s they were still going. I had to give evidence in some insurance case about some film that had been lost, I was an expert witness, one of the other expert witnesses was from Butcher's Film Services, Chalmers I think his name was. A very honest old fashioned, Mr Baker, Baker of Butchers.

RF: Are you actually remembering dialogue from 60 years ago?

SG: Yes, accurately. I never forget that. It was a lovely time, when you went on location, okay you'd pick the area but Walter Forde would know where you could find a or a quarry or something like that. And on one picture, there was a scene of convicts in a quarry, I had an assistant by then, and quite automatically, without even thinking about it, I ordered two extra convicts, one for me and one for the assistant, because we had to dub up and play too, I made 17 appearances in that film in different characters, I even played the pilot and the observer in the same same plane. Because he shot passed me onto the actor and then past the actor onto me so I played both. You could only see the back of the head on one and the face was straight in the other.

RF: How long did you shoot for, two weeks, three weeks.

SG: No, no, this is a misconception. Silent films took longer and I'm quite sure that *Would you Believe It* which was only 5 or 6 reels at the most, I would guess about 5,8 or 5,9, I couldn't tell you if that was accurate, I'm sure that took 12 weeks to shoot because we started shooting the 1928 side of Christmas and I've got a photograph somewhere upstairs which was taken on the last day of the location shooting and that was well into March. So 12 weeks it must have taken.

RF: Why was it that so much time was consumed?

SG: I think very largely numbers of set ups. If you and I are just talking in a chair and there's no sound, you have to jazz it up a bit. You always reach the stage in the picture, whatever the picture, even big spectaculars, where in the end you have to save money by keeping people still for one scene that isn't that important, rather than move them around and have a lighting problem when you're already behind schedule. I think with silent films you had more set ups. You couldn't keep people still for the length of time you could with talkies, let alone widescreen.

RF: I've seen very few English silent films. Were they again theatrical in style, in origin for the most part could you say. Or were they more filmic?

SG: It's a long time since I've seen any of those. If you go back to the very beginning there was a tremendous anxiety that you should understand what was going on and as I think one of the history books said if a woman wanted to indicate to some man who had made advances that she was married she would point to the third finger; if a man was saying to someone I'll go to gaol for this he would put his hands together. And that kind of thing.

RF: Still around this time or earlier

SG: Much earlier, it wouldn't be quite so bad then, but that's how it started. So you'd get a bit of that, the more civilised version of that kind of thing and, of course, subtitles were the great thing. We had hilarious subtitles. I read quite a few.

RF: Deliberately so

SG: Not really.

RF: You weren't sending the picture up?

SG: No, not intentionally. There were some lovely ones but my favourite of all which was Angus MacPhail's favourite, was the Dempsey fight which I think took place in Argentina.

And they had subtitles, and the subtitles said "Eager to get at each other the bell rang for round two." And the famous one was in the Hitchcock film *Downhill*, when Ivor Novello is taken into the headmaster's study, ordered into it with his great friend, the other schoolboy and when they move into the headmaster's study they find the headmaster with a girl there and the title comes up "This girl has a serious charge to bring against one of you two boys" That is that he'd put her in the family way. And Ivor Novello is expelled on the spot in the study because he takes the blame, the girl points to him as the father simply

because she knows he's the one with the money out of the two and the other chaps family hasn't any money and he accepts the blame for his friend and goes out. Half way out of the door the title comes up "Does that mean sir that I shan't be able to play for the old boys?" That title's haunted Hitchcock, Angus and everybody for years and years and years. I can get a card from Angus 25 years afterwards and all he had to say "Does that mean sir?" And I knew exactly what the reference was.

RF: Zanuck was the only native born native, he came from Nabraska. he wasn't Jewish, he was the only one who wasn't a Jew.

SG: I never met Zanuck. Selznick I did meet. I spent a couple of hours with him, incredible.

RF: This was post war.

SG: Yes this was a very interesting thing, going back to Hitchcock, when I arrived in America, I should explain, when we made Jamaica Inn he was already set to do Rebecca for Selznick and he asked if I would go out with him, but I didn't like the terms in which he was cabling Selznick about me. And I made him changed it. But when Selznick's memoirs came out the original version, he was just a writer called Gilliat, well that's no way to describe anybody. And that was the one he sent and not the one I got him to alter it to. And the relationship over this Lady Vanishes thing was a bit strained, and during the war we didn't communicate except that he offered me again a job of writing on Rebecca. I turned it down because I knew that Rebecca, the character of Rebecca in the book does not really appear, she is spoken about but she doesn't really appear, she is a presence who is absent in fact.

And I felt that the book was absolutely right that Rebecca should never be seen and I discovered from Joan Harrison that Hitchcock intended to write a whole lot of Rebecca into it. So I said "I don't think I'll ever agree with that." So having had one or two disagreements on Jamaica Inn I didn't want to get into a situation where I was immediately at odds. Had I known that Selznick's views were in fact identical to mine, I could have made some out there I suppose. I turned it down. So I didn't see Hitch until after the war.

And I went in 1946 and I had an introduction to Selznick and the first thing he said when he met me in his office was "Have you called Hitch yet?" And I said "No." "You call him, he wants you to call him." I said "He hasn't asked me." "No, he's up at his ranch in Santa Cruz but he wants you to call him, I know." Then I had a long talk with Selznick who ADC. And then I met Charles Bennett, my old friend. He said "Have you called Hitch?". I said "No." He said "Call him." I said "Well, he can call me. I don't think that we're all that friendly really." "Oh, he wants you to call him." So this happened in a very short time, in 3 days. I then ran into another old friend, Michael Hogan, another screenwriter. He said "Have you called Hitch?" The same thing happened. So eventually I called Hitch and he immediately invited me out to dinner. But he had to go through that ritual. Everybody knew it there, all the old timers knew it.

When he came over to England after that we took him out to dinner

one night and in the course of it we were joking about this and that and I said "You know Hitch I wouldn't mind coming out, I don't want to do a whole script but I wouldn't mind coming over for a busman's holiday, checking on a script with you is always a pleasure and getting my expenses." I just want a holiday, I don't want to do a whole script. It's too much. He didn't say much "Yes a good idea. About a year later I get a call not from Hitch, from Jack Sanders, his accountant over here, also an Ealing man later. Jack Sanders said "Hitch is going to call you, will that be alright?" I said "What do you mean?" He said "Something about a busman's holiday, mean anything?" "Yes it does." He said "Would it be in order for you to take a call from him. There's something he might like you to do." So I said "Yes, I'll happily talk to Hitch." He said "He'll ring you at 3 o'clock, next Sunday. He's in hospital at the moment. He's had an operation. He'll be out by then."

Nothing happened next Sunday at all. Then Sanders came on the phone again. He said that Hitch couldn't ring you because he had complications and they kept him in hospital another week, he'll ring you next Sunday at 3 and he did. And I took the call and I said "How are you Hitch?" And he said "They've taken away my naval, a dreadful thing has happened to me they've taken away my naval. It was supposed to be only a hernia, I can no longer appear on the front row of the chorus." Now he wanted me to read a subject and do a script for him, when I read the subject I knew he was having difficulties with it, it was that sort of subject. But I didn't do it. But the point of what I said, it couldn't be a direct approach, he had to establish that he would be welcome. And then he would make the call in due course.

RF: You had to call him.

SG: No he called me but he had to ascertain that he wouldn't be ringing me out of the blue, that he had to have a purpose.

RF: What was behind it from his point of view, was he establishing a relationship, authority.

SG: I don't know but my guess is that he was in trouble with the subject and he wanted to talk it over with somebody without making too big a drama.

RF: But going back to the 30s would he just call you out of the blue then or gain.

SG: But then you see there hadn't been a breach between us, I could ring him and he'd ring me. But it was well known in Hollywood that he liked people to ring him and he always spoke to them as if no message had gone out from him. It was, Michael Hogan said "It's wrong to say that I heard you wanted me to call you, no you couldn't say that. Hello How are you Hitch. He had to be wanted in a sort of way.

RF: Was he susceptible to imagined slights? Did he hate

SG: I think so, Mycroft he hated, when Mycroft came back from Ireland after the war, I think it was after the war, Hitch made a film at Elstree, Hitch told me himself, he said "When I got there I had to phone somebody from another office about the film, and I

got the list of house numbers and on it was Walter C Mycroft, do you know what I did? I dialed every number on that list and all I said was Mycroft's back and put the phone down, Mycroft's back." No he didn't forget. They were busom friends when I first went to Elstree. But the great lesson about Hitchcock whose talent I wouldn't wish to underestimate for a moment, but Hitchcock only became famous when he started to make the same kind of picture. When you consider the pictures he was making when I first got to know him, 1927 just, he was making the Farmer's Wife, totally untypical, The Manxman, untypical, Champagne, the one that is derided by the chap who wrote his biography in America, Champagne, he said he was compelled to make it by Mycroft. The truth is that they worked on the story together before Mycroft joined the company and Hitchcock, as far as I know, never complained he was forced to make it, they were chatting amiably together.

RF: Well he made a musical did he not.

SG: He made Waltzes from Vienna. He made Rich and Strange is the title, and then they kicked him upstairs and he produced Lord Cambers Ladies, I don't think he directed that

RF: Wasn't he essentially a contract director, well regarded but he would be assigned to whatever

SG: In 1927, November, which is when the Quota Act had been operating a little while, not long, I came back from Elstree, I was taken, I was given a life simply because I was with Mycroft, I hadn't joined the firm then, I had no idea I was going to, and in the car was a driver, three of us in the back, Hitchcock, believe it or not, 22 stone, Mycroft, myself. And somewhere sitting was Thorpe and Thorpe said, we were driving he said "You better straighten things up with Inland Revenue." Hitch said "What do you mean?" "All this £10,000 stuff. If that gets in you'll have to pay tax on it." This is indication of two things. Obviously it wasn't the true figure, it must have been the option figure, and his option was only for £10,000 after presumably at least a year. Although it was very good money then, it was top money, it wasn't dizzy money.

RF: Was it not.

SG: He probably never got that.

RF: He was a great self promoter wasn't he.

SG: Yes. a great self promoter, but it was Thorpe who said that so he must have had an option figure of £10,000 which he probably never made because he was out of favour within 18 months, two years.

RF: What happened do you think, was it that he got bored with what he was being required to make.

SG: I think the simple truth would be that money didn't come in enough. Champagne didn't make money. I'm sure The Manxman didn't. The Farmer's Wife didn't. There were three straight away which were made while I was there.

RF: He was very conscious too of money. He ended up immensely rich, a major shareholder of MCA.

SG: No question, he was a very good business man. But he always pretended to shy away from that kind of thing. A very odd man.

RF: While we are talking about him and we were on about writing before, what part did Alma Reville play, was she really part of the writing operation or was it just an extra fee for the family?

SG: Alma, was she an editor to begin with, she used to have title, continuity - Alma Reville, that didn't mean that she was a continuity girl. It meant that she wrote out the script, broke it down for Hitch. With Jamaica Inn I know exactly what happened because I wrote the draft, with just standard headings, put in the odd close up. Then she would come and take the whole thing and split it right up. I'm not sure that Hitch particularly observed what she did. Frederic Raphael in the Sunday Times the other week said that Hitch always used the story board, not true; he certainly didn't use them on The Lady Vanishes. And I think the confusion is that Hitch is a good draftsman. He'd often sketch set ups, I've seen him do it, give it to the cameraman, "That's what I want." But the thing of the boards, that's my day's work, I don't think was in his mind. He had a brilliant retentive memory, remembered everything he was told, Hitch remembered. I think Hitch just mapped out his work. He always used to say shooting was a holiday. The script was the tough part and this was because he had a very clear mind, he was often wrong but he had a very clear mind and he knew exactly what he was going to do.

RF: He also had the marvellous gift of being able to see the film right in his mind.

SG: Yes, a wonderful visualiser.

RF@ Was that something you could do

SG: No. One of my weaknesses

RF: Could you run the picture in your mind.

SG: I could do it but with the wrong pictures if you know what I mean, the wrong images. Hitch could draw a trick shot for you, I've seen him do it, and tell someone the day before that they had a very deep focus and tell someone, in the days before they had very deep focus, exactly how they could hold the focus. I've seen him do it. But story board doesn't ring a bell. Alma on Jamaica Inn, she was no more than a re arranger of the literal continuity of the script, in other words, long shot, medium shot, close shot, split up, which you had to do anyway because it's the only way anybody could ever schedule it, the sheets are more or less standard size. They're always scheduled by pages.

Your pages have better be as uniform as possible, that's why in most cases they never correspond with the actual shots, it's only the script, the headings are just a guess of what they will be which enable you to schedule so many set ups a day. And I don't believe that Alma was a creative figure, myself. Neither was Joan Harrison.

RF: Was she more than just one of the ice cold blonds.

SG: Oh yes.

RF: She became very adept as a television producer and a motion picture producer.

SG: She was efficient, and very ambitious. I was always a bit cagey about her. She liked me though. I had a very, very long session with her which seemed to go on for hours and hours, finished about four in the morning and really what she was asking was my advice. This was during Jamaica Inn and I got fairly tight in the end and I said "Well if I gave you the advice what to do with your career, the first advice I would give to anybody would be don't take any advice I give. But leaving that aside I can tell you in precisely two words but you won't like it, but it's true, you won't get anywhere in the long run, I don't mean now, but in the long run you won't get anywhere unless you take one step." And she said "What's that?" And I said "Leave Hitch." Oh she was very shocked by that. In the end she did it.

RF: It was in the end. She stayed with him for several years.

SG: Until Alma said no more. Because of the relationship with Hitch.

RF: His ^{pensions} were obvious during the 30s. His obsession with that particular type of woman.

SG: No one commented on it at the time.

RF: Was that only in retrospect that we now see it.

SG: We all have a type, everyone has a type, or preferred type but it never occurred to me just because of Madeleine Carroll or Joan Harrison that there was a thing there. Maybe there was, it came up as far as I'm concerned much later, depending on whom he cast in the picture. No one suggested anything about Margaret Lockwood. She was in so many pictures that Hitch didn't do.

RF: He seems to have had a sexual obsession, there's that fascinating sound test with Anny Ondra on Blackmail which survives.

SG: Very nasty but I don't think there is any suggestion that there was anything between him and her.

RF: But it was strange to introduce sex into a sound test the way he did. Are you sleeping with men I think is what he said.

SG: That was in the day of sound booths and she was dubbed as you know, and the cameras were in booths too and pretty everyone in that unit
I don't think, it wasn't exclusively Hitchcock.

RF: Anny Ondra was everybody's darling

SG: Yes, they all loved her.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

1 June

RF: We left you with Archibald Nettlefold.

SG: You were also asking about Butchers and that can bring me to realise that that was a tiny concern, Nettlefold, and Butchers stayed for years and years and years. The Butchers end of it was typical of the diverse state of distribution. There weren't big duopolies, as they later came to call them, distributing pictures at that time; there were, the beginnings were of the big circuits but there wasn't the control of huge sections of the business which came later. For example at the time we're talking about Nettlefold it was only, if you call that 1929, it was only about 3 years, I couldn't tell you the exact date that Beaverbrook owned Provincial Cinematograph Theatres. And indeed because of his ownership of those he always criticised Mycroft, putting on his theatre hat, when my father was managing editor he often defended Mycroft. Beaverbrook would phone up or write and say "I didn't agree with the criticism of this film at all. Of course, I'm wearing my cinema hat." And my father always defended Mycroft and said I must point out that apart from still doing some work in make up of newspapers, he was also being film correspondent and also being film critic, and because of his work in that capacity, the Evening News got a film correspondent as well as a film critic, so he was doing two man's work. So in fact he was never fired. He got the job I've already mentioned. But PCT, at that time, was one of a number of circuits of different sizes. I don't think any of them really resembled what the Odeons or Gaumonts and the others became over the years; in other words, they became Rank or ABC.

RF: To some extent the circuits got large by incorporating all these small local house

SG: Sometimes almost by accident. And as an instance, at that time, PCT, Arthur Jarrott was the booker, now he exercised booking because he was in competition with the other circuits and there weren't the giant machines, so there was genuine competition; and a good booker, a good judge of films was worth his weight. And I remember Walter Forde saying, when I say recently, I mean in the last 20 years, long after he retired, the he had an immense admiration of Arthur Jarrott and his judgement of what films to book. Well this was almost unthinkable in the Rank and ABC late days, because what did they do they pencilled in dates from their own set of American customers, and so on and the job of the booker was the job of turning down the odd film and selecting the odd film but not from a different source.

RF: When you were a producer of substance and note did you find it a problem with the circuits getting bookings and also if you had a remarkable hit was there any problem of extending the playing time of a film or were they totally rigorous about the way the booked the circuits.

SG: Well, yes, I can answer that, there were problems. Going back to the days of Rank because I think they were crucial, by the time we came in, of course, Rank had just absorbed the

Gaumont lot, which was after all a big circuit; he'd just absorbed General Film Distributors, which was C M Woolf, an individual person, and they became distributors for Rank and later the name was changed to Rank Film Distributors. So it was a case of takeovers and getting bigger and bigger. And as a result of the booking system, what you might call free competition becoming the reverse, neither free nor competitive, it led to an acceptance of the status quo by all the big shots on that side which in other words meant they didn't want to change anything. And I think you also have to go back, to before the war for the moment in this discussion because one is inclined to forget that the Americans were really our ruthless enemy, this is now forgotten, but they did everything they could to hinder a British film production, they didn't want competitors. We were the most important market outside America, by a distance, and they didn't want to lose any part of it to us. So when, for instance, I think it was Sam Eckman came over and gave evidence before the Moyne Committee which would have been the 1927 one, if it wasn't then it was the later one, he just said we didn't have the know how that was his exact words, "I guess they just don't have the know how here," that was why British films couldn't be encouraged.

RF: I think that would have been leading up to the second quota act.

SG: I'm not so sure because I was very much concerned with the second quota act, I wasn't with the first because I didn't know anything about it then.

When it came to the second one, because talkies had come in, that was 1938, I was working for the Americans then over here. The point is that MGM leading up to the second one, MGM employed Rosie Rosenberg who was the ex secretary to Ramsey Macdonald to do the PR work, and they also announced a very big programme. That's why I was working for them. I never knew and still don't to what extent that was propaganda. The war came along before you could prove anything either way. But I always felt that it was propaganda, serious window dressing. They didn't mind expending money on quite big pictures three or four years if they got the act, and obviously it would be too brazen to depart as soon as they got the act that they wanted. Meanwhile J B Williams and others were trying to get this separate quota by which a film could not count twice, the exhibitors had a quota as well as the distributors.

But they could count twice, in other words if Love on the Dole was on the distributors books, it could fulfil part of their quote; it then went into the cinemas and fulfilled the exhibitors quota. And J B Williams' proposal, which people seemed to think was enormously complicated, was that they shouldn't count twice, in other words distributor separate quota, exhibitor, separate quota. This was fought very hard, the Americans got very agitated about it and it was defeated. Partly, I think because Oliver Stanley who was President of the Board of Trade was not friendly to the British Film Industry and a bit of a fool. They said at the time the Coal Bill was bad because of the time he spent on the Films Bill and the Films Bill was bad because of the time he spent on the Coal Bill. That was said at the time.

RF: Were the times then similar to what they are today when free trade was god.

SG: No, the Americans wanted simply to keep us out of our own market.

RF: And to keep us out of theirs too.

SG: But I don't think that they regarded that was a serious threat at the time, at all, or ever have done; but they certainly didn't want this one tampered too much. And hence the policy which was well before 1938, I would say roughly that the quota quickie came in with talkies. Nobody talked about quota quickies in silent days. But they came in with talkies. And the old story of the Empire, Leicester Sq fulfilling it's quota by showing it's films in the morning to the char women who didn't look at it naturally. Some of that was villainous. As part of that and this is a very important point and I don't think it has every been made, as part of that, the American representatives of the distributors, that is to say Sam Eckman who was number one, Bob Woolf who was RKO, Robert Harley, Twentieth Century, before him Kane, they were given large salaries in America, expenses over here, and Bob Woolf whom I knew personally quite outside films, he had a suite at the Savoy the whole time he worked until shortly before his death. Well they were the kings. Their job was to promote American films and if necessary, I'm quite sure, hamper British films any reasonable way they could.

If you take the Royal Command performance as one example of this, the Americans objected if you got two British films in a row, so they developed the idea, which was sanctioned, that you should have one America film and one British film alternately. Then a year we had a film in, which was the only one seriously in competition, they would put in one of their British quota and said it was American financed and so was an American film, that was Beau Brummel which nearly brought all Royal Command performances to an end. But that was typical. I happened know someone who was on the Committee, that was Earl St John who told me it was American lobbying. He was a Rank man, he said "I voted for your film but you're outnumbered. You see people back the Americans because they get their films from the Americans." And this had the consequence of also building up a breed which had been two or three because of the growth of duopolies, you didn't have the same quantities of chaps around. Equally, the American distributors started to amalgamate, also fade out so the numbers were reduced of these tycoons figures. But the result of it in Britain was if you got your Ken Hargreaves with Rank and whoever was there before, I've forgotten, and on the other side you had your Goodlack, Goodlack was really an executive, you got that chap who came in for ABC, Robert somebody, another American actually, came in much later that was. But they behaved like little gods. Jarrott arranged a lunch for us with Winkle, for example and the Boutling Brothers, ourselves and someone else was there and he had a lunch discussing publicity for British films generally, how much to spend what we thought would happen. It was a perfectly civil lunch. At the end of it Jarrott told me that Winkles phoned him up and said what do you mean by getting me together with a group of film producers, he regarded us with complete dissent. Equally John Davis was inclined to take the same attitude.

I'll come to the question that you put forward about extended runs. I sat next to Davis at a dinner given when relations were becoming rather critical with Rank; and present were Powell and Pressburger, David Lean, Ronnie Neame, probably Tony Havelock-Allen, Ian Dalrymple and I think that was about it. It was Independent Producers, a dinner given at Pinewood. And I happened to be sitting next to Davis who was at one end of the table and Rank who was at the other, a small dinner party, and I said to Davis, we were chatting, nothing controversial about the conversation at that stage, I said "John, don't you think that perhaps we are in or approaching a time of revolution in the way that pictures are shown?" And he looked at me very coldly and said "I don't know what on earth you are talking about?" I said "Well, for instance, look at the best years of Our Life, which was running in London, it's running and running and running, you're going to have it two weeks on the circuit." I knew a bit about it because Bob Woolf had negotiated that. And he said "No, they are making a great error." He said "We had it on", I think, "at Leicester Sq and it did very well indeed and we argued we don't want to run it any longer, we want to put it out on release; they said no it's got a lot of life in it." We said "Well it will damage the release. Now we put up the break figures and now it's at the Regal, it's still there because they insist." I said "Well, it's reaching the break figures, isn't it, and you put them up." He said "This will kill the general release, they're mad to go for two weeks, you mark my words." Of course it ran sometime after that at the Regal and it did record business in the two weeks. But Davis would not give these bookings; he was told in that case they bloody well had to or they wouldn't get the film.

When Blue Lagoon, which he hated the whole idea of from the very beginning, he put every obstacle in the way, Frank was doing a tour of the country with it, probably half a dozen cinemas well scattered; and I remember him saying someone at Ipswich, or somewhere like that, the Odeon, he said "Can you have word with Mr Davis and get them to run it for another week?" Frank said "We've tried but they won't." They've got to fill in those slots and slot for one week and that was after, yes that was after Best Years of Your Life which in the end did break the mould, of course, but Davis was so far behind he wouldn't shift on it.

This meant, of course, if you had 52 weeks in the year you had 52 films on a pattern. They wanted to standardise everything so you had 52 slots, they didn't want those interfered with. So they were completely rigid as anybody could be. One of our films they forgot, although we had these meetings round the table, there weren't more than 8 or 9 round that table ever, and Rank sat at the head of it as Chairman, they forgot one film on our list and didn't put it in the slot. And I said "What about it?" They said "Oh we've forgot it." So I complained loud and long and Rank asked me for breakfast at the Dorchester. He said "I haven't seen the film but I understand that it's a little gem we'll have to do the best we can." We never had the release we should have had because they would not change the pattern.

RF: It's interesting to speculate why they were in production because essentially it was a matter of just releasing films to the circuit cinemas.

32

SG: I think it was undoubtedly true that Rank, who I'm sure was a thoroughly decent man, Rank did have a genuine enthusiasm for British films. Davis on the other hand was a man of psychological bentness that I wouldn't care to have to analyse and obviously he wanted to run the thing and because Rank collapsed, virtually collapsed, he was able to come in and tidy up, accountancy wise.

RF: Would you say that Davis had any imagination?

SG: The only imagination he had was imagining he knew how to make films.

RF: From what you say his attitude was based on block booking of 20, 30 years before.

SG: I think it's fair to say that Rank backed him up in that but it started honourably enough the whole thing but they seemed to be by idee fixe and I remember because there was a certain etiquette at Independent Producers, we were the second to join, Micky Powell and Pressburger were the first, no Pascal, Powell and Pressburger, then Launder and Gilliat, and then Cineguild, Lean and Neame, and then Wessex, Dalrymple.

And Frank was appalled by the budget of Caesar and Cleopatra which was £550,000, the budget and he said do you think you'll get this. It wasn't etiquette to question each other's budget and we didn't get the support. Rank was there doing this at the end of the tale, he didn't like the question either. He said "Let me put it this way, we hope to sell another five pictures of Caesar and Cleopatra, that's what we hope." But of course they'd been taken in by something of a charlatan and the subject could never be box office in my opinion anyway. And of course, it cost a million and a quarter, not £550,000.

Some of the shooting was absurd. He tested in colour an incredible time. I know because he took my floor space at Islington. He wouldn't have gone to Islington for the picture, of course. He went to Islington for his cover test. And he was testing girls that I wouldn't give a reading to and if did give anything it would be a reading an nothing more. But he was testing them in full colour, taking up the whole stage at Islington. And he did that I think for three weeks and it cost them over £30,000. Quite apart from the inconvenience it imposed on yours truly.

RF: It was the definitive fiasco.

SG: They forgot in their calculations to include bank interest, so that became a major disaster. Then they were obsessed with quantity. They had to have their 52 weeks and Rank had a perfectly genuine desire to promote British films expansion and everything else but that meant quantity. I'm quite sure I'd be right if I said the way to develop, an hopeless unrealistic way of developing British films is what in fact is really the realistic way, you work on a basis of backing the people who make successful films, cutting down overheads and trying to keep the whole thing on a rational basis and restrict the number of films according to circumstances. Don't aim at a target of so many films as far as you can avoid. But we had to aim at a target of

so many films because were were foolish enough to take over the responsibility of filling up Pinewood, Independent Producers. And then one of these freequish things happened, Micky Powell developed this idea with David Rawnsley called Independent Frame. And I wrote a letter based on a letter of Frank's to the board pointing out the tremendous pitfalls of this system, to which I got a nice note back from Micky Powell saying "Thank you for your interesting memorandum, I tore it up at lunch and put it in the waste paper basket."

But they then went into x number of films, Independent Frame, and when I went back having left there. I went back to clear up the office, and met George Archibald, our managing director as was of Independent Producers, he said "They've put me in charge of this Independent Frame thing." I said "It will fail George." He said "Why?" I said "It must fail, anyway you can't churn them out like that." And, of course, it failed because of the churning out, in my view it would have failed anyway; but it wasn't the system that killed it, it was the pictures they made on the system. They said those Independent Frame pictures that went round in the trade not only keep people out of the cinemas the week after they keep them out the week before. It's an example of the slot mania, quantity, the number of films counts not what the films are.

And that's exactly what happened when he built up his little empire in America. It was built to take quantity but could only be cold on quality. And if you've got the quality you really don't need the quantity. Certainly, in later years you didn't. What happened was that the films that were put out in America, many of them were quite successful but they did not justify the costs of setting up organisations to deal with them, it soaked up all the expenses. And then when Davis was in charge years later he repeated exactly the same mistakes on a slightly smaller scale. He started the office in New York again under Ken Hargreaves and moved up things but he hadn't got the pictures. You've got to get the pictures first. And I think that the whole system, there is no reason why the head of the distribution organisation should be a really important person at all. A competent manager was all that was needed. He didn't have to exercise much in the way of judgement. The same thing applied generally.

RF: Did they have standard criteria or was it all by the seat of their pants?

SG: You mean judging what they were going to book. Oh I don't know, they weren't very impressive people. Who was the chap before , there was a chap, name began with B, I don't think any, I think it's a very tricky business judging anyway but the point really was that most of their product was there already. They could pretend to view and judge it but it was there already. And people like us, who were independents, were the ones who suffered later, because they could easily say that this film will not succeed, so they refused to book it. They might have been right. But you couldn't respect their judgement as such, why was it better than ours.

RF: Would they see the scripts.

31

SG: The exhibitors wouldn't. Distributors quite often did, in one sense or another. What Rank tried to do in that most important period which was from about 1943 to 1950 really, I don't think you could stretch it any more, he tried to build up a central organisation and it was called appropriately enough PFFL, Production, Films, Facilities Ltd, PFFL, a wonderful name for it. So he had casting. He had the distributors representatives, like Earl St John at that time was head of Odeon, the circuit I suppose, and he was a pretty good judge.

RF: He'd come up through exhibition, he'd come over here initially to run the Plaza for Paramount. That was his first job in the country.

SG: He was a good chap at the Odeon and then they moved him up to run Pinewood, Denham, Two Cities; and they brought in a casting man David Henley, they brought in a literary man, Robert McDermott; they brought in Incast, weather forecasters, imagine that, and they brought in the accountant, it was Robertson, I think was the man who ran that. And everything went through that including, for instance construction, if you had, as happened in one film, a brass rail for a jury box or something, then that brass rail was made in the Rank workshop and it cost about twice as much as if you had it made in an ordinary workshop. But Rank put on a percentage you see, because it all went into the centre and not back to the production, it came off the production in fact. And they tried to run this and again it was a quantity thing. X number of films could be made, they worked out, at Pinewood, x number at Denham, x number under Sidney Box by then at Shepherds Bush and so on. There was, of course, at that time, certainly earlier, a shortage of studio space, so that gave certain plausibility, there was so much demand for space, everything must be alright. But we found that we couldn't control costs. And if you had an extravagant art director, they're hard enough to control anyway, you can't catch up with the costs, but he couldn't catch up with the costs himself under PFFL because they came too late. Going through a central organisation took that much longer and by the time you knew that we'd gone £X,000 over, it was too late to do anything about it for the current thing. So I had high set costs I think I'm right in saying I ever had at any time, if you forget the last picture or two where inflation is too much of a factor to be truly comparable, but Green for Danger cost more than any of our pictures up to a very late day, not the picture as a whole, the sets, and one of the reasons was, I'm getting at the madman who was the art director, but a brilliant one, but he could say "I don't know what I spent two weeks ago I can't get the figures. I don't know where I am under this system."

And then David Henley would phone you up and say "Can you test these girls for me, have you got a moment and then they'd send a lot of suggestions on casting. And Earl St John would throw his oar in, so you felt that the whole thing was getting unwieldy. And people expressed opinions at absurd times, like when something cropped up, Peter Ustinov made Vice Versa I think it was, he started off at a fantastic pace, so the amount of minutage he was doing, we were always getting the stick for that, they said "Look what Peter Ustinov is doing." We said "Yes, but you haven't seen the picture. It may be brilliant, we don't know but

you can't judge the picture by the minutage." They doubled themselves over at the rushes, every day at rushes they were arguing themselves silly. I remember saying in my experience that generally been a very bad omen, it turned out to be in that case.

That's the sort of thing which happened. The whole thing became centralised. mechanised in a sense and you began to feel you had no flexibility. So then naturally they tried to discipline us, Independent Producers and it broke up. And to my mind that is one of the great tragedies of the British film industry, because each side lost confidence in the other and it all broke up, starting with Micky and Emeric. Then we went, then Cineguild had already split up amongst themselves. Then David Lean went to make two bad pictures; he was the white haired boy, couldn't do anything wrong, made two pictures that didn't go out. And it was a great tragedy, we had something really going there.

RF: It's interesting what you have to say about Green for Danger because one's thoughts about that pictures is that it's a very tidy not a large scale film, I'm very curious why the sets would have cost so much.

SG: Partly my fault, with the best of intentions, we were the only film in the studio, the only thing which ever shot while we were there was the paddle steamer in a tank for Great Expectations, that was the only, I thought it would be wonderful to have the sets there. So I had them all on two stages and, of course, I could go and look at the set I wouldn't get to until next week. What I hadn't realised in my innocence because I knew nothing about running a studio, was that we'd get all the rental charged to us, although there was nothing else to go in, we weren't keeping anybody out.

RF: You were carrying all the overheads.

SG: Yes. They gave us a reduction in the end, they acknowledged that, but it didn't make much difference. We got a reduction for being the first picture in and only picture and I think that they knocked £16,000 off the production. It wasn't a very high production cost. Peter Proud was the art director and he went wrong on one or two of the sets. We had some shutters which were supposed to be telescopic, going in and out with the wind, and the engineering mechanics were wrong because they were so long that when they came out, you know those things you used to get, you squeezed them and the trellis comes out, I've forgotten what they did, they were like that, on that basis. But what happened was because they were about as long as from here to that door, the weight pulled them down too much and so when the machinery was activated they wouldn't open up. So he tried putting reinforced elastic on and all sorts of things and it wouldn't do it. In the end I had them all taken down and put a plain and there were other things. He had a special plate glass made for one shot and he worked the shot out and it was really a very very good shot. But the plate glass broke when we were taking it, the first take I think it broke, cut the camera man's hand, and we hadn't got a replacement. So they had to wait for it to be made. So that meant Of course, we didn't have the cameras we ought to have.

RF: So it was just bad luck and inefficiency

41

SG: No, it was just shortage of equipment after the war really. And I think they were helpful towards us, but when I say it cost that much the final cost was just over £200,000, £202

RF: I would have thought that that was a modest cost for the time.

SG: Modest compared with many. Then we went to Korda which had no such central organisation but did have a big studio and had a reputation for great extravagance. And everyone said you film will cost a fortune and we made two films, and somebody interviewed me around that time and I said it was impossible under Rank to make a film for under £200,000, or virtually impossible. But we'd achieved this immediately practically with Korda to our amazement and Davis didn't like that and they issued a statement saying it was perfectly possible. There was not more expenses there than anywhere else.

RF: I think it is a received notion that production people by and large at this time were a bit cavalier about costs, is this true. It's only Arthur's money attitude.

SG: I don't think that we had that at Independent Producers. Micky and Emeric went over, they did in quite a big way, the results justified them. There is the famous story of showing Red Shoes to Rank and Davis and when the lights came up they just walked out. That was the sort of thing that lead to the break up, plus the fact that they went to Korda and we had an offer to go to Korda and I was very strong about that, I must say. I was weak about a lot of things but I said to Frank "We'll never be able to work with David, we're coming to a new era, if we can get out let's get out." And we had no contracts other than from film to film, but a sort of moral obligation. And Frank said "I think we ought to see Arthur Rank and tell him." I said "You can't go through these things you have to make your own mind up. What happens, you go to Arthur Rank he plays some violins, he offers you some more money and you stay. And you're back in the same pit-fall you're trying to get away from. You can't be sentimental. All I suggest is that when we know that the deal is settled, we write to him and explain the circumstances and say that is irreparable. "

What actually happened is that Korda put out a statement before the contract was signed and I got an urgent message to ring Frank and I rang him from Paddington Station and he said "I'm afraid I've been rather weak and told them that the deal wasn't final." I said "It is final." He said "Not signed." I said "Look, we can't honourably get out of this Frank." He said "I don't know, lack of courage or something, they want us to meet them."

So we met Rank and Davis and I told them "I don't thing this can be reversed, it isn't signed but I don't thing it can be reversed." And then Davis only made one contribution the whole evening. He was sitting next to Rank, and Rank was there in Rank's office and Rank said the usual things, "Very sorry to lose you. I look forward to keeping you with us." And Rank who was very opposed to Blue Lagoon which was being cut at that time, hadn't come out, he made one remark, I'll always remember that remark, he'd got the Evening Standard on his knee, and we had a

42
meeting for about an hour or so, three quarters of an hour or so. And he looked up once and said "I see old Lady Orne has died." That was the only contribution he made.

Then I was asked for lunch by George Archibald. And this is typical of the dumbness of these people really, he said they wanted us to say, could we reconsider in any way but, he had this directly from Rank and Davis, but they would not necessarily agree to the same terms for Frank and me. The implication being that Frank would have to get less because up to that date my films for Rank had been more successful than his. I said "Look, it's an idiotic way to use the criteria, his next films could take more than my next two." So I said "You couldn't call it an inducement, could you? What do I do, go back to Frank and say they want you to stay but you'll have to bargain on your own. I couldn't do a thing like that, and I wouldn't. Anyway it's too late."

RF: Was your inference that John Davis didn't really want you to stay. You must have had a great loyalty to Arthur Rank because he'd done a great deal in establishing you as producers and directors. Did the two of you have a personal loyalty to the Rank Organisation.

SG: I think so, but from the time Davis said "I don't know what you're talking about" and the way, I honestly think that Independent Producers as whole, we had these terrible meetings, I think that they thought that Rank doesn't want to give us more money an different deal, more freedom whatever you care to call it. That is what he doesn't want to do, but I really honestly think I was the only one to realise that Rank on his side was saying we've got to keep these chaps under control, we've got to watch it, we've got to have more say in what they do. And having more say meant Rank and Davis expressing opinion which they weren't qualified to express. And I thought in the end what's the point, loyalty yes but what is the point of loyalty at that cost.

RF: But even at a cost of £200,000, the two of you hadn't had any runaway productions like Pascal or

SG: No we exceeded the budget on two of my pictures and I think we exceeded the budget on our first four but they weren't ridiculous figures. The highest production cost until the Blue Lagoon was £180,000 and that was mine. I hadn't been.

SG: I think that it is very important in this sense because had Davis not been of the opinion he was, I think there was a good chance of Independent Producers continuing. And we learned some lessons from trying to fill the studio too. And I think that there were good chances but it was thrown away in the worst possible way and at our last meeting on the subject of the future, not our future but the future of Independent Producers, was at the the Dorchester, as all these things tended to be. And George Archibald walked out on it, he regarded himself as insulted by us all and walked out. Unfortunately, it was a great anti-climax, he'd forgotten his briefcase he had to come back in dead silence while we all sat round the table watching him go out.

-3

But I said one thing at that meeting, naturally one can remember what one said rather than what anybody else said, that's human nature, and I remember saying to Archibald, before he walked out, I said "George, I think this is a case of crisis of confidence on both sides." And he said "That's absolutely right." But I don't think the others thought it possible that the other side could lack confidence in them. I don't think it occurred to Micky or Emeric that Rank could lose confidence in them at that time. Therefore, they thought that they could get what they wanted. And that was it, really. It never recovered from that meeting. Davis got more and more important. And along came the ad valorem and that came as a convenient excuse for Rank as to why things went wrong.

RF: It is interesting that you say that there was no considered expansion of production to meet that withdrawal of the American product because that again is the so called history of the product, that's what happened.

SG: Because he said so, at the time,

SIDE 5, TAPE 3

SG: When would this have been? The first Independent Frame picture had been embarked on in 1948.

RF: The great financial crisis for the Rank Organisation was 48 wasn't it? That is when Denham closed and several of the studios closed.

SG: I know that Edward Black who Rank wouldn't take at all, and I was told never to mention him at a meeting because he was persona non grata and Edward Black, after that, was engaged by Rank was a producer, of what I don't know, at Pinewood. And the reason I went up for that last meeting with George in which he mentioned Independent frame was to clear my office for my old boss Ted Black who alas was in a terminal condition, but it wasn't known at the time. And that must have been 48 and would have been before Blue Lagoon was shown I would think. I would have thought that the crisis came a bit later, in other words, he had already embarked on Independent Frame.

RF: Yes, because they were pouring money into that.

SG: They were hopeless films, hopeless.

RF: Only two or three were made weren't they.

But I suppose the technology wasn't up to it then and it's no way to make films. It may be a way to make television.

SG: You see Micky who thought it up and David Rawnsley who was another brilliant madman, I don't mean Micky, I don't mean Micky was, I was thinking of Peter Proud who did Green for Danger, they couldn't see any limit. I remember an argument went on from 10 in the morning with David Rawnsley in Frank's house in London and we said look we're on the first floor here. Let us imagine the scene in which somebody is coming into the house below and this character is having a drink over here and doesn't want to see them. So he puts the drink down and crosses over to the window and gets out. And it became clear that there was no mechanism that you could do that in one shot. Or indeed get him through the window because the set would be projected. If you built the background of the set you were defeating the object of Independent Frame. And if you didn't he couldn't get through it because it was projected. And he had no answer to that at all. And he said "Well, going back to the words of our memorandum on the subject this made be a useful handmaiden but it can't run the house." And I think this is true it did greatly improve back projection methods at Pinewood, and probably elsewhere, but I don't think that it much much more than that.

RF: Did it have an effect on modular set construction because Independent Frame presupposed modular set construction.

SG: What I forgot to mention on this is that we deliberately introduced the table and the drinks which were in the room already as an example and the whole point was that no one ever moved. They only treadmilled. So the table would either had to be whiped away or drawn away or be on the treadmill. If it was on

the treadmill, it would presumably move so it had to be anchored in some way. And they were so simple and nothing could be more simple than the little set up we postulated. But it couldn't work. But I never saw it being. But if Micky himself had proceeded with it, and he never lost the idea as you know, he would have used it sensibly, he was a fine technician, he knew films.

RF: It doesn't really sound like his kind of film making.

SG: Well you know when he went back to Coppola, went over to Coppola in the States, his job was running the whole stage, I'm told, I have no exclusive information on it, I'm told that his job was running a stage which sounded very like an Independent Frame set up, experimentally

RF: That's true, because Coppola was very much into electronic methods of production wasn't he. And all studio based methods and he lost Zoetrope because of it. One from the Heart was the film involved and a gigantic disaster.

Since we're talking about Independent Producers, it was a group of equals was it not?

SG: I would imagine that our contracts were financially quite different.

RF: I was curious the influence the board had on the various productions. Would say Cineguild present their idea for a film to the board or were they wholly independent, autonomous.

SG: They were wholly independent in that sense. They might have put it up to the board to toss it around if they were uncertain.

RF: But the other units didn't have any veto on what you might do or what Cineguild might do.

SG: No.

RF: Pascal was out of the picture by then presumably.

SG: By that time virtually was. Initially he didn't encourage. He didn't really know anything about films. But what happened you'd sit round a table say once a fortnight, there would be, monthly I think it was, boardmeeting and there would be a fortnightly production meeting. The board meetings, both were subject to production demands on people, in other words the director wouldn't go because he was shooting. But things would be discussed generally, they'd discuss each production and report on it. And out of this centralisation which was so tiresome by 1947, it had become utterly tiresome, they found that between Independent Producers, Two Cities, a play had come out and everybody would be there for the play and immediately they'd all try and buy it. Now this didn't make sense if you were all from the same company, so they developed a system which also didn't make sense which was that the first request that went to the story department ranked no 1. So if, I'll give you an instance, a book I made a film of it wasn't very good, London Belongs to me. I read the book and in a fit of great enthusiasm banged the telephone to McDermott I suppose it must have been, the head of

the story department, and the subject was bought because I was number 1. Uncle Silas was not in the public domain, it was Sheridan Le Fanu wrote it. But nevertheless you registered an interest. Now I wanted to register an interest in it. And it so happened that I was number 2, Eric Ambler being number 1. So Eric Ambler was working from time to time with Cineguild. I asked him about it, he said "I'm not working on it, if I decide not to proceed, you can have it, you'll be number 2, I'll make sure I'll tell you first. Then suddenly it was announced as production by Lawrence Irving. I immediately rang up Eric and said "You've let me down." He said "I should have told you but I didn't have any choice in it. Irving sort of billeted on Arthur Rank during part of the war and they were great friends and Irving wanted to make it and Rank asked me if I had plans and I said I'm not working on it at the moment and he said can I have it for Irving. Such pressure was put on that I didn't think that I could say no but I ought to have told you." I said "I couldn't have done anything anyway." So one of the great disasters of that was made.

RF: Irving was an art director and the picture was superbly art directed the picture but otherwise was strange.

I misunderstood you before, I thought you said it was not in the public domain, it was in the public domain wasn't it.

SG: No,

RF: Le Fanu is early 19th century.

SG: Sorry I got it the wrong way round. The point is collision between people, if everybody wants to make Treasure Island. You must register, register is the word used which is absurd.

RF: That is based on the American system, because the same thing there, a studio would say I want to make a film about Fred Teaset and he would then have first right on it.

SG: But that was more titles, register of titles. There is nothing to stop Metro from bidding for the Barretts of Wimpole St shall we say, everyone else would. No doubt they had some regulation there, an easy going kind but the actual registration there was of titles. This was a registration of properties which is a bit different.

RF: I think it also extended to properties in the public domain. You could It was a gentleman's agreement, there was nothing binding.

SG: Even then you could put it under title. And obviously you register it so you can have some status in the open field, number one number two, it lead to some people being bought out which was lucrative from that point of view.

RF: Going back to Independent Producers, it seems to me that there were structural problems, it was all a bit Alice in Wonderland the way it was organised, but the key to it's failing must have been Davis from what you say.

SG: I don't think it was Alice in Wonderland.

RF: I don't mean the company itself but I mean the way you had to operate, acquiring properties, the physical departments of the studios.

SG: That is not a criticism of Independent producers, the whole Rank attempt to centralise everything.

RF: But I am saying that there were structural problems that you had to cope with that contributed to the cost and inefficiency of the pictures and tended towards the failure. But also this area of personalities

SG: Yes. One very important difference is obvious but we haven't mentioned is the old struggle between creative and non creative people. I have never known an accountant or shall we say cashier, not so much a company accountant but the person handling the money, I have never known one who wasn't jealous of filmmakers. And one of the common things said at the meeting of the British Film Producers Association, which orientated towards the duopoly very strongly, was always somebody sneering, and independent producer is somebody is someone who depends on somebody else for all the money and everybody roared with laughter. Exactly they said. But of course it's true. But if somebody had got up, why what do you expect the filmmaker whose an ordinary person in the economic world, would you expect him to mortgage everything and sell his house in order put up what would be only a fraction of the cost. They were an organisation to put up the cost, you can't do it yourself it's not practical.

RF: Looking at it from their point of view they had had some nasty experiences, certainly Pascal and there was Giudice running barefoot through Two Cities, he creamed off an enormous amount of money, one way or another.

SG: I don't know the economics of Two Cities at all. Del was, I know nothing of his finances. He had his points you know, he had something to offer, he did believe in creative people

RF: It's an interesting question whether he could have accomplished what he did had he been more disciplined because he gave talent its head.

SG: At one of those distressingly frequent dinners which are given at the Dorchester, Davis gave in a speech, gave Del Giudice, sneered at his lack of command of the English language and gave him a public humiliation such as I have never seen and that was the end of Del. He later of course did the same with Earl ST John, drove him to drink and Earl St John was an able man. I don't know whether anyone could have handled what John asked him to handle but he was an able man, he wasn't a fool. He destroyed him. He destroyed one person after another and later he took over the ring himself and I was told he would say give me a script and he'd pick any script from his desk, tell me's whose in it, tell me what the subject is and I'll tell you exactly what it will make. Well the next time in that particular round of films was a film, was it Ferry to Hong Kong, Orson Welles, well Davis decided this was the big film to exploit so he had a huge party at the National Film Theatre, a huge firework display on the other side of the Thames illustrating bits from the film. And the film was shown and we were leaving the party and my wife said

there's John Davis and Arthur Rank I must go over and congratulate them. I said what a bloody disaster. Of course, she said they've had a hard time. She went right across and shook hands with John Davis and said congratulations. I stayed right away, didn't have anything to do with that one.

RF: Davis probably took it

SG: Davis got on well with women in a way. He was a brute. The subject of John Davis is an interesting one, there is a perversity of his makeup which goes beyond any rational human dimension.

SG: He was very rude to people and he destroyed so many people. They would go all a tremble. Only his judgement counted. When Blue Lagoon made a bomb, he would not extend booking a week because he never wanted it made. You were asking about cost, I'm sure it applied to all Independent Producers contracts, there was a sealing, you could go up to a certain cost without any kind of approval from the board, well from the financiers

RF: An overall cost per picture?

SG: An overall cost per picture which was something like, I'm only guessing, shall we say £330,000. If you went over that cost, your budget was over that cost, then they could veto that film. Well we put in a budget for Blue Lagoon which was over that and Davis promptly vetoed it. We saw our agent and he said "They cannot veto it if you get it below." So we cut the sound unit out on the location and made other economies so we got it below, so he couldn't stop us, we made it. This of course lead to, to some degree we got a lot of ribbing over Blue Lagoon, Frank is rather a romantic character and I think some people thought it was of a rather old fashioned nature. Davis hated it, but we made it by cutting down costs including not sending any unit abroad, in those days there was a union rule about it. I think the picture was made on cost, there wasn't any budget problems on that if I remember rightly. And we had no ostensible friction with Davis, we had friction with the sound department, this will amuse you, John Dennis, he was the head of it and one day, we went it to my rushes, we were seeing rushes, it must have been of London Belongs to me and just as we were getting up to leave on came another picture which was a scene, first of all they did, David Lean shot a comic scene with Robert Newton so he must have been doing Oliver Twist because he was dressed in his Bill Sykes outfit and he did a scene of getting some sort of backcloth, some send up of Blue Lagoon, I've forgotten what business was. Then up came Blue Lagoon rushes, had sound put on by John Dennis, and the sound was all nonsense, getting at the fact that no unit had gone out there and synched up roughly with the people speaking and then there was kind of chorus which went from ta ta to da da, no sound, I forget what the words were, but da da d a da, no sound. Then there was this passage coming up the beach where they put this cod sound on which reasonably matched so that when the lights went up and they were all laughing at our expense. I said "John, what do you think you've proved?" He said "What do you mean?" "You've proved that we can do it. If you can put nonsense on and it doesn't look too painful, we know exactly what was said, we can post sync it with no problem at all." And that is what lead to union rules about sound,

guidetracks, that picture.

Ever after, whenever I was working without a sound unit, on second unit, I always knew the way around that little one. Because I would just say a note to Frank saying I've taken the dialogue outside without sound, would you please take close ups to cover this at different speeds." So when he got inside he would take the actual sound and close ups at different speeds and we would find no difficulties fitting it onto the sound department never knew that. But that answers your question about control, they did have a veto over a certain figure. And what happened in the case of things like Red Shoes but maybe Micky had a different figure from us. I just don't know. I know everybody did have a stop figure.

rf: That was a very expensive picture, something like £800,000 I think

SG: £550,000

RF: In his book it was around £800,000

SG: I know it went over.

RF: I think it was in for a penny in for a pound, they had to complete it.

That happened to a lot of ours but we never had runaway costs. never.

RF: Why we are still in this general period what are your memories was Arthur Rank, was he a naive man

SG: Yes he was. He was a very courteous man, they all called him Uncle Arthur, not to his face but it was common. I remember when we'd left him, it was all very embarrassing because of the way it came out, we felt rather shitty about the whole thing, because we planned it to come out quite differently. And we didn't see him for quite some time. And one day we were walking along to Deanery St at the back of the Dorchester, and we saw Rank, I said "There's Rank, he hadn't seen us, wearing his bowler hat and about to go in the back entrance of the Dorchester. And he saw us came straight across to us, shook hands and asked how we were doing. He couldn't have been more pleasant, he needn't have come across but he did.

But the first thing which happened, of course, was a kind of abrupt cut off in relationship. To give an absurd example, I think we broke with them about September and Christmas came a long and we always got a brace of pheasants from Arthur and no pheasants came that year, the first year they hadn't for a long time. And I wrote a parody on Good King Wencelas in which good sir page was John Davis and Powell and Pressburger and all I remember of parody apart from the fact that Uncle Arthur was Good King Wencelas, and John Davis was the page, all I remember of it was the end was "Nothing give to L and G, nor to Michael Powell. We checked that he hadn't had any pheasants either.

RF: They had been personal gifts

SG: Personal, from his estate in Scotland, he had a big shoot there. He was a nice man, I don't think there is any doubt about that. He made one revealing remark to my sister-in-law and she'd been to a dinner her husband was chairman of Fords in Britain at that time. She said I sat next to Arthur Rank the other night at a dinner and I was talking about pictures and I told him that my brother-in-law had been with him and he said "Ah yes, Frank and Sidney, he said "If they'd all turned out like that I might have been in a different position." Not that we made any fortunes for Rank but we must have been, all the perks with go pictures, we must have been very handsomely in the black.

RF: You didn't lose him many,

What do you feel, do you consider it sad that he failed?

SG: Yes I think it's sad. If you go right back to the beginning, when I went to Elstree who was running the studio, a distributor, a salesman was running production. When you come to these rather grandiose proposals of centralisation, Independent Producers, who was really becoming the power behind the throne, Davis had been I think a company secretary to the distributors, I'm not sure about it.

RF: Odeon.

SG: The same thing. And he brought people in like Earl St John who a man I had respect for had no experience of production at all and as I said in a note I was writing about the early days of Elstree, put in the mouths of one of the writers of the time, the appointments were made rather on the principle that postmen ought to be able to write the best letters, and this is it, they were not qualified to judge on pictures. You could have an intelligent talk with an exhibitor about why a certain film didn't take money. You might not agree with him but you could have an intelligent talk. But you ask him what subjects you ought to make, and again I'm right in the past now, and the only thing they'd read was as a school boy, The Cloister and the Hearth, Rob Roy, Conan Doyle was a favourite, never anything you could really do today. They're not creative people. What I think is where the whole thing went wrong, ambition. Ambition on the part of the wrong people to get a structure whereas the only way to proceed really was to proceed by steps. Because what killed it really was the structure.

RF: Did either you or Frank have any desire to be the executive producer. The problem always is that the good films have to be made by talent but they do need a great deal of money and the money has to come from somewhere.

SG: You mean by executive producer someone in charge of the programme.

RF: Running the Rank Organisation in essence, the production side of it.

SG: It's immensely difficult. You have the situation throughout most of the time that I was working in films which can be exemplified by the situation at Universal in America where they made 5 films in a row, the sixth was called Francis the Mule and

it paid for the other five. Now the situation in Britain was the exact the reverse. You make five successful films, the sixth made at a loss wipes out the profits on the other side, that's the real trouble, you have a smaller market, you don't have the market but you have to match the quality.

RF: How does one finance the production programme, talking about the hey day of the British film industry.

SG: Well one man did it, Ted Black did it, admittedly he did some of it in wartime but he again, he could chose his subjects but he couldn't chose the propositions: in other words, he'd have to make 3 Will Hays, he couldn't alter that but he could choose what the Will Hays were. And equally he and I, I was there for six months had to finish off old contracts while Gaumont was under care and maintenance, Gaumont British. And you had to make a Boris Karloff but you could choose what it was, in theory. Then you get the other things in between which were in the free market and weren't obligated of which *The Lady Vanishes* was one.

RF: The Ostrers came in as the money people but then began to get illusions of creativity did they not, and nepotism began to prevail.

SG: And sycophancy was rife. But Ted Black ran, if you count the period, it started with *Tudor Rose*, although Mick was the executive producer, and we looked after it Ted and I, and then Mick departed the scene, and Frank but I was fairly closely connected with that. And I would say for that period of two to three years up to the war, Ted Black was running at a profit, making several pictures a year. Then during the war he was moved more or less forcibly to Gaumont British, and although Maurice Ostrer was in charge of production, for the first two years it was Ted Black and the odd picture that Maurice Ostrer looked after. And he still up to the time he left, Ted was still in the Black I'm quite sure. I think he ran a programme and ran it successfully from the latter part of 1936 to the latter part of 1943.

RF: They were mostly bread and butter pictures weren't they?

SG: Well you have in them,

RF: I think that is unfair.

SG: It's only common sense, more people might well have done it with profit, to have comedy because comedy was British, it could please a British audience, it tended to be cheaper and you had a ready market. That is why we had so many comedians. Well Ted Black got landed with them if you like, he brought in the *Crazy Gang*, and his brother ran them at the Palladium of course. And I'm pretty sure that if you saw the figures that he would be in the black for every year.

RF: The perception now is that he made Will Hay films and *Crazy Gang* films and Arthur Askey films.

SG: He was also the producer of *The Lady Vanishes*, the producer of *Night Train to Munich*, *Kipps*, they weren't bread and butter films, and *Fanny by Gaslight* which Anthony Asquith directed.

RF: Why was he persona non grata to the higher reaches of the Rank organisation.

SG: I wish I knew the answer. What happened was that he fell out with Maurice Ostrer, who was jealous of him beyond a doubt. Ted was the opposite of any kind of intriguer, and a very sturdy Tynesider, and he fell out and when Rank took over. I suppose the problem must have arisen about taking Ted Black over. Ted been the producer Millions Like Us and Waterloo Rd, both of which we were connected with. At that time of course Waterloo Rd hadn't have been shown and I doubt whether Millions like Us would have been out but Waterloo Rd was still being made. And it came to a head in ways I don't fully understand.

Obviously the Ostrers, Maurice Ostrer said that he was responsible for the programme and he didn't agree with what Ted was doing. They thought it was ludicrous to make Millions Like Us and Waterloo Rd and thought we shouldn't have been given pictures to direct and I think that it much more to do with Frank, that Maurice Ostrer didn't care for Frank because he and Ted Black treated him at Islington rather like a supernumery in fact.

Anyway we were called to a meeting when Rank took over, not a meeting, an interview with Farrow, his chief accountant, I've forgotten his first name, Leslie Farrow, who was a man slightly second rate bishop or third rate archbishop. And he interviewed us in Maurice Ostrer's office without Maurice Ostrer being present. And asked us what our opinion of Black was. The reason why this happened was that Black had obviously been challenged as to what he'd done. He said ask my colleagues. They asked the two of us and Leslie Arliss and who else I don't know. Frank and I went in together and we said, if anyone was position to know it was Frank, that Ted was nine tenths of the outfit and what he'd done. "Have you feelings against Maurice Ostrer?" "No." "Have you any complaints about him?" "No. But the man who made the pictures was Black."

We don't know what Leslie Arliss said, he was an old colleague and I'm sure he wouldn't have said anything against Ted. But I suspected long afterwards he might have said to his wife afterwards "Well I didn't want to get mixed up in politics." I don't know, because the thing which happened was that Ted was forced to resign. And as soon as that happened I said "I'm uneasy that we're going to Rank because if the first thing they do when they fully took over is to sack the best man they've got, what is it going to be like." But by then it was too late. We hadn't anywhere else to go. That was just while I was still making Waterloo Rd. Because then of course they delayed the picture. It was a year before I could get it finished and Earl St John rescued it from being another year.

RF: It's astonishing how destructive these people were.

SG: They used to run Waterloo Rd for laughs, Maurice Ostrer, Harold Huth, Mae Murray, they used to run Waterloo Rd for laughs. Then at the end of Maurice Ostrer's first season, so to speak as a producer, Earl went down there as the Odeon chap, and he saw all these films and I happened to hear what was quite true, how I heard it I've forgotten but he saw all these films, about 4 times

and said "The one I'd like to to book is Waterloo Rd, when can I have it?" "Oh" said Ostrer, "It won't be ready for a long time." Because he'd put it right at the bottom of the dubbing queue, because there was a dubbing bottle neck so right at the end. I heard this and I went to see Earl. He received me at his Odeon office. I said "First of all is true that you liked Waterloo Rd?" He said "Yes, they showed me a lot of rubbish but that's a good one. That will do well in my opinion" I said "What were you told about when you could have it?" He said "It's at the bottom of the dubbing."

I said "Can you get it moved up Earl because it will never get moved off the bottom. And it's outrageous, for 6 months they wouldn't let me do the finishing shot." "I'll do what I can." he said. And he did get it moved up. And of course, he was kind enough to send me a sheet of advertisements, when it broke the southern area record, with a nice letter

RF: Do you know why Ostrer and co had so taken against it, it sounds to me an element of snobbism.

SG: I think that, I don't know because I never had an argument with Ostrer at all. I suspect that he took the line that a) he had his cronies and he took the line that people wanted to get away from the war. And I didn't know till afterwards that people thought it was rather ludicrous doing Millions like Us, and in fact Millions Like Us without any pushing did very nicely thank you. And John Davis who didn't shower his compliments, he said to me "A very good film that, it did very nicely." So it must have done. I know it got the money back because we did it for half salary and Ted Black said "It isn't fair if it does well if you work for half price so you can recover up to the 100%. After that you can't have any." So we got our money back very quickly. So we know the film made a profit, I never found out how much profit. But it did. I think that was the reason.

The other reason was that Arthur Crabtree who'd made a major cameraman, Ted would not promote him to director, he said "There are not that many good British cameramen, why should we move one up when he's really doing a splendid job." And the other was R J Minney who wanted to produce and got done a subject which had been bought for me by Ted called A Place of One's Own. He wanted to do that, he was a friend of the Sitwells. And another chap, Bernie Knowles, another cameraman, they went to Ostrer saying We can't get anywhere with Black, he won't give us any they each wanted to direct. Black said, I think rather sensibly, "We're short of cameramen." And they toaded to him if you like. I don't think Arthur Crabtree would toadie to anybody but worked on him a bit shall we say, so that when I was finishing off Waterloo Rd I actually had to wait for my own cameraman who'd left the floor to have an interview about the first picture he was going to direct outside in the corridor. That was a very successful picture he made, Madonna of the Seven Moons.

RF: But neither he nor Bernie Knowles were that good as directors, they were journeymen directors. Ted Black was no doubt one of the master English producers in retrospect.

SG: Never had the credit he should have had, absolutely honest man.

RF: Not at the time, but now he's seen to be a man of considerable achievement.

SG: But you know the history of the Lady Vanishes if very interesting. We wrote the script from this book for a director to make, it wasn't written for him

SIDE 6, TAPE 3

SG: We were talking about Ted Black, the history of The Lady Vanishes is quite simple. It was bought by Ted Black from the novel by Ethel Lina White. We did the script, supposedly to be directed by Roy William Neill. They ran into trouble with the second unit before he was available, in Yugoslavia, and came back with virtually nothing. The picture was put on the shelf. Meanwhile, Mark Ostrer, I think it was, having put Gaumont British on a care and maintenance basis and settled a few contracts and fulfilled a few others, he suggested to Ted that they should settle Hitchcock's contract, this isn't generally known. He had one more picture to make and Mark Ostrer said settle it, because Hitchcock was not a popular director with the distributors. And Ted Black said "To hell with that, why should we settle his contract, he's a fine director, and we've got a subject for him." He thought of The Lady Vanishes, took it off the shelf, and gave it to Hitchcock to read. Hitchcock wanted to finish his contract, because he had to go onto Jamaica Inn for Mayflower and then Selznick to do as it turned out Rebecca. So he was anxious to finish it. I don't think he was ever madly interested in the film, that's how it happened. It was Ted Black and but for Ted Hitchcock would never have made it, it might never have been made. And equally there would be no Night Train to Munich following up with Charters and Caldicott. Ted Black bought the story, on Frank's advice. They were a very good team when they worked together.

RF: Of the stuff which was made in the 30s, it's the Gainsborough films which really hold up.

SG: When you look at the terrible programme I went to join Ted as partner, we were called associated producers, the first thing we collected was Tudor Rose which was Bob Stevenson's first solo direction. Mick Balcon couldn't follow it through because he was in the states. The next thing was a Will Hay, we had no story, everyone went into penalties if they weren't paid, so we had to conjure a story up as best we could out of the hip pocket so to speak. It wasn't very good but we got it down, and then we had a Karloff to do. I forget what it was. And then we landed the last of the Hulberts, a dreadful thing called Everybody Dance where these Americans came in, Chuck Reisner, very nice people, they'd had it.

RF: What were they doing over here was it because they'd had it.

SG: Mick Balcon, he says in his autobiography that he was sent over by the Ostrers to get American talent because things weren't working out.

RF: The strangest people ended up over here like Fay Wray and Chuck Reisner. All sorts of strange names, if one was going to buy American talent, they were strange names to buy.

SG: He went over, the best comment on that is that he went over 10 years before I did I suppose, I went in 46, my agent contact over there, the contact of my agent to look after me to some extent, was and he took me to lunch at the club there and talked about what you just said. He said when I think of the people I've sold Mick Balcon, he said good agent though I think I am, honest agent though I think I am, I'm ashamed, I sometimes wake up worrying about it in the night. And he said I'm a good salesman. Chuck had had it. Ralph Spence was the laziest man I'd ever met and I'd met some.

RF: Bill Beaudine.

SG: Bill Beaudine was not part of that package. He had come over as an experienced comedy director and they gave him Boys will be Boys which all the troubles. And then they kept him on, he had a contract to finish off, he wasn't one of that. He knew his job in an old fashioned way and was economical and sensible in a cowboyish way, an old style cowboy.

Quite a nice chap and he knew his job in a way and he didn't let you down too much. Arthur Caesar was the classic case.

And I don't know if he had he had bells palsy, but he obviously had a serious alcohol problem. And I saw him down at Shepperton. He was sent to help us with an idea for Will Hay. He arrived and Ted Black said "Would you look after him until I get down to the office." Ted and I shared an office. So I took him round to see the little studio and he asked me questions. You were saying that's a set for so and so. And he'd interrupt and say "What do you do?" I said I'm an associate producer with Ted Black who will be down in a minute." "What did you do before?" I said "I used to write." "Do you like writing?" I said "Yes.". He said "I hope you're doing it now." I said "I'm going back to it shortly." When we got up to the office we had this discussion where he told this story idea about Will Hays, I kept looking at Ted and he seemed to be taking it quite intelligently. All I could get out of it was this thing they had in America of live father Christmases in shop windows at Christmas and they sit there and people say is he a dummy or is he real, they have to sit absolutely still. And that was the only thing I could distinguish in this long rambling thing. Anyway at the end of it, we gave him some tea and sandwiches and sent him home in a car, sent him back in a car. As soon as he'd gone Ted said "What did you make of that?" I said very cunningly "What did you make of it Ted?" "Not much" he said. I said "I thought you'd followed it all." He said "I thought you did." Well we agreed it was about a dummy Father Christmas and that was all. We used to work quite late and about 7 o'clock the phone rang. It was a man called Howard Formby who was story editor at Shepherds Bush and, it must have still been going then, he said "Why do pick contract writers like that?" I said "What do you mean?" "I've just had Arthur Caesar in, he's in a rage, he's calling a press conference tonight, the thing he's going to say is how badly you treated him." "Who treated him?" "You did." "How did I treat him?" "You took him round the studio and he didn't want to go round.

You told him you were disappointed by it and wished you were somewhere else and you did this and you did that." I said "Ted is sitting opposite me would you like to repeat it to him, because I reported on exactly what I'd said and he knows exactly what he said." I said "It's totally untrue." I passed him onto Ted who put him right. He said "Well you know, when he's had a few drinks he finishes under the table at the Savoy, and amusing everybody saying he's saying taking the next boat back. My one and only contact with Arthur Caesar.

RF: Was Islington Ted Black's fiefdom or did he report to Micky Balcon.

SG: When he first was there, he was appointed studio manager, because at that time he hadn't produced any films. But he tried to learn the business from the beginning and he was a very good studio manager and he wanted to get into production he didn't want to run a studio. And I think when they hit on this maintenance scheme, and what is confusing to me and I'd very much like to be enlightened, at what time did the Ostrers decide to get rid of Balcon and also put everything on a care and maintenance thing because Balcon was still working for them and then Ted and I went there, yet it occurred to us much later that it was wholly significant that we were doing nothing but work off old contracts. Nothing else at all. Because Lady Vanishes came after Mick had gone.

RF: You must have an inkling why Balcon left Shepherd's Bush.

SG: Well I told you about Hitchcock and Balcon didn't I

SG: That's all I know about it, there was obviously somewhere around late 36, I don't know the exact time, there was a great closing down and firing and this is not contradicted but the waters muddied a bit because I know when I went to, trying to think of the dates, I think it was March 36, does it say there, if you look at Everybody Dance does it give a date, I don't think it had a credit on it,

At that time, Balcon's authority had not technically been eroded but the thing I was referring to just now, I did a review for the Sunday Times on Mick Balcon's autobiography, ghosted by Stephen Watts, I got a letter from Hitchcock which I've got somewhere, which said "I read your review in the Sunday Times of Mick Balcon's life with interest. I shall never forget the time when Victor Peers, who was general production manager at Shepherd's Bush, Victor Peers said to me "Look, I've just had a list given to me of people to fire, I knew things were going to be much reduced here so I wasn't surprised. But Mark Ostrer gave me the list and said will you tell these people. One never likes that much, so I went to my office and he said it wasn't until I got to my office that I saw the first name on it was Michael Balcon." That was obviously when he got back from the States and after the people had been working some time which suggested it was late 36. And I joined Metro in February 37 and Mick had already been there for some months.

RF: Was it do you think that the Ostrers

SG: I think that they'd run out of money.

RF: Mick had lost them a lot of money

SG: Someone had, I think it's a bit hard to blame it all on him. It's the same thing as at Rank, they were putting in films to fill the studio.

RF: Although some

RF: I'm not saying the films were bad but that they didn't make any money. Jew Suss is the classic one.

SG: I didn't think it was a bad film.

I haven't seen it since it was released. But I knew Connie Veidt and had been working in the South of France with

RF: I think any film with Veidt had presence.

SG: I think the Ostrers decided to get out, they decided at a rather odd time and then they shut the studio down and Ted kept on and he must have been kept on because of the backlog. I can't think of any other reason. And I suppose he was quite successful. And then we had a grand party at Islington to which I was invited. It was to celebrate a million or something provided by Twentieth Century Fox, that was still in Ted's time but I doubt if he had anything to do with the securing of the money. And they threw this party, and a band playing, a magnificent buffet, everything. And the band played Thanks a Million. And some cynic remarked "Let a year go by and it will be Thanks for the Memory."

RF: It lasted for a little while that relationship with Fox.

SG: It lasted right through the war, until, I suppose it lasted until I don't know, but after the first two years of the war.

RF: And that was their way of satisfying quota presumably.

SG: Yes. They were quite progressive and they didn't interfere to any extent and they had this chap Bob Harley up in town somewhere and when war broke out they announced that they were pulling up the hook and going. And I went up with Frank and Ted, very significant the three of us went up there, I was probably still a freelance then, I don't know whether I was or not, but I was asked to go up there with Frank and Ted. We had the interview with Bob Harley saying you must stay, you have obligations you must stay." He was a friendly sort of guy. He said "Look Ted, a bomb drops outside your studio, no one's there the next morning." Ted said "Bomb drops outside the studio and everyone will be there the next morning." He said "Well," I don't know what he said but they never went back and Harley stayed, through the Blitz too. Among other pictures they financed, The Lady Vanishes must have been one of them. Could it have been

I tell you one thing I do remember remember, Night Train to Munich was Twentieth Century Fox definitely.

Lady Vanishes had it's press show at the MGM theatre. Now one of

these films was given to Metro to fill its quota in. And it may have been, in England it may have been Night Train but it was financed by Twentieth but they gave it to Metro because they were short of quota. So it went out as Metro, one of those two.

RF: Everybody Dance had its trade show in October of 36.

SG: That would fit in. So Ted was active during 36, somewhere during the latter half Mick Balcon went. And he was in America therefore in 35 so when I went to join Ted, it is dated in the autumn roughly of 35.

RF: You're right, The Lady Vanishes was distributed by MGM

SG: Therefore I'm wrong about something, because I distinctly remember that 20th let them have it, therefore 20th must have already have put some money in. It looks as if that reckoning, I'm making a great error, I'm thinking the date of writing The Lady Vanishes, not the date of filming and it was on the shelf for 18 months. So somewhere, when did we start shooting it, in the winter of 37, 38, so somewhere before that time they must have had this famous party, sometime at the end of 37

RF: Fox came in later than you think. The first one that one can see here was A Girl Must Live, which was a Gainsborough film which was 1939, that was trade shown in April.

SG: No, they must have been there for Lady Vanishes, when was that out. In Munich time, it was out.

All I said was that Twentieth Century had the party, I was uncertain of the date, that Metro took over The Lady Vanishes because they were short of quota, but that was Munich time. So that was late in 38.

Now I mention the party, so I must have been working there at the time or doing something, and it was well before the Lady Vanishes was out, well before. And they did a whole lot of films, they went on to do The Young Mr. Pitt, Kipps, The Girl is News.

They were all Fox after a certain date, all the Gainsborough, I don't know about Gaumont, but then Gaumont closed down for a long time. It's difficult to remember because I wasn't there all the time.

RF: Somebody's whose name keeps cropping up is Micky Balcon. You surprised me the other day by saying you resigned from the Saville because he cut you there. I didn't realise that you had a falling out.

SG: That was later at British Lion. He must have thought we'd fallen out.

What happened was very like what happened when George Archibald walked out of the Dorchester. Mick Balcon called us to a meeting at the Garrick, the Boultings and myself, I don't know who else was there, David Kingsley. And he felt we were pursuing too restrictive a policy and he was there as chairman, that was a

reconstituted British Lion of 1964, so it would have been a year or two after that. He said, really what he was saying is that he would resign unless or felt he should resign unless we could initiate more production which with the structure we had was very difficult. What it really meant was he wanted to get some of the old Ealing talent back but wanted the company to do the financing. And we hadn't been too happy with one or two suggestions that way. Anyway, it was rather like George Archibald, when Mick said "I see no alternative but to resign." no one said a word. And he did resign. After that he wasn't very cordial.

RF: He was a man who bore grudges.

SG: I think he did and I always had a, ever since Yank at Oxford I always had an ambivalent relationship with Mick because I think I saw too much of what was being done to him and he didn't like it. Because I was with him virtually the whole time he was at Metro, except when he was in America, and he had a humiliating time. I think from then on things became a bit colder, all very cordial when we met, but he was obviously embarrassed and he didn't want that taken too seriously. It was a combination of the feeling that the saddle was changing, the loss of TVV to Harlech and all the Harlech boys being civilians. I just felt well it's no fun going to a club where there things happen, I don't want to be sitting, drinking my Scotch in the corner while people are toasting themselves for getting the station I don't think we should ever have lost.

RF: Was that the end of your connection with the programme contractors.

SG: Yes.

SG: Going back Hitchcock who keeps cropping up, I was warned by a friend Michael Hogan the writer, he later worked with Hitchcock in Hollywood, who was working with him in the 30s in England and I was told to watch out because he was a great one for causing trouble in your marriage. And Michael had a somewhat tense sort of marriage, and Hitchcock, for instance, said one day "Come along, we're going to go down and investigate something. So we get in the car, and go down to Southend. Get to Southend and he says "Let's go on the pier." In those days they had this railway to the end of the Pier. They get in the train and go to the end of the pier where they just sit down. Hitchcock says nothing. They sit there for an hour or two. Never mentioned the subject. After a time he says "I suppose we better go back." turns round and goes back which lead to Michael being about an hour late at home. And he said "You look out because he tried that sort of thing one people." And once Hitchcock said, he asked if I'd like some tickets for a play called The Old Garde, a play with Michael Redgrave, it must have been after he shot The Lady Vanishes, because I didn't Redgrave before. And Redgrave wanted him to go and see him in the play, "Would you like to come along." I said "Yes." He said "I'll get the tickets, I'll ask him for the tickets." I became a little suspicious, I don't know why, perhaps because Michael said something to me. So when I was sitting with Joan who was acting then more or less as secretary, I was waiting for Hitch in his flat. I said "Joan, how many tickets did Hitch get for the White Garde tomorrow night? And

she said for "Four." I said "Hitch, Alma, me and you." She said "Yes." I said "What about my wife." "Oh he didn't mention that." I said "Well could you get an extra one." And she hesitated "I don't know." I said "I don't want to embarrass anybody, just cross me off, that's all. I don't care if I see the play or not but I'm not going without her. So you do what you like about it and if you think it will embarrass him just cross me off. I don't mind a bit." He got the extra ticket. Hitch took his revenge by snoring loudly after the first 10 minutes. We were in the second row of the front stalls, all the actors could quite clearly hear him. That was his way of taking a little revenge. You had to watch him.

RF: There is indeed that dark side to him.

SG: In the end she did take my advice and not such left him as was pushed I think. I got on very well with Joan, myself. A funny thing happened in Hollywood and Charles Bennett had a party and he said we're going to have a party for you next week. So he kept ringing me up saying how about inviting so and so. And he said "How about Joan Harrison? I said "I'm not all that fond of Joan, I met her twice already here." "Alright I'll cross her off." He rang me a day or two later "Look you're not going to insist I don't invite her." I said "I wouldn't do that why?" "Because she rang up and asked why she hasn't been invited." I said "Forget it." There was something going on there but I never knew quite what.

RF: We were floating around Ted Black, Mick Balcon. I want to ask you when you began to feel secure as a writer because you'd come in and done titles and then gags for Nettlefold.

SG: I don't think anyone feel secure as a writer.

RF: You know what I mean, in terms of the craft. Did you feel that that was instinctive.

SG: Yes, instinctive in the sense of ideas that you get, just ideas, pictures in your mind. It was instinctive and I had it to some extent, must have done. When it came to dialogue, that was really hard work for me, I had no gift as such for dialogue. Frank did. But Frank had been a part time actor and had written odd plays so he'd learned to some extent on the stage. But I didn't have any of that training and my dialogue was pretty painful and didn't flow. And then I learned it. I don't say I could ever write brilliant dialogue but I could write adequate dialogue anyway.

RF: Did you take it from life? Did you observe?

SG: One always does. But how do a pair like Charters and Caldicott from a writers point of view emerge. I put them in here on the corner, before Frank joined me because he was busy scenario editing, because I put them in as two typical Englishmen who were on a steamer in the first part which was a frontier like Lake Constantine is whichever lake it is in Switzerland, Germany one side, and Austria one side and Switzerland the other, rather like that sort of thing with this lake steamer. And they were looking round the lake steamer, the only passengers that were walking, going round and round and round. And you've got the

political background through their eyes and the geographical background while they're complaining about how late the steamer was, it came over from their comments. That's how Charters and Caldicott started. But you can say it's observation, but they became quite different people as soon as you got down to writing the scene.

RF: Had you travelled enough that you were aware of the English abroad in their full glory for example. Were they based tenuously on life.

SG: I suppose they must have been, they weren't based on particular people. I based them on actors. I originally thought of one older and one younger. And the two I thought of, the older one Felix Amlyer and the younger one Cecil Parker. But in the end Hitchcock cast one of his favourite actors, Basil Radford, and then he cast Evelyn Roberts, a rather burley actor, a very good actor. He either fell ill or had another engagement so he got Naunton Wayne who I don't think had really appeared on the screen, and that was luck, he wasn't the first choice. They couldn't have been a better pair.

RF: How did you two of you work, did you write separately and then compare or did you actually do it in the same room.

SG: What we generally did for the most part, especially when we were inventing a lot was talk it over and probably get down some rather undisciplined treatment. And then we would take sections of it and write the script and then exchange.

RF: Did you have complimentary gifts, was one strong on story, you mention Frank on dialogue for example, were you strong on construction.

SG: We had different tendencies, I might have been stronger on construction than Frank, it depends. I think I was more logical than Frank, more meticulous about detail, Frank more querkish which was a valuable attribute.

RF: In terms of incident, story or character.

SG: Especially dialogue. But generally we'd make the style seem reasonably the same by simply exchanging and changing the phraseology so you'd end up with a fairly connected thing. The best example of that is Seven Sinners which was our first collaboration, there was some later stuff put in by somebody else which sticks out rather. But the rest is rather typical, yet some of the very split stuff of Edmund Lowe's tends to be Franks.

RF: Did you have models?

SG: As writers? No, I don't think so.

RF: I imagine that everyone went to see the American movies quite regularly.

SG: Yes. And Seven Sinners shows that quite clearly. But

RF: This was the era of the smart snazzy 5th Avenue comedy in the United States. Would you say they were influences.

SG: Not so much the stage, I think The Thin Man, you can see that in Seven Sinners. But the story was far more convoluted. Anyway, what would you do if you were a writer and somebody said here is this old play, we can't use any of that, here is the script but I don't think we'll be able to use much of that and we had one train wreck we'd like you to use. And one not very good script by du Garde Peach and we take this lump of stuff. The play was the Wrecker. And out of it we right an entirely new story and take one character from du Garde Peach, the French detective, all the rest, not a single episode from the original play. It had three wrecks, two of which we invented, one which we used the old one, from the 1920s film and you'd have an absolute hotchpot. In fact, today although the film has dated in style, particularly, I don't think it's dated in plot, in fact it makes more sense today than it did then.

RF: It's more easily followed because it's episodic, there are very abrupt transitions. It strikes me as being almost continental rather than American or British.

SG: I'm not sure, de Courville directed it and he's not a good director. He shot some of the stuff too far away, too much in long shot and missed points. On the whole, though, it stood up better than I supposed I hadn't seen the thing for 30 years or more and it stood up much better than I thought. My father saw it at the time and said "I couldn't make head or tail of it." Well you can now because when you say Continental, people have got into the mood of the intrigue which is very complex, and although the idea really of a chap going mad and wrecking trains through some querk isn't very plausible, we were stuck with that, we couldn't really help that.

RF: As I remember it you don't waste a lot of time on people going in and out of doors and up stairs, it follows very rapidly.

SG: There is one passage written by Austin Melford, it must have been, they bring in the local police constable and the style changes completely. We wrote a straight forward scene and I think de Courville must have said "We must jazz this up." And they got Austin who was the part writer to jive it up and it sticks out rather. It's not in keeping.

RF: I can't remember the scene.

SG: It's in the pub when he brings the cufflink out. And the chief constable is an actor who is a type Albert liked, a rather outgoing comic actor, I don't know who he was, I didn't know the face. He made him into rather an eccentric chap, didn't add anything to it, because he wanted to get on with it. On the whole it stood up very well I thought.

RF: Did the two of you write quickly together, when you embarked on a subject did it come together rather quickly. In general.

SG: Frank was generally quicker than I was and less lazy. We had no set way of working is the best way of putting it. When we really worked hard we always exchanged and in the end it generally worked out. In our latter years we didn't really collaborate much at all which I think is a great pity. That

wasn't my fault.

RF: But as young screen writers there were all sorts of other attractions, not just family, but living life. How dedicated were you to the motion picture art. Or was it just a job.

SG: No, it wasn't just a job. I don't think one could have done it that way if it was just a job. I think that I wasn't sufficiently dedicated to the art of the motion picture because I was lazy as much as anything. I was affected by all sorts of other things.

RF: Was it that you liked to sit around or was it that you had other interests.

SG: Music and reading.

RF: So you were always doing something.

SG: Yes. A certain amount of sport, tennis, I played a lot of tennis in those days.

RF: Tennis always seems to be particularly 1930s, white flannels.

SG: That is why we haven't any tennis players because they have this image of a middle class game and no middle class players. I know this is a stupid generalisation and nothing to do with films at all. Our players, our great players came from clubs, Perry came from, he was a schoolboy at Ealing County School, he had no particular advantages, his father was a pillow of the co-op movement, he got his job as secretary of a football co-op.

Now all the clubs have gone and you don't get the players coming up. It's gone out of fashion, it hasn't gone out of fashion anywhere else, just in England.

RF: But an Ealing schoolboy would still have been modeling himself on that middle class ambiance.

SG: Perry was always a bit of a rebel and he got his Wimbledon which made him tougher. Austin of course was a Cambridge man.

(section about tennis)

RF: Did you ever have a court here?

SG: Yes, we had a court on the lawn there. When we first came down here we got constant invitations to play tennis.

That was a bit later on. I think it's very sad. I played tennis very badly but I had so much fun playing tennis that I miss it more than any other thing or hobby, I played until I was 67 or 68. I stopped playing because I hadn't got nobody to play with. They all stopped placing round here.

RF: Val Guest is still playing.

SIDE 7, TAPE 4

SG: A bad film directed by Sinclair Hill called A Gentleman of Paris, and Liz Constanz was the leading lady and at time Bunny Austin was number one Davis Cup and Fred Perry number two and I remember talking to her and saying isn't it wonderful that they're capable of winning the Davis cup. And she said "I'm so happy for Bunny that Fred Perry's come along because before that he thought he was carrying too much and the responsibility affected his game. Now he knows that if he slips up there's someone there who probably won't and it makes all the difference, it makes him so much more relaxed. I remember that.

He wants to meet you, so I went down to Mick's flat and he was quite different from what I'd expected. I talked to him on the phone in 1927 but I had no impression of him, I'd never met him and he seemed a much gentler type of person, quiet than I expected and he was very complimentary about the script and he doubled my salary. That put me just into the double figures. Afterwards of course, I found the usual thing, I found I was collaborating with writers who were getting 2 or 3 times as much as I was. I got a small rise and then found I was still working with writers and taking perhaps more responsibility than they were and getting a good deal less. I thought I can't continue like this and I went to Korda for an interview on my own on my own initiative. And Korda had to break off the interview because of family news or something, made a fresh appointment which I couldn't keep. That was the end of that. But when I left Korda, on the time I had this short appointment, I passed Hitchcock who was at the enquiry desk. He knew me of course, we said "Hello", nothing else was said.

But shortly afterwards Balcon called me into the office and said I hear you're thinking of leaving us." I sensed the right thing, I'd given it up by then but I thought the right thing to say was to say "Yes, Mr Balcon." He said "Why?" I said "I'm not getting enough money." He said "I hear you've been trying somewhere else." I said "Yes. But I didn't follow it up." He said "You think you've had a better offer." I said "Yes, but not from films." The truth of that was that my father had made me a better offer but it was to do film criticism for two weeks only while the critic was on holiday at £25 a week which was more than I was getting by far, but it was only for two weeks. So I said I had had a better offer. Then he made a long speech about, not using the word loyalty, but about how he wanted the team round him and all this stuff. And he said "What do you think about all that?" And I said something terrible, really, but didn't seem to hurt him much, I said "I don't know, sir, I haven't brought my violin with me." Anyway he gave me some more money.

I was never somehow devoted to Mick but I certainly behaved properly towards him, there is not question about that. I liked him personally, I thought he was a fearful snob. He was the worse and most disturbing kind, really, the left wing snob. And he did have this, he did care about films and wanted to make good films and he was prepared to encourage young people but not too far, because of the risks which were considerable after all. So he tended having given directorships to someone like Bob Steven-

son, he would be lucky if he got a look in after that because that was the great risk, you see, and he wouldn't take too many great risks. He hadn't much in the way of impulse, I think he thought things over and was a little cautious. But he was very feminine as a character. I don't mean that he was effeminate, he reacted in the same way as a woman might react. And when you talk about him bearing a grudge I think that's the feminine side of his character.

RF: Was he indecisive.

SG: Terribly. When we were in the Home Guard together and we were waiting to go into one of the studios there and we were all a group of Ealing boys, Danischewsky, Basil Dearden, Bob Hamer, me, Mick, I wasn't an Ealing boy but I was in the same battalion and Mick I remember said "I want to pee, or do I?" And looked at all of us. So, we said "Yes, probably." So he went off. A crazy example. But he was very indecisive.

RF: Jake Eberts is about to publish his account of Goldcrest which have a title My Indecision is Final.

SG: Mick fell into the same trap that Rank fell into later in a way I'm trying to convey, which is this quantity thing. He had to fill Islington, he had to fill Shepherd's Bush and films went in which weren't right. Mick was not good enough, well enough equipped, whatever words you might like to use, to say, no that film's not the right one. Yet what could he have done. It's very difficult.

RF: The studio was an adjunct of the circuit right. I suppose essentially it was a matter of feeding their cinemas, despite the fact that they could buy in all that American product.

SG: Quota really. You see C M Woolf, I cannot help with at all. I wish I could because I'd like to know much more about him. I suppose John Woolf ought to be able to tell you and he was really sinister in my mind, I don't say other people thought that. He was somebody I never met and he was a sinister man who made obscure decisions in back rooms and then they came back and hit you when you weren't looking. He was the one who never had any faith in Hitchcock, he tried to stop 39 Steps when Mick was in America. And he had an immense effect on all this, while the Ostrers were there to some extent but particularly before the Ostrers. The Ostrers got going when Mick came to, I never understand these take overs but I imagine that it was really an Ostrer takeover when Gaumont British became Gaumont British. C M Woolf was still a great power throughout the whole of that time. When he retired I've forgotten, he's an essential figure I know nothing about.

RF: I think that he is shadowey.

SG: I think he intimidated, if he didn't intimidate Mick personally he intimidated Mick's decisions, he influenced them rightly or wrongly.

RF: GFD distributed all Shepherd's Bush product?

SG: There was something before that, before GFD there was

66

something else I've forgot the name of the company, it's still Woolf.

RF: You make it sound as if it was a very formal business at that stage, for instance you refer to him as Mr Balcon, was it not then a first names business.

SG: I have no recollection what so ever what Mick called me at that time. Angus MacPhail, I called MacPhail, I was taken over, I knew I was going to be kept on because Walter Forde had put in a word for me, but a lot of my colleagues at the Gaumont Co Ltd knew that I would be kept, and most of them were fired but I knew that I would be kept because Woolf had told me, but all these people were new to me. The people I'd referred to were new. I hadn't met MacPhail, I'd heard of him. When I met MacPhail, I called him Mr MacPhail, he tolerated this for a time and then he said "For god's sake, call me anything, call me fishface, I don't mind but not Mr MacPhail, Angus will do." So gradually we got onto first names. Mick was a little bit more formal that way if you were a bit junior. I don't think he'd like you to call him Mick. If, however, it sounds terribly catty but I think it's true, if you were of aristocratic lineage or famous and you were the son of that line, or that fame and you called him Mick he wouldn't have been displeased. I think he would have been if I had at that time.

RF: Was there very much of that around the studio, there were cliques, there were all the Germans, the Polish corridor.

SG: They came later, not much later but a bit later.

RF: Wasn't it around the time of Rome Express that the German influx began.

SG: Yes, but you have to remember that the script was written some times before that, and, two things, there had always been a German connection, Sunshine Susie, nothing to do with the political problems of Germany but it had German personnel and a German script translated into English and rewritten by MacPhail and co, but Sunshine Susie, a whole lot of them, but Sunshine Susie was the first of that bunch. And Hitchcock's first film was made in Germany, because of the Balcon connection, so it is a bit treacherous to say that they were necessarily there because of the situation in Germany.

RF: What were Balcon's strengths and weaknesses as a producer.

SG: I never worked for him during the main Ealing days at all so I only heard Ealing stories. My experience goes back principally to the 30s.

RF: It's about that time I'm curious because he seems to have suffered a very traumatic thing with A Yank at Oxford. How did you find him performing prior to that at the Bush.

SG: I wasn't present at many script conferences with Mick, because I had them with MacPhail, that was Angus MacPhail. He might go and to Mick and Mick would join in but I never thought that Mick had very much influence on the individual film, he

relied very very much on the directors. He'd argued a lot with MacPhail but I haven't a picture in my mind at that time of script conferences with Mick. On a Yank at Oxford, yes, but not many because he went off to America and left me that bastard Léon Gordon.

RF: You say he went to the States during his sojourn at the Bush.

SG: This is when he went to recruit all these stars.

RF: Were these lengthy trips?

SG: The first one was fairly short, the second one he never seemed to be coming back, I couldn't tell you how long it was. What seemed to have happened is that he went off to see Louis Mayer and Mayer gave him an awful time and then gradually he was going out and Saville took his place. I didn't know much about the things because what happened was is that I was engaged to go to Metro. I couldn't go on the date arranged because I had to finish a script off, probably *The Lady Vanishes*, so I was a few weeks late. I went in mid February, or thereabouts of 1937.

I was immediately given an office sharing an office in Waterloo Place at the Metro Goldwyn Mayer officers which were in there and Mick shoved a whole lot of scripts at me, *Goodbye Mr Chips*, some treatments and original notes on a Yank at Oxford and one or two other things which I've forgotten now. He said I would like you to look through these, we can discuss which you're going to work on. Well I wanted to work on *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. I told Mick that and he said "There's a difficulty there because Sherriff's working on it and the thing hasn't been fully discussed."

Now A Yank at Oxford, we only got story outlines for that at the most. So I read it through and said "I think the Yank at Oxford's awful. What you have on it, it's a good idea but that's all." He said "We could do some work on that." or words to that effect. He said "You can't do *Goodbye Mr Chips*, not yet anyway, but I'd like you to make some notes on it." This I think is Mick's indecision, he didn't know what to make of the story. So I made notes which turned out to be of some fatality, about 2 and a half to 3 pages on *Goodbye Mr Chips*. It was very critical, in which incidentally I said that every character spoke like every other character, there was no differentiation and so on. Mick took that, he asked me when I told him, he said put it down on paper so he took the paper. Then the next thing I remember because I certainly hadn't been there more than a week or two and he said "Look, I'll have to leave, got to go to the States, shan't be long, I'll leave you with a man called Gordon, Leon Gordon to help you. I said "I haven't had time to get a story out yet. "No that's alright. Somebody you could talk to." And off he went. Well Leon Gordon to my mind quite clearly had ideas to replace Mick. But certainly, he intended at least to be the scenario editor and he was issuing orders to me at once. I couldn't work at home I had to work in the office. And he expected a story in 3 days for A Yank at Oxford. All you had was one or two ideas.

RF: Had he been at Culver City or had they found him here.

SG: No he was born in Brighton but I don't know what his job was, a junior producer at Metro, and Culver City, he was on the Metro staff, Culver City. But nobody told me what he was, and I found I was being treated as a subordinate and ordered about and bloody difficult to turn out an original story in three days, it's worse because you've got guiding lines. And anyway he kept at me and I'm a lazy writer and once I've lost confidence in it. So I made little progress. I said I think I can make more if I had somebody to talk to. Who I wanted to talk to was Frank but Frank couldn't be released from Gainsborough, so I suggested Michael Hogan which was fatal because when it came to the point of a full collaboration he and I didn't see eye to eye. So we had a split camp and it was fairly, I didn't get on with Michael, Gordon was saying all the time "Come on, come on, where's the script? The next page." that sort of thing. I can't work like that. And then he got, apparently, he got in the fellow who wrote George and Margaret

RF: Gerald Savory

SG: I think it was, he never told me he was getting him, I never met him, and then he got Roland Pertwee. So we would churn out our pages here, then he would go across the corridor where Gordon and Pertwee would write on the spot and they would never show what they'd written.

RF: This was the Metro system on the coast.

SG: More or less. I took it very personally and by then my confidence had completely gone. And anyway I got a certain distance with it and they sent the script to America and I had an option to do a play with Frank, with something like 10 weeks, which I could operate. So I was so damn grateful to get away from that man that I exercised pleased to let me go and I exercised it and I started work on a play I did with Frank.

And while I was there Ted Black asked me if it could be arranged would I do a script. So he negotiated with Metro and I had four weeks, either four or six weeks to do a play and with the script I got 10 weeks off, wonderful, 10 weeks to be away from that place.

When I went back Mick still hadn't come back and they put me on of all things rewriting a Michael Hogan script from Gaumont, Soldiers Three, Michael when he heard it, went through the roof, accused me of betraying him. My reaction had been I think it's a good script already, I'd rather not touch it. But I heard I had to do it, I played around with it but not much. Eventually Mick came back. Apparently, these things take so long to emerge, but apparently, he went to the States, he met Louis Mayer and according to Victor Saville, after the event when he discussed product he used my criticisms of Goodbye Mr Chips which apparently although I didn't know it he didn't like. So he used any adverse comments I made.

RF: In his name.

SG: No, the reason this conversation arose, guess where? Aubrey Smith's golden wedding in Beverley Hills, he had a wonderful golden wedding and Victor Saville were there. And Victor said

had a message from Mick, he passed on to me to give to me, it was about releasing an artist or something, he said "Mick won't believe this but I can't release this artist. I think it was Gladys Cooper, I can't release her, he won't believe it, because he thinks I took his job at Metro. But you were more responsible for Mick leaving Metro than I was." I said "How do you make that out?" "That awful letter that you wrote." "What awful letter." "About Goodbye Mr. Chips." I'd totally forgotten it. I said "What happened." He said "Mick quoted it and he said Irving Thalberg had given that script his blessing which meant it was sermon on the mount, it was the tablets in stone. Anyone who said anything nasty was not desirable. That got Mick off on the wrong foot." I'm totally innocent of all this because anyway I'd love to have worked on Goodbye Mr Chips. Whether Saville was entirely true, there must have been other factors, of course, but I had not idea. Imagine I wasn't in high favour at any time with Gordon, I just don't know about these things.

RF: Part of what seems at least to some extent a great culture clash, the way films were made at Culver City and the way people were used to doing them here.

Who were the Americans in place here, was Ben Goetz here have that time.

SG: Ben Goetz was here.

RF: And Sam Eckman

SG: No, he wasn't there

RF: Because Mayer came over.

SG: Yes, I met him. I couldn't stand him.

RF: Whe Grahame Greene was writing for Night and Day I came a cross a piece he wrote about a lunch at the Savoy which was launching MGM British.

SG: I never understood the exact plan and motives they had. But Mayer, the despicable thing that happened was that Mick went boldly on. I went back to fulfil my contract, they put me on various things, eventually on a thing which I've forgotten the title, a play originally of H M Harwood or something, and we tore the guts out of it. I worked with Chan Balcon who wasn't a writer but I could talk to him you see. We worked on this together. And then I think that Roland Pertwee came in again.

RF: Was Chan his brother's alter ego?

SG: No, very much treated by Mick as a junior. But I worked with Chan on this and then Roland Pertwee. Mick was then very positive about the script.

Mick was quite decisive, more so in fact I had an idea I'd forgotten but I've never known Mick so vehement about how wrong and bad it was, "We cannot have that sort of thing in the picture we must cut it out at once." It wasn't vulgar, what it was I don't know I can't remember. He was very decisive then and they were going to make the picture. Then a letter came from Hollywood

70

saying the script that Pertwee and I had done was a travesty of the original book and play and missed all the points and so on. I answered that fairly forcibly and that was the last that was heard of that one.

But towards the end, I continued as a man on the floor or available on the floor for the whole of the production of A Yank at Oxford. I was the only one who survived it from beginning to end, despite all these troubles. And while I was working on it still, Jim Williams came up to me, the writer J B Williams and he said "I'm very shaken." I said "Why?" He said "I went to a press conference, what Jim was doing there I don't know, and he said "Howard Strickling, who was head of publicity, he was there and he told the press off the record but otherwise quite openly that Balcon was on his way out."

RF: Well Strickling was not only head of publicity he was one of the Mayer courtiers, he was very close to LB .

SG: So he told the press and Mick didn't know at all. And Jim said I'm tell you because you're working with Mick Balcon at the moment and does he know these things are being said?" I said "I can't very well ask him." He said "It seems to me the man should know what's being said." So I said " I can't possibly mention it to Mick, I might mention it to his brother." So I mentioned it to Chan who said he would mention it to Mick. And then all hell broke loose, because Mick didn't like being told it, he said it was nonsense. And he saw me talking to my agent in the grounds there on quite other matters, and my agent said that he rang him up and asked what he had been discussing with me. He was so paranoid about it. I had absolutely the best intentions. I was appalled that Mick should be treated like that. And then of course it turned out to be quite true. They didn't renew the contract and they didn't treat him well. And Saville more or less took over his duties.

RF: Was Saville an opportunist do you think? Or did he just happen to be in the right place at the right time?

SG: Saville, Saville I'd always got on quite well with but if you'd asked me I wouldn't have trusted him, for no reason. I wouldn't have trusted him, I don't know why, because I don't think that there was anything to suggest that he was untrustworthy. But there was a terrible feud, undercover feud really, between him and Walter Forde, I think it was jealousy of the wives rather than the two men. And because of all the poisonous things Culley thought, said about Victor Saville, I assumed that there was some substance to them. So when I heard that he'd taken over Mick's place, more or less, I assumed it had been a bit of sly work, but in the light of history I very much doubt it. I think that he was the man around. Maybe an opportunist in the sense of if offered something he might take it. But I don't think he intrigued to get it.

RF: You don't think that he connived at Balcon's fall.

SG: I don't think so, but equally there was terrible jealousy between the Balcons and the Savilles, again the wives, so it's awfully difficult to sort it out.

RF: Saville fitted in very well at MGM

SG: It's so astounding, at this wedding, nothing was further from my mind and suddenly "This awful letter that you wrote." I'll never forget that phrase and that must have been sincere. He assumed I knew.

And the funny thing is I'll tell you something I've just remembered. Before this, while I was still at Metro, I went back after I did that stint with Gainsborough, I went back there and they put me on this and that. While I was on that Soldiers Three thing I was trying to find some waste paper and the office that I'd now had been Leon Gordon's office, and he still had a few odd papers in and I was looking for foolscap or something and I opened the drawers and nothing, mostly empty. And one piece of paper was caught in the back of the drawer and I picked it up and it was my note, or a copy of it, on Goodbye Mr Chips. What's that doing in Leon Gordon's desk. What was it doing, what had it been doing, because we just weren't working on that subject. Of course, years later when Saville said that, this gradually came back to me. Obviously Leon Gordon was a party to my criticism, even though he was't working on that subject. So it all ties in, but, nevertheless, I cannot believe that that was more than one reason.

RF: You said the other day that part of your departure from BIP was that you were a callow youth, are you a less callow youth now, you're more used to the ways of the business, but were you ever a politician in the sense that these characters were?

SG: No. I don't think so at all. For one thing it's hard to be, if you're a practicing writer, as I was then, it's hard to be. Your politics concern the person you're working with or for immediately. And in most cases in those early days it was for Angus MacPhail and Angus was no intriguer.

RF: How about getting work Sidney, was it very competitive in those days, was there that kind of personal competition between screenwriters.

SG: Well it was a fairly loose arrangement, they had staff writers. I remember Leslie Arliss, Frank as a freelance at that earlier date, myself, Stafford Dickens, some of the Germans, Curt Siodmak, Wolfgang Wilhelm, they were around I don't think Wolf, no I never saw Wolf at Shepherd's Bush. Hans Wilhelm and his brother was at Islington for a time. There were enough of us to be thought a group, Jock Orton, Val Guest later. And they made a group of people. Well there was a bit a maneouvering amongst them, Val Guest, Jock Orton, I didn't do much work with Val, but I remember Jock Orton rushing screaming round the studio, red in the face with a book and it was "What Makes Sammy Run?" And he said "It's Val, read it it's Val." I remember that. But generally a writer worked on the subject so until we had the Writers Association you had friendships of writers but you couldn't say that they were a body. They had no representation and different interests according to what they're writing. Nevertheless as a staff hack you had a certain common label and I, generally, had a salaried job rather than an individual assignment, so I had a so much a week. Generally, for a lot of the time, I had no contract in the sense of the term contract.

72

They were terminable for a month or a week or whatever it was. Later I had a period contract, when I got an agent.

RF: Would you hazard a guess how many serious film writers there were in this country making a living from writing for films, was it 2 dozen, 3 dozen, more or less.

SG: I doubt whether it was a 100, you would have to go topping them up, totting the studios up first but I doubt it was more than a 100.

RF: There were a lot of little studios.

SG: but they wouldn't be regulars, you got people like Con West and Herbert Sergeant, I remember them, they would generally be engaged in proposition and dropped until the next proposition.

RF: By and large did people concentrate on films or were they shuttling back and forth between the stage

SG: No, naturally, the stage people tended to be freelance. Like Emlyn Williams as a writer, Guy Bolton did a lot of screenwork. Pertwee, they were very seldom staff writers. They were engaged for either a term or mostly by the job.

RF: What would be the going rate in those days for a screenplay.

SG: I don't know what the figure would be for a screenplay, it depends on the whole thing and who you were. An average writer you'd probably get £600 or £700 for a screenplay. And for the weekly wage probably £50. Varied you know.

RF: £50 quid a week wasn't bad in the mid 30s.

SG: No I married and started to raise a family on an average of about £35 at first, taking two years at a different rate and averaging them up. I got more at Metro of course.

RF: But presumably they didn't pay according to West Coast standards, they were paying what a hiked British rate.

SG: I'm talking about the studio writer, the Hollywood figure wouldn't have been all that high in those days £200 a week was a very good figure in Hollywood.

RF: That would have been a middling writer I would have thought. Dorothy Parker and co

SC: Some did like Scott Fitzgerald who I collaberated innocently with no one knows what it was.

RF: Poor man, I think he only got one credit at MGM. Worked on so much.

SG: They'd send a script and say "Have a look, see what you can do with this scene or that." That was the way it was done.

RF: The Metro British projects were actually initiated on the West coast?

SG: The big period, yes. They were initiated there, but I'm not at all sure that if I hadn't expressed a grudging willingness to work on Yank, Mick might not have put it forward. I think he had a batch of stuff. I don't think necessarily, I don't know, I don't think necessarily they were doing more than saying it might be suitable for Robert Taylor, it has a British background. I don't think it was necessarily an order from Hollywood to do Yank, just explore it I think, they were very fond of doing that. Shooting over every script or every note with a British background and then a star who it might be suitable for on their book and saying get on with it and see if there's anything in it.

RF: It does sound as if there had to be a very serious political dimension to what they were doing, more so than just making pictures or a commercial enterprise.

SG: I always thought that Nobody else did it. And Eckman was easily the most prominent of the American pseudo tycoons.

RF: On the other hand Warner Brothers built a very respectable little studio and had a very tight operation.

SG: To put your son in law at the head of the studio, and say alright Charlie will be okay. And Charlie won't go out of bounds but Charlie will get ambitious and want to make a decent job and that's what Irving Asher did. He was a very decent man and did a decent job, and the best of it he kept within his budget. It was small stuff but they did their best.

RF: A very respectable operation they ran.

SG: And they sent a lot of people to Hollywood. But it's unsatisfactory really, because it's like a second team, colts that are being geared to work somewhere else, groomed to work somewhere else.

RF: It was a kind of training ground.

SG: Trained Frank to a large degree, We got his first offer to direct from Irving Asher, and Ted Black said you mustn't tell, this is confidential, Frank couldn't say to Ted Black, "I'm resigning, goodbye," when you're close friends and had worked together for years. He had to say he could direct elsewhere but he couldn't here. And Ted said "Right, you both can have a directing contract." And Irving Asher said

RF: This was when, war time.

SG: I think it must have been wartime.

RF: Asher went to Korda, wasn't he producing for Korda before the war.

SG: I don't think so. I know we would have had the contract way before we made any films. It wasn't one of those which said you made three films a year, a bit more hopeful than that. But we did in fact make the films in the end.

RF: Is now perhaps the time for your recollections of Korda.

SG: The first time I met him was not long after Henry VIII when I sneaked away because I didn't think I was getting enough money. I got an appointment somehow, perhaps as a film critic, I don't know, with Korda and went to see him.

RF: This was before Denham had been built.

SG: It must have been I think. He had a rather small office in upper Brook St. And he was very nice to me and said "What have you done?" And I said "Rome Express." and one or two others, Rome Express was obviously the thing to go on at that time. He said "Did you get a screen credit?" I said "Yes." I told him what it was. Then he said "I don't like to take someone from Micky. I ought to talk to Micky." I said "He doesn't know about it. If anything develops, I'll have to tell him" He said "I'm a little worried about that." He said "Let us meet again and we'll have another talk." And he made a date and I got buttonedholed at Shepherd's Bush and I couldn't get away. When I arrived it was three quarters of an hour late and Alex had gone off to another appointment. So I left a note of apology and explanation and never took it up again because in the interim, the conversation I told you about with Mick took place.

RF: Obviously Hitchcock had grassed on you, was that mischievous or was that just in the way of conversation?

SG: There are two possibilities. One is that Hitchcock did, in which case it would have been provocative, shall we say. Or it could be that Korda had spoken to him. I just don't know because, I wasn't able to follow it up and I didn't see Alex again for years. I couldn't tell you when I met him, was introduced to him at all. And he never recalled that to me. I never mentioned it and he never did.

But what happened was that Micky and Emeric went to Korda who was trying to rebuild things up again, on the back of the Eady Levy, which and he was just on the And he did a very good deal with Micky and Emeric and obviously wanted other people. He'd already got Carol Reed and I think possibly the idea of poaching talent a la Del Giudice entered Korda's head, I don't know. But we were sent up to meet Alex and we had a good offer from him. And a pretty fair amount of freedom. I don't remember much about the very first meeting but I remember one when we discussed subject. And he was very easy to talk to, very positive in talking to him about subjects. We got on very well. Korda was alright unless you got on his mad side which I did over Gilbert and Sullivan but otherwise we had a very close relationship, I had a great respect for Alex.

RF: When you met him at the height of his initial first success was he the great charmer

SG: He seemed mostly worried but it was partly explained by the reason he said he brought the interview to a close, he had had a disturbing phone call about the condition of his child, which must have been the boy who later became such a bane to him. He had asthma or something in hospital and was very worried and "I must go and see to him." I'm sure that was genuine. He was very polite and civil and I didn't form any impression much except

that he'd been a bit distracted, which was understandable. When I met him later of course the charm came into it, he had enormous charm.

RF: Did you ever meet Isidore?

SIDE 8, TAPE 4

SG: You were asking me about Isidore Ostrer, he either arrived on what you might call state occasions or you were taken to meet him on state occasions, I can't remember which but he never appeared much at the studio and when anybody spoke about him it was always about his obsession with gold, on he was an expert and that's really all I know about Isidore.

RF: So probably films

SG: He had a very face, that's all I remember

RF: Films were irrelevant to him, presumably, it was the financial manipulations which interested him.

SG: Yes, because his daughter was an actress, of sorts. Mark always appeared to me rather like a heavy weight boxer's heavy weight manager. I couldn't imagine him having a constructive or enthusiastic views about films. David, I've only just met. Harry Ostrer was the fool of the family, with bald head and china teeth. And the most extraordinary character, one who creates jobs for himself. I christened him liaison officer between the assistant director of administration and the assistant director of production, I wrote a little verse about it.

And he was almost impossible to describe. But Maurice Ostrer who had the claim towards the creative filmmaker, I never got to know well and I never thought he knew anything about it. Other people say that he did. I never saw any creative gleam in his eye.

RF: And Bertie.

SG: Bertie Ostrer I nearly had a fight with once, I threw him out of our box at the Chelsea Arsenal, he started to get offensive so I threw him out. The next day he came up and apologised and we were always friendly afterwards, but I never worked with him. But Harry, he was a self creator, a task creator would be better, and he decided to bring in an economy drive. So he saw some loose iron lying about so he sold the lot for about 50 p as it would be now, probably today it would be about £15. And it turned out to be all the joints of the scaffolding, so no one could put any tubular up. So they had to buy it back. The other thing was that if you were sitting in the loo or washing your hands or anything in the lavatory, the lights would suddenly go out, that was Harry's economy drive and you'd open your draw of your desk to get some writing paper to write upon for your script and you were rationed say to six sheets.

He used to buy rights of things which no one knew and when I started to work with Frank on Millions Like Us, Frank had then left his job as scenario editor and up came an accountant with a huge ledger one day and said "Could you help me Mr Launder?"

Frank said "Yes, what is it." He said "Some expenses in the scenario department, you were there and I can't identify them. Could you tell me..." Frank realised nearly all of them were expenditures that no one else knew about by Harry Ostrer buying stories and he paid very small sums like £15 or £25 for a novel rights, that sort of thing, and they were all very odd, slightly towards the macabre, horror. One was called the Man. And these sums came to £3,000 or £4,000 by the time you added them all up. And that's all I know about Harry.

Oh, they were going to make a film called Spitfire, a Frank Rosen script during the war. Harry Ostrer, according to Louis Levy, came into Louis' office one day and said "I've got a wonderful idea for a number." Louis said "For what?" "The Spitfire, the film, I've a wonderful idea. He said "Alright, what is it?" He said "Alright" He said "I can sing it for you." "Alright, if you must." "It isn't a story." He did a double shuffle and said "Spitfire", one, two, three, four, "Spitfire, one two three four "Spitfire. Louis said "Very nice, what's the one, two three, four?" That's where the band plays and the same to you." That was Louis' story, exactly as told.

RF: Was it first generation wealth, it was all based on a carpet factory, wasn't it

SG: I haven't a clue, now you've said it. Except, now you'd said it, when I last saw Maurice Ostrer, he just nodded, that was at the Ritz, in the dining room at the Ritz, and someone told me that he had a directorship, I think it was in textiles of some kind.

RF: Yes, their company was Bradford and Metropolitan Trust and Bradford has either to be a textile mill or a carpet mill, I'm unsure which.

SG: That is the famous thing of always selling the A shares, selling them to John Maxwell. You know that's why the Screenwriters Association was formed. We were all working on it and there were about six of us actively forming it and it was literally in the formative stages, and Leslie Arliss who was one of those at the meeting said "Look there is all that stuff of Maxwell buying control of Gaumont, we have to have some organisation to protect writers." "We know that, we're working on it." "But it must be sooner, because if he's coming in, we've got to move damn fast. So we accelerated, it probably got formed six months earlier because of that remark but he never gained control.

RF: Maxwell was shafted on that deal.

SG: Otherwise I never knew him and I always regarded Maurice as a phoney. I know once when Ted Black picked the phone up and somebody asked for Maurice Ostrer and he said "He's not here I'm afraid at the moment." I don't know what made Ted like that because he didn't make that sort of remark but the chap said "Where can I find him" and kept asking and Ted in the end said "Try the 6 furlong stretch at Newmarket." I imagine some of those remarks got back.

RF: Here is a good point to talk about the Screenwriters

Association

SG: It started really, half a dozen, they were Frank Launder, J B Williams, Leslie Arliss, Roger Burford, Allan Grogan, the agent and I've left a writer out somewhere. We met mostly in each other's flats to discuss it and we talked it over with Angus MacPhail. Angus couldn't take a prominent part in working it out because he was a scenario editor himself and an employer. But he was very willing to give advice and support us any way he could. And from that six we extended it to eventually about 30, people like Lajos Biro and Ivor Montagu amongst that 30.

RF: What year

SG: 36, going over to 37. And we met in each other's houses and hammered out the general approach and somebody, I think it was Grogan, suggested getting in touch with Roberts of the Society of Authors and they said we could be an entirely autonomous group, rather like the League of British Dramatists, under the general umbrella of the Society of Authors and we could use their office staff initially. We had our first meeting with about 30 people present in, I think, March 1937 when they elected a committee and somewhere I've got a letter with the names of the committee. Biro was on the committee but he dropped out, because I think he moved to America. Leslie wasn't on the first committee because he was in America but he went on it when he came back. And it achieved recognition, partly through the good offices of Mick Balcon via Angus MacPhail and Korda was co-operative and we formed it without too much difficulty. And eventually in quite a short time, a few years, we achieved a writers credit agreement which was better than the American one at the time. And that became the standard and it has only been slightly modified since.

RF: What were the primary aims

SG: Credit.

RF: Pay

SG: We had a basic minimum pay at that time we felt it would lead to a minimum becoming a maximum so we put that on the shelf, contract conditions, copyright,

RF: Moral rights

SG: All that sort of thing, original stories, which were not recognised you know, if you wrote a story they owned it.

RF: If you were under contract

SG: If you were a salaried writer.

RF: I thought that still applied. If you wrote an original story it became your property after the Screenwriters got their agreement

SG: No, I don't know if it did that but what it tended to do was rather the opposite, that original stories stayed outside your contract. You see I was never told at any time, and I had all

sorts of weekly engagements, engagements paid by the week, it might be for a year and I wouldn't have a contract in those days, I was never told your job is to write original stories, I threw them in. And then they would claim, if payment was owed in any way, like someone else offering to buy it, you had to pay them. But I tried to point this out with Mick, I think Angus MacPhail must have done, that really, if you want to encourage material, you must treat it as a similar thing. And we got Ted Black to agree that with our mad friend Val Valentine who would churn out ideas, think of the whole thing in a bus but would never get paid for them, and we got an arrangement for Val from Ted so he would get a sum of money every time an original idea of his was used.

RF: How did it work, would the producer say we need a story for such and such an actor because we have six weeks of studio space coming up or was it up to the writer to proffer stories. Was there any general way of working?

SG: I'm trying to remember, One thing, you were talking about the nature of the films made at the time, there were a lot of comedies, a lot of comedians under contract, well that's a very group of people where you don't normally go for a book or a play, especially a book. So you had to go to originals because you wouldn't find what you want in a book, Jack Hulbert, George Formby, Will Hay, anybody you like, you don't get them from a book. You have normally a team of writers working on it, you generally got an idea from somewhere. I started, not with Will Hay but Jack Hulbert, Walter Forde, but I never wrote any stories for Walter. So I really started with Jack Hulbert and I virtually did two originals, I don't mean I did them single handed but I worked on two or three originals.

RF: So they would say specifically we need a story for Hulbert

SG: Yes, perhaps a little more, more likely, where are we going to put Jack next, last time he was a policeman. Somebody says a sailor. And somebody says Jack Ahoy, as you had a class thing with Hulbert which you didn't get with other comedians, not the same way, you knew straight away it would take the formula of Jack's the Boy, Bobby on the beat is the son of the commissioner of police, you have the rating, the new recruit in the navy who is the son of the admiral. And working on from there. Someone else had an idea, I don't know whose idea it was, it wasn't mine, of having a story for Jack Hulbert where he takes Bulldog Drummond's place, so Drummond only appears as a character in the prologue. He takes his place, unintentionally of course, in a Bulldog Drummond adventure. Well that idea was put forward and two or three of us wrote it. That was the comedy formula. But then, it's a bit different, it's not like one I did called Facing the Music, I think it was which was an original story, an outline, it wasn't for any comedian, it was an original story, and one would expect that to be treated differently. I don't think one, not at that time expected a separate sum of money for a story where you'd been told what to do, like we want a story about a sailor. But I did one called Falling for You with Jack doing a lot of ice-skating, and I don't know if I got any money for it but I did get the credit

RF: Did you have an agent at this stage?

SG: I don't think I had an agent until Frank started to work with me, so I wouldn't have had an agent before 1934 anyway, I don't think so.

RF: So all pay negotiations would be done by you. Did you approach that diffidently

SG: Well, that's why I always tried to get an offer, so I could say, a risky business. Mick was very possessive, he didn't like that at all, if he found someone, he was quite unscrupulous sometimes. I forget who it was, on one occasion he stopped a deal because he didn't want to lose the man, he was furious about it, he just said don't do that. This happened a lot. Believe it or not Frank and I had a deal with the Woolf Brothers years ago, and everything was fixed except discussion about final terms and that sort of thing. And we met them and John Woolf said "Sorry, the whole things off." We said "Why?" He said "Arthur Jarrott rang me and said he can't allow it, it will upset him completely." "We're not under contract to him, we haven't any arrangement at all." I said "We may have been with the firm for years but we're freelancers. we can go where we like, he's outrageously out of line taking that action." John Woolf said "I wouldn't want to offend him, sorry." And that was the end of that. So it does happen.

RF: I wrote a lot of original stories and ideas and that Facing the Music thing, I got £50 from another writer who sold it, sold himself as the scriptwriter, I was with Gaumont, and didn't reveal, apparently, my role in it. Did I tell you about it? I wrote to, Stanley Lupino, the star, it was at Elstree, I wasn't at Elstree, we were collaborating on Rome Express with Clifford Grey, and I told Clifford Grey this idea. And he said "I can sell that" and rather jumped the gun. He wrote a hasty treatment and then paid me £50 and sold the treatment plus his participation in the script for a good deal more. Then I read in The Stage one day an interview with Stanley Lupino about this new film Facing the Music and how he thought of it in his bath. So I wrote the The Stage and said how funny, I thought of it in my bath six months before and had been paid for it. The next thing was I got an aggrieved call from Clifford Gray saying "hy did you say that?" "Because it's true." "Oh well, you should have a word with me." I said "I'm perfectly entitled to contradict something which isn't true. Anyway I hadn't head anything from you once we'd done that sale and I want to know what my credit situation is." He said "I was in Paris. They dragged me back from Paris to sort this out." I said "I want credit for the original story. "So I got the assistance in some way of Cham Balcon who was general production manager and the only result of it all was that I never got the £50, because that went to Gaumont.

RF: How common was plagiarism, was it a hazard of life?

SG: It was always alleged to be. I wouldn't call that plagiarism.

RF: He wasn't going to put his name on the story.

SG: I never got any proof that mine was going to be put on, put it that way. I had a letter from Mycroft afterwards, the only time I heard from him, enclosing two tradeshow tickets for it.

And he said he had pleasure in enclosing them and hoped the picture would be a success and so forth. He thanked me for my contribution. He said as you know I was always wished for the development of your career in this office.

RF: That was your sole reward

SG: It wasn't Mycroft's fault.

RF: By and large you were not too unlucky in working for sheisters or moonlighters, fly by night agents, the companies always seemed to have some basis.

SG: I don't think that I was treated dishonourably. I had a brush with George King once. I was doing a film on the side, I was only getting a fiver a week and the company was disintegrating, that was Gaumont before Mick took over. And so I was doing a job, going to do a job, did one I think, oddly enough with Charles Bennett on the side, and I was going to do another, of which I've forgotten the title. And I remember having a couple of problems with the writing of it and suddenly George King, he reneged on it. And I wrote to him and asked for some compensation because I'd done a certain amount of discussion work and a few notes and he wrote back denying any liability of any kind on the whole thing. I could point out anything I had done. So I pointed it out in detail. He wrote back and asked my estimations of what it was worth as he would be willing to settle. I wrote back and said "The sum involved was nothing, pound, zero, zero, naught pence but I at least had the satisfaction of persuading you to behave like a gentleman." And left it at that. That was my last exchange with him. But he was a bit of a fly by nighter, George King, Charles Bennett will tell you.

RF: I remember Eddie Dryhurst talking about George King who lived extremely well on a mansion on the banks of the Thames, all out of pound a foot films.

SG: These were pound a foot films. I remember Charles Bennett and I had written this script, whether it was that one or the other one I don't remember, and George King took me for a ride in his up and down the Thames, the journey was quite pleasant but his manners were that, that's what I objected to. I wouldn't have spent much money for the time I spent on it, but to behave as if he hadn't behaved with bad manners, I couldn't take that, at least I got his manners right.

RF: There were an awful lot of shadey characters, did you have any approaches from them, did any of them try to inveigle you into deals

SG: I can't remember. I was nearly always working or avoiding working, I don't remember much of that. One forgets these instances. In any way, I never believed in working for nothing or working on speck.

RF: It must have been for a lot of writers a way of life.

SG: We'll all do it up to a point, up to a point, but there comes a point where you say no I can't afford to go on like this, if I go on like this my income will be zero so I'm afraid we'll

have to leave it at that. That sort of thing has happened, not often.

RF: You might care to rough out the development of the Screenwriters Association until it was merged into the Writers Guild.

SG: When we formed it, Frank was the first hon sec, we had a council which had some notables on it, like H G Wells, Bernard Shaw, many others, a few titles sprinkled plentifully, and then a committee which did all the work. As I said, we were under the umbrella of the Society of Authors and we codified things and met regularly and one of the things I told you about over Hitchcock, the writers press thing, to get press consciousness of the writers role, we had that standing subcommittee going all the time. And we had the usual officers, hon treasury and what not, we had a press officer as well. There was a lot to do, a great deal to do and there were constant complaints from writers about ghastly things being done to them. We went on right through the war, and due course that very good agreement was negotiated for credit, and a great many other things, the whole contract system was regulated in many ways, so many ways, copyright, all sorts of things, fully employed salaries rise, freelance, and it went on for 21 years from 1937-57. Somewhere around that date in the latter half of the 50s. we celebrated the 21st birthday. And that was the one we invited the Duke of Edinburgh to and he joined he insisted on joining, he was doing a lot of television and he insisted on joining the Screenwriters Guild, he ran into Frank somewhere, at some function, a few months later, he said "Ah here comes my trade union boss. There is nothing to say except we continued and got more and more members until we developed the thing you mentioned associate membership, started lectures, meetings about screenwriting, I remember giving one talk myself and my flies were open and I didn't know it. And I got a little envelope with my notes on and I tried to

That was the top room of the Bedford Arms in Pond St where we used to have a lot of our meetings. And we went on perfectly happily and really nothing happened, when you talk about a takeover, there wasn't any takeover.

RF: You were absorbed

SG: We already had got television writers in, and I think we had radio, I'm not sure about that. And all that happened was as far as I can recollect, our first president was A P Herbert, the second president was J B Priestley, the third was Frank Launder and then I think Frank resigned from the committee, he had too much work to do and so did I, and of the old garde it left only one or two, J B Williams who did an immense amount of work during waht you might call the Willis period or just before the Willis period.

And that was when the friction over the ACTT writers section, they attempted to take us over and occupied a disagreeable amount of our attention. Eventually, I can only say that roughly from the Willis period, there was a sort of attempt to describe it as a new organisation, but, in fact, there was nothing new whatsoever about it except the constitution of the committee and the officers. And there was nothing that I can think of that

82

changed at all. We were already a trade union before that period, before I think from 1956 onward we were a trade union.

Then they seemed to think that they made us a trade union and they didn't and I checked all these dates and they were accepted by the secretary of the Writers Guild that it was accurate, in 56 we had become a trade union. But they kind of became trade union again and I think the mentality was simply this, in the mind of the Ted Willis of this world, I don't wish to say anything more about Ted Willis, put it in the context of the Ted Willis of this world, and some of the people with him, you were not really a trade union unless you were a member of the TUC. And through this they got membership of the TUC. And then they put out, and I protested at the time, they suddenly put out in their rule book, or something like that, I don't know what it was, it was something they distributed annually, annual report, "founded in 1959", and I wrote and protested, they did it for 3 or 4 years and then they dropped it. It's totally untrue. But after I resigned, as usual I've lost the correspondence, I don't know when I resigned, they had a photograph of this youngish looking fellow who was described as the founding father who could have been my son. I have a very great grievance about that, most people who came in at that time onto the council thought they had created something new largely because they were now part of the TUC, because I can't think of any other reason or any other change. True when they went on they behaved more like a larger trade union might, but then they were larger, because the number of television writers accumulated, they brought in books, they brought in plays which were excluded previously by our connection with the Society of Authors, so they did break away in that sense. But otherwise it was just the same. And the only thing they did bring in, things like minimum salary.

RF: But it was a successor group and not a new one.

SG: It was a completely continuous process, there was never any break whatsoever, I think a disgraceful piece of gerrymandering.

RF: And credit claiming too.

SG: It was. The hard work was done by the people before. And I was on the council for many years but I was not one of the hard workers. I speak more more on behalf of Frank who worked very, very hard.

RF: Who started the Screenwriters Club in that lovely little place on Deanery St, adjacent the Dorchester.

SG: We had an approach, there had been talk for a long time in a loose way wouldn't it be nice to have a club and someone, I don't know who now, was approached by or brought forward a man called Stanley Rubens, and he was a very odd chap, something to do with Ciro's. And he was also a which seemed unlikely on the face of it. Anyway, he had the opportunity of taking this place and he was willing to run it and we thought it would be a fine thing to have and we could have our committee meetings and everything there too. And it worked very well except that it wasn't very profitable. In the end the thing became loud with recriminations and I think they incurred debts and the thing was was the

Screenwriters Association liable for the debts. And I think we were able to prove that we weren't. But I think we had to pay something in the end.

RF: When did it fade away

SG: I think it must have been in the early 60s, it may not have done. What I really meant it couldn't have been later than the early 60s, it might have been earlier, it was rather nice but he was a bit of a rogue.

RF: I'm afraid most club owners are.

SG: He wouldn't have been averse, one of the few times I was sitting next to him, it may have been, I started a thing called the Megaphone club, I went to Alex and said, I saw this position coming with the Boultings not the Boultings specifically, but with somebody, the employer and the union, this ambiguous, this invidious position where you are asked to fight against yourself. I said "Looke, the ACTT is all very well, NATKE and everything else, but directors should have their own organisation. Now I don't mean the union, they should have somewhere where they can talk as people and craftsmen and not as union members. And then if the ACT gets too obstreperous and too awkward they can make a stand as directors. " Alex ignored the union part of it and said "What a wonderful idea, I will tell you what we will call it, we will call it the Megaphone club. You must give the first dinner because you thought of the idea. I will give the second." And we worked out the whole formula, terribly unrewarding these things, the first dinner, I took them to, it was on the basis of Dutch treat, naturally it hadh to be, and I took them all to Kettners. Practically everybody grumbled about the bill, it was a fiver each and everybody grumbled and of course blamed it on me. I didn't think it was unreasonable, anyway. But otherwise it was a success. The second one was Alex's and Orson Welles was his guest and we had it at the Moulon D'Or. Alex couldn't come but sent a telegram from the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth, a great success to the Megaphone Club. He was a great enthusiast. Then somebody else gave the next dinner which was successful. And David Lean was next on the list, and he gave it no choice, Restaurant, Royal Festival Hall and only five turned up and one was Ronnie Korda who bore the pants off David all evening and David said "I don't want any more." And the next one on the list was Frank's who forgot. The whole thing went down like that, a good idea, it never became political, it wasn't intended to except in the last resort.

RF: That would be what the 50s

SG: It was certainly post 51, he died in 56, I reckon it was about 54, the time David was working for Korda so Hobson's Choice, Sound Barrier, whichever was the last thing he did, the one with Hepburn, Summer Madness.

SIDE 9, TAPE 5

RF: We've finished the Screenwriters Association.

SG: I think so. The point I really wanted to make was that there was never any change at all except becoming the TUC and this has become represented as a completely new organisation which is tosh.

RF: We're now working towards your directing. As a writer in the 30s, I assume there was the general dissatisfaction with what people were doing with your material, when did you first begin to think of yourself as a director?

SG: Well you mentioned Victor Saville earlier, and I did not have any ambitions particularly, I didn't come into films saying I'd like to direct, I came into films by chance. I think that the first time I thought I might be some use at it was when we were doing a series of comedies, our resident comedians, one of the was with Cecily Courtneidge, Me and Marlborough which Victor SAVille directed. I had nothing to do with it at all, but when they finished the film they thought that two sequences were wrong and asked if we could write new ones, fairly short. So I wrote two of these little sequences. And then Walter Forde shot one because Victor was away and Victor shot the other one himself. And I noticed that time and again on this short scene that Victor missed points that I thought ought to be emphasised and when I mentioned it, yes, perfectly ok, adjusted it, but I thought well he didn't know but I did, but maybe it was because I wrote the scene. I sometimes used to feel that with Walter, although Walter, on the whole, got points better than Victor; so I thought from the standpoint of not missing important points in the character or story that I had if nothing else. That's the first time I thought I had something to offer.

RF: That's quite early.

SG: That's quite early, that would have been what, 33 or 4. It must have been. It couldn't have been later than 35. And I didn't really do anything about it except later when I had a contract with Mick, it did have a clause that he conceded with a great air of concession which really boils down to my having a right to direct if they thought that I could direct one. It gave me no rights at all, but it did have in the contract that I could direct in certain circumstances, they never came about.

RF: It planted the thought at least.

SG: I planted the thought by asking for it in the contract, they didn't give it me in the contract, they gave me a meaningless phrase in it's place which I suppose had I wanted to show it to someone else would have meant a bit but not much. And then nothing happened, the good directors are sometimes teach you more than the bad ones. You go through a lot of comic comedians, with comedies like a director like Beaudine, you know what Beaudine's got wrong, he doesn't miss a salient point, so you think he's a great one for ad libbing, if a scene was over he didn't end it camera wise if they were to far from the door, he said ad lib

till you get to the door, which sometimes had but on the whole he didn't miss anything disastrous.

And the one that really made me want to do it was Carol Reed oddly enough because I felt quite often with Carol that he hadn't the temperament to, for instance, do a really steamy sex scene, if you can imagine writing them in those days, I couldn't imagine Carol directing it. And somebody said "Well, Carol is only at home in the square miles with Mayfair at the centre." And I think that's unfair because Carol was a good director but he could be a very tepid director, as in our Man In Havana which I discovered from writing the opera libretto, Our Man in Havana wanted every situation punched and Carol underplayed every situation and every character except Noel Coward who shouldn't have been in it and you got a picture which was tepid. And I felt that once or twice, particularly in a picture that sank without trace, Girl in the News which I think had a good script. I read it recently. But Carol didn't want to make it, he hadn't got his heart in it and somehow the picture doesn't get you, it should but it doesn't. And I thought I could do that much. After dealing with a lot of directors, you reach the point where you say I would like to try. And that is what Frank and I wanted to do.

RF: Did you ask during the 30s?

SG: Yes, we asked Ted Black. And Ted Black didn't really want to give us the opportunity. "I need you as writers" or more to the point "one day." And then Carol left, he went into the army and so Ted for the time being was left one director short and he tried us out and he liked what we did. Unfortunately his break-up occurred while I was still filming, I don't know about Frank, but Millions like Us, he was very supportive but it was a joint effort. Waterloo Rd he was very tough on me, the reason was that they were being tough on him and saying it's ridiculous to give this chap a film on this subject.

RF: You say he was tough on you, when he saw the rushes.

SG: He'd come and stand behind me. I had to tell him not to do it.

RF: Was he second guessing you with the artists or the set up

SG: No. I think he was terribly worried and he knew that I didn't know much about technique and he asked Crabtree to watch me in that respect and help. Crabtree who I respected as an honest Yorkshire man said "I don't like doing this but Ted has asked me and I will." And he gave me a few elementary principles which I probably would have fallen down over if he hadn't helped me. He was very helpful. Crabtree said he didn't want to do and didn't see why I should do it and he was a great help to me.

RF: Did you also have an editor.

SG: Alfie. He was very helpful. But Alfie was a bit self effacing. He had great experience and I knew it. But he could have helped me more, not through any unwillingness on his part but because he was retiring. But when you really got him on it, he was a great help.

SG: I think he was always happiest when he was in the cutting room by himself.

SG: He was very helpful and he finished the odd two shots at the end for me. Crabtree in the middle of the fight of Waterloo Rd, Crabtree was very good and took me aside after the rushes and said "This stuff is marvellous but I hope you realise, it's your first, that if you go on like this, the fight will be over, bang bang, crash crash, fall fall, wallop wallop,. Finish. So I said do you mean I'm using up material in the script and at this pace it can't last much longer." "Yes, I think you've got to slow it down." He said, we worked out something between us which slowed the whole middle of the fight down. It gave a breathing space and added that much too it. So I can't grumble about the people who helped me on the picture. It was only the blasted management that caused the trouble.

RF: That fight caused a greatdeal of rucus at the time.

SG: It did. I don't think Arthur ever claimed credit for it but I think that everyone else did.

RF: Did you intend it to be that rough.

SG: Yes I did. But I'd never directed a fight or faked one or anything and I knew that he'd got helpers like Dave Crowley who had been a British lightweight champion and who worked with Johnny Mills, anyway. I thought the best contribution I could make was to keep at Johnny and Jimmy Granger and say "If the fights no good, the films no good, are you working on it at the weekend and that kind of thing. And I think that got it, the indispensibility of the fight into everyone's head. Johnny's story is different by the way. Johnny says that the fight was only two lines of the script which isn't true, and he had to point the importance of the fight out to me. That wasn't so otherwise I wouldn't have regarded the fight as the climax in the script. However, everyone should take credit for it because they all worked hard and they did it very well I think.

RF: How much preparation did you do on that film, it was your first film as solo director? Did you storyboard?

SG: I tried the equivalent of storyboards, I found them worse than useless later, because they were done by art directors and art directors never get a set up right. They can't get the set ups. I've got some upstairs for Gilbert and Sullivan. You couldn't shoot them like that. The proportions are all wrong, I gave them up. I only had them for Gilbert and Sullivan for quite different reasons, they weren't intended to be a set up or anything like that but just an atmospheric picture of each highpoint in each sequence. No I didn't do that. I took a good deal of advice on it. It was difficult to start with two fairly big names too on the thing, three if you count Alastair Sim. What I really went by was what I didn't like, not what I wanted. What I didn't want. It isn't a bad way to direct. If you know where it's going and you're completely negative it is better than being pleased with what they give you when it isn't right.

RF: Were there any American directors that you particularly

admired.

SG: I worked quite a bit on the floor with Jack Conway on A Yank at Oxford. I admired him greatly. In the end I antagonised him quite unnecessarily, quite stupidly. But I had a great deal of respect for him on the set, I learned quite a lot from him, more than any other director. I learned to time scenes from him. By which I mean if you've got a dull scene in the script, to time it, speed it up and speed it up and speed it up. And there was one scene in A Yank at Oxford, a dull little scene in the athletic things and he got it down from something like 28 seconds to 19, he said "This is only a bridging scene we don't want to spend any time on it. Get it faster get it faster. He'd say "What's the time on that?" after every take. When he got down to 19 seconds, okay. And I've done that since.

RF: How about just watching films, directors working in Hollywood, directors such as Frank Capra or Howard Hawks. Howard Hawks always had that pace. I think that's one of the big differences between British and American films, their pace, their speed.

SG: I don't know how true that is. Well generally, I don't know how it's true of me, god I could be slow, I don't mean that, but there is no greater training than comedy for tempo, no better training and a lot of the slowness is being satisfied with and not playing the time element. I think a lot of British films were slow but then I don't think that our comedies were.

RF: The Will Hays were gems.

SG: A man like Varnel would work more or less to a stop watch too.

RF: And Alfie again was a very good cutter of comedy.

SG: I think probably it's true but I've always found it easier to learn from a bad director than a good one. If you take that as an example, As you Desire Me, it is so atrociously directed I learned don't do this and don't do that from it. It's a catalogue of bad directing that film. I didn't realise it at the time, I just thought it was bad. And she was marvellous. Now I think she was marvellous considering and the direction was bloody terrible. I used to say that years ago, I learned more from a badly directed film or a badly written film than a good one because you get absorbed in the film. If you go and see it six times it's fine, but few filmmakers were able to do that, unless they were in the cutting rooms where they might have access to copies, but I generally if a film was very good I'd get absorbed in it and forget entirely how it was directed or anything else.

rf: These two debut films of yours and Franks, they didn't launch you on a career instantly there was opposition within the organisation to making them and there was opposition to getting behind them when they were released.

SG: We knew after Waterloo Rd, the break up between Rank and Ted Black really, although never worked for Rank, Rank had taken over Gainsborough from Gaumont and through the Ostrer situation Black departed. And we, almost simultaneously, got this contract to

join Independent Proudcers and the first picture was Rake's Progress. Owing to the demands for studio space at the time, the studios were crowded, I had to make mine at Sheperd's Bush which having just witnessed the break up of the Black situation, it was the last place I wanted to shoot the film, but they wouldn't let me have anywhere else. And it wouldn't have been very wise to say "I'll wait till there is space because you never know in films what is going to happen, you might find yourself with no film. So I accepted that and I shot it at Shepherds Bush where I had the first, if you can call it story board and they didn't work at all. So I continued to receive them and look at them but I didn't use them. After a while they accumulated in an office, never used.

RF: Was it part of the system then to board a film?

SG: No, not in the least. It was an idea of David Rawnsley who was the art director, I think to try and control the director. I think, oddly enough, and to guide him but unfortunately his own sense of camera angles was not good. He was a good art director but sense of camera angles expressed on paper was not good.

RF: There is on Rake's Progress a sense of the film being in a smaller studio than it ought to be. And I think partly that stems from the sets, because there are false perspectives which are noticeable.

SG: There is one in particular, in South America, it's a good one, it was a mixed stage too, Stage 4, which is big enough for most things. I always thought it looked pretty good. But I agree with you, in a bigger studio, it have looked better.

RF: Who was the cameraman.

SG: Wilkie Cooper. He did a lot of pictures for us, that was the first one. I would have much preferred to have done it somewhere else but I don't think in general it suffered from it. There was plenty of room at Shepherd's Bush. For that particular , the set he wanted of rows and rows of plants and people cultivating, obviously you couldn't get even it into stage 4.

RF: It's strange how notions like that survive.

SG: I think people if they're in the business they can tell that's a set.

RF: That was a fairly happy shoot, Rake's Progress?

SG: Rex was a difficult chap but in the end I had more trouble with Lilli. With the rest of the artists, no real problem. I think Rex gave the best performance he ever gave on the screen, I still think that. And I've seen the film a great many times. In a way I think the film made him, by made him, made him conscious of things he didn't know he could do. Certainly it's his own favourite, he makes no bones about that. And I think it's awfully difficult to judge most films, because from the point of view of happy atmosphere and all that, because films were so difficult anyway at that stage, you didn't have the equipment you needed. And Rank was very stupid over some things. One of the most obivious examples of spending your money on the wrong things, for

instance you take Independent Frame, he put money into that because he thought he could make the films cheaper. But he took us, by us I mean Ronnie Neame, David Lean, myself Frank, Micky, all wanted little tracks because you had constant trouble with and you'd have them hounding you over time, worrying you all the time, what is your minutage, it's only two minutes a day or whatever it was. But I lost half an hour this morning because of creaks on wooden tracks with wedges knocked in and that kind of business. In America you can pick up a length of track from here to the door and you can hold it up like that because it's lightweight and they don't creak, why can't we have those. I can remember saying this, we said this at Shepberd's Bush, whoever it was there, Black, or whoever it was listened, they couldn't get the lightweight things they have over in America but they got heavier ones and though they take two men to manhandle, they don't creak. It took ages to get the equivalent things from Rank, he didn't seem to want to listen. And I think it was a very difficult time to make films, right up to Blue Lagoon time, around Oliver Twist time, it started to get better, more equipment came in.

RF: Maybe dollars had something to do with it as well.

SG: Maybe. And the other things was unions, of course. On Rake's Progress there was a chap up on the gantry, I remember on Stage 4, and I would be, this idiotic notion of taking the quarter, dreadful institution, I'd take the quarter, that was statutory, of course, you could do that. And then I'd be doing about the third take and the voice would come up from the top, "Only four minutes to go now Bill." And this went on, can you imagine, you're worrying to get, you're behind, you're over budget and you're worrying to the damn thing over, you've only got 10 minutes to go and there's someone up there timing you and calling to his fellow chargehand below. So I thought right it will be back to the old trick on Waterloo Rd, so next time when there's still about 10 minutes to go, I said "ction and will the gentleman in the roof who keeps interrupting my work kindly keep quiet because he's on the soundtrack, and is going to be from now on." That stopped it. That atmosphre is rotten for making films. I had it two often. I don't have great affection for some aspects of film crews.

RF: Were the other two pictures made at Islington, Million Like Us and Waterloo Rd

SG: Millions Like Us was Shepherd's Bush. And Waterloo Rd was Islington.

RF: I was wondering what the union relationships were there like?

SG: They got worse during the war because I think they did generally. I was shown, it really was like a Royal Ordinance factory, and the shop steward there was a very nice old style man and he took us round the corner to his cubby hole as he called it, which was a space cleared on the shop floor and he said "You know the union work is taking so much of my time, the management understands that now,

And that was the old style doing new style work. But you'd go a

month or two later and the feeling, the notion that people were working themselves to the bone simply to save Britain was simply not true. For one thing there were too many conscripts, too many girls who had been more or less uprooted.

I remember Maggie Johnston who played the lead in The Rake's Progress and it began with her in a factory; in fact we used the shot of Millions like Us at the beginning. When the bell rang, she's supposed to go. Well I knew that I couldn't shoot it that night, I said I'll have a complete run through. I got on the camera and started to look through it. We had the back projection thing going, the bells, gave the cue, rung round to the back projection plate onto Maggie Johnstone and I said right move and the camera moved and I was looking through it and I lost her altogether. Finished the other end of the shot, yards away, no Maggie in sight. And I looked back and she was at the desk and she was slowly wiping her eyes and combing up everything neatly, set square, tee square, everything. And I said Maggie "What do you think you're doing?" "There I knew you'd say that." "So what are you doing." "Well I'm devoted to my work, I'm the sort of girl who's working in them." She said "That's how they are in factories. You don't know." I said "I do know. I spent some time in them. And one thing I can tell you absolutely is the truth which we can't show, is that 10 minutes ago the girls would be lining up to get out and the charge hand would be going up and down saying you girls, there's still have 10 minutes to go you know. I'll have your cards, I'll have your cards. That's what would really be happening." You get this difference between the romantic idea and the public's idea of what really goes on. And you get alot of that in film studios.

RF: Would it be fair to say that you were trying hard not to print the legend but to film reality.

SG: Up to a point. With Rakes Progress, it was irrelevant really because it was a tiny scene and we got the timing right the next day. And the point didn't arise.

RF: Denham was quite literally in the hands of a communist work committee, Bert Bachelor, I wondered if the same applied in tother studios.

SG: Well Charlie Wheeler was a good unintelligent deputy to Bert Bachelor who was quite high up in the communist hierarchy. He was known, Bert Bachelor, I had had connections with a big factory, through a family connections, nothing to do with ownership, with the management and I can tell you the bosses at Plessey during the war knew Bert Bachelors name and he was in a business totally removed from films and he knew it.

RF: Well they were all powerful there. Was it an abrasive relationship at the Bush, were the unions dominant by then.

SG: I don't thing that it was as bad at the Bush, I joined the ACT around that time, freely, they wanted me to but I joined entirely of my own free will, and one of the first all union meeting which, of course, was held at lunchtime. And there I had my first experience of union democracy at work, Frank Kelly was the conveynor but all the unions were represented. It was about a strike or threatened strike, I've forgotten what the point was,

and Frank Kelly amazed me, because he listened to what was said and made his own points and then there was a disagreeing faction on the floor so he put the constructive motion to the meeting which was carried and then he put the opposite motion, which completely cancelled it out, from the disruptive and that was carried by a large majority. So I was left bewildered. Union democracy is going away happy having passed entirely contradictory resolutions. When I got to know Frank as a gamekeeper many years later and was our union liaison man on our staff at Shepperton, he said it's common union practice, keep them all happy. They don't worry about it.

RF: Nothing got implemented I suppose they just passed their motions.

SG: But Charlie Wheeler made a defiant speech on the stage during Rake's Progress, unless it was Millions Like Us, one of the two and he made himself out a Nazi. He made all the obvious jokes on the name Rank, having made some fearful puns on Rank, he said no Mr Rank would ever stop him saying what he felt, the truth being if anyone had fired Charlie, there would have been a strike anyway, he was safe as anyone could be.

Green for Danger, which was shot in 1946, was dreadful from the union point of view. Because we had the whole stage and things started off alright and then Rank went and had this party everyone invited to it and he didn't invite the workers. I didn't know what the party was. It was to meet this or that person. But the whole the press was there, all the critics, everybody, and they had a buffet laid out on our set, the Green for Danger set. And then gradually it became discernable that the object of the meeting was to formally reopen the studio after the war, although we'd been going for some weeks. And speeches were made.

And I then went back to my set and no workmen on it, not a soul, only the camera crew and the assistants but no electricians, no NATTKE, the ACT unit were with me so I don't know if they were with me. But I went back on the floor and couldn't shoot at all, because they'd all walked out. Why had they worked out, because they weren't invited to the opening of the studio. I said "I was invited but I had no idea that it was the reopening of the studio, officially." It was very badly organised. Well Frank Kelly was called in and he as far as a trade union official said to the management "Now's you change, they are completely out of order." as far as he could say it and remain the honest trade union official he did. And Rank wouldn't do it. Rank said "I don't want trouble, I'd sooner try and meet their point of view. It wasn't a point of view, it was just bloody mindedness. And one or two agitators. Then he called a meeting which various people including David Lean addressed, I'll always remember David Lean addressing them and telling them "Be tolerant if a directors changes his mind and kills a set up and has a new one, you may think alright it's losing time and what not but it's part of making a picture." It meant absolutey nothing to the rank and file, absolutely nothing. This is how I got disillusioned about trade unionism.

Then the next thing was they had votes on the floor. And by then things were improving. What the votes were about I don't remember

but I know how they did it and I know it was still done before secret ballots in the factories. The ays go to the left and the nos go to the right. And the undecided stay in the middle where they are. It was so easy to see people watching people see where the majority was going to be. And as soon as they saw where the majority was they'd drift over. It was pataently not their own thinking at all, they just didn't want to be in a minority which isn't democracy whatever it may be. And in the end of course they got no kind of retaliation from taking an afternoon off, Rank was seen to be weak and things deteriorated with Mr Bachelor about.

RF: It was also part of that brave new world, post war, when it was going to be a socialist paradise, so I think people like Bert Bachelor were feeling their position, their authority and pushing it for what it was worth.

SG: At British Lion, the same subject but I was on a negotiating committee with on the other side Frank and Frank the two great fineglers of the ballot who both got charged with fraud, really, lost all their pension rights and office rights in the ETU, and thorough dishonesty, forging ballot papers. That was quite an experience meeting them.

RF: On the floor who were the least troublesome people? Would it have been the technicians, the ACTT people.

SG: You couldn't say. Sound were a lot of trouble and one of the reasons was I think was that they were not paid as well as the camera people at the time, I'm not sure what the situation is now. So they got a chip on their shoulder. Also, to be fair to them, they had been left out on occasions, like Blue Lagoon. because they could be up to a point, in certain circumstances you could shoot without them. I think they, I could name, I could have named, I've forgotten his name, onw shop steward in the late 50s at Shepperton, and I was shooting all night and the last part of it was in the studio grounds, doing public meetings at night, election meetings, that is what I was shooting. And in the middle of it I'd got two shots to do, I think it was, we got to about 4 in the morning and it came pissing down with rain. So one of the chaps, I think he was an electrician, he said to me "Mr Gilliat, you've now got the angle so narrow, we could move it into the stage." I said "Anybody against that." I moved into the stage and just starting to shoot and the ACT shop steward, he was in the sound department, called a halt to the whole thing, on the grounds that all, which was technically true at the time, all exterior night shooting had the convenient heading of emergency, well it wasn't emergency shooting if I moved the exterior night shooting into the studio, therefore I couldn't do it. I had to do it all again separately and waste the rest of the night.

RF: Do you know if the Boultings drew Fred Kite from life. It was certainly based on observation.

SG: He didn't draw it from life in one person but my own brother's stories were about some of the more militant members at Shepperton, one who is more odiously familiar, I've forgotten who he was and he slapped my brother in the back, and said "The trouble is Les, there is not intergity left, it's all compromise, compromise compromise."

RF: It would be nice to ask to crew of I'm Alright what they thought of the script, if they understood it.

RF: They struck, probably somebody had got round to reading the script by then. There was a completely balanced picture, if you analyse it, the biggest crooks in the whole thing were these terrible spivs who were running the business, but the unions ignored that completely. You could say what you liked about those dirty bosses but you couldn't tell the simple truth about the sort of strikes which were going on up and down the country.

Over that meeting with Rank where he addressed people and said Let's get together and all this nonsense, one of the things which arose, how to get people more interested in scripts. So when I made London Belongs to me I bought about 50 copies of the book and distributed them to the heads of department and the gaffers and shop stewards and everything and many complained that they'd been asked to read the book. No one gave any constructive answer to anything, most didn't read the book at all and one man put in for overtime, reading the book. You get very disillusioned.

RF: Did you ever have any major industrial dispute.

SG: Not of my making. The two things I remember, one is the one I've told you. The other which I think illustrates the total irresponsibility of such things, was when I had a very good scene in Green for Danger which began with a big wind machine which covered the of one woman round the garden, a huge estate garden, and the second, there were three So it was camera on a train, a long, long on a big stage there and then when it got to the forward position we went cross on the jib like that and as we reached the position where she ran into somebody else and dialogue started we had to cut the propellers, so each propeller was cut in turn, the last propeller on the jib, they cut it just across and silence.

But then obviously a bloody gale couldn't die down just like that. We had one of these funnels which used to be known as silent wind to complete it, it was pumped in through this big canvas funnel. So we had this canvas funnel all lined up there and everything, and rehearsed it once or twice, well we could risk a take. It was the end of a short day, Saturday and the only chance of getting a take at all with this elaborate shot was this last time. So it didn't go badly at all except that there was no sign at all of wind at the end. So the woman went into a dead calm from hair being blown back, went into a flat calm for the dialogue.

I jumped up and down about this, and then I looked where this silent wind was and there was no one attending it at all. The chap had gone off for a meeting about whether it was his job or the gardeners or the electricians, oh the electricians traditionally looked after the propellers but NATKE after the silent wind. And the argument arose as to who should man the thing. So they left it.

He just walked off while the thing was being discussed and no one told me, and we did the whole shot to the very end when it goes into a flat calm. But any other dispute I've been involved in

has always been nothing to do with me.

RF: How easily was that one solved on the Monday.

SG: On the Monday someone turned up to operate it, they'd solved it. They'd worked out who it was.

I had one on London Belongs to Me too about a Christmas tree, part of the Christmas tree was artificial, some holly was artificial some was genuine. And we had the set dresser, the dispute, I think the set dresser dressed the christmas tree with fandangles and some artificial vegetation, and he only had one man, we should have had the gardener too because it was a christmas tree. The whole thing came to a stop. They had a dispute as to whether

SIDE 10, TAPE 5.

RF: Where we are now is going into Independent Producers, what was the deal you were the second entity in after Micky and Emeric, it was very informally constituted.

RF: To begin with yes. I really can't remember what the constitution was but we were not under contract for a succession of pictures. I remember David Lean saying in America he was asked when his contract with Rank ran out and he said "There isn't a contract. But we would not let each other down" or words to that effect. And they thought that was remarkable in America. Later, of course Lean did let him down.

RF: What was the deal. They would, did you have to offer them any film you were making, were you exclusive to them.

SG: As far as I can recollect we could do what we liked on the understanding that they could veto a particular picture if the budget was more than a certain sum which would have been in the £300,000 mark.

RF: Which rather indicated what their break even point was. So although there was no contract, was there an understanding that your services were exclusive to the Rank Organisation.

SG: Oh yes, I think that's true, there was an understanding. And they behaved on both sides, at any rate at that time, as if such an understanding existed.

RF: And they provided 100% finance.

SG: They provided all the finance. Yes, in the usual way, through the bank, and they would take from it 25% distribution, which was standard, fair enough. We never found, at least Frank and I never did, what the actual break terms were with the theatre, we were never told what the deal with the theatres was.

RF: Were they principally Rank cineams.

SG: The release would have been. I think in those days, if I remember rightly, they had an Odeon release and a Gaumont release, at that time.

To what extent they overlapped each other I can't remember. And whether Rank Independent Producers thing automatically played one circuit or the other I can't remember, or both, I just don't know. But I know that we did play in Gaumont houses because Green for Danger opened at the Gaumont in the Haymarket. It opened there, no it opened at the New Gallery, it was another one which opened there. I know we were in that theatre.

RF: From your point of view what where the advances in this situation. Finance was a very obvious one, a guaranteed release.

SG: The advantages were fairly clear for Micky and Emeric too. I think. And later for Cineguild when they came in. If you take Cineguild for example, say right they're an independent separate company with three principal directors, Lean, Neame and Havelock-Allan, and therefore they could make a separate deal with A B or C Then Rank was in sore need, Denham, Pinewood and now Shepherd's Bush by that time, it was logical that they should come under an umbrella and be offered a deal which gave them independence as well as finance, or apparently gave them independence as well as finance. So it was a logical step. Also it suited the filmmakers because if you take Frank and myself, we had not worked without a producer before, we'd always had, in the three films we'd made made Ted Black was our producer, and to be our own producer gave us the power over the picture.

RF: What was it that contractually was released, was it the directors cut or the producer's cut or did they have any rights over the final version.

SG: When it was released, the picture you mean, well that was handled by Rank Distributors who were then GFD

RF: Could they tamper with the film at all?

SG: No, I don't think, you didn't get criticism as such, you might get a comment but I don't think you couldn't say that the distributors as such or the exhibitors as such interfered with the nature of the production

RF: What about Rank himself or Davis, is he yet that strong or powerful. Would they insist on changes.

SG: Davis at the time of the Rake's Progress had not come up that far. Mrs Rank was the chief danger as far as we were concerned because she had read Waterloo Road and thought it grossly immoral and Rank is supposed to have said to one of the Universal men in New York, he told me that Rank had rubbed his hands, he said that Rank had said we've got a film coming out which will make a lot of money and my wife disapproves of it, she say it's an immoral film but I think we're going to make a lot of money out of it, joking he was. But that made no difference to Waterloo Rd, by the time she got round to that film it was finished anyway. Over Rake's Progress she was strongly opposed, then the would be Methodists wanted to jump on the bangwagon who were around Rank, expressed hostile opinions.

RF: Does it mean that Mrs Rank was sitting there thumbing through all the scripts which were in production.

SG: I only know ours and she certainly read at least two of ours.

It cost a lot of trouble for me and for Frank, an awful lot of trouble.

RF: Did it come close to losing the picture, cancelling the picture.

SG: I think the picture would have been at least postponed and probably been cancelled if it hadn't been for the fact we were 3 weeks into the shooting when it blew up. And consequently you had to weigh the costs, and in the end it just shows how silly these things are, if it had been left to us there would have been no problem.

RF: Do you remember any instances when anyone in authority required major changes in a film of yours.

SG: Once we started being producers, of course, Gilbert and Sullivan. That was Korda but rather an exceptional case. I can't think of any of the Independent Producers, we did 6 pictures for Rank, I can't think, the kind of interference one had would be from someone like David Henley running the casting side, for example, who would put his oar in over casting in an interfering way to justify his own job, he hadn't really got enough to do.

RF: And also to use one or more of their contract players,

SG: That's fair enough. Earl St John caused me a lot of trouble, innocently, asking if I couldn't get Pat Roc or Margaret Lockwood was still around then or Jean Kent into London Belongs to Me. And I took Pat Roc in, thinking how well we'd done with her in Millions Like Us. And she was all wrong and I had to throw her out, so it cost a lot of money and a lot of pain all round. And if Earl hadn't suggested the extra pain, it wouldn't have risen. But a perfectly legitimate point for him to make. On the whole, I still think the sourest note came from the administrative and financial staff. Mr Robertson could always be relied upon to put a spoke in our way if he could and he continues that way.

RF: Do you remember Cy Howard from those days, he was in the accounting department, he's now managing director of Pinewood.

SG: No, I remember Robertson because oddly enough it didn't happen very generally but he was taking from a small unit, from Shepherd's Bush, he was head of accountancy at Shepherd's Bush and he went to Rank and became the accountancy part of PIFFL. And for some reason, perhaps because of Ostrer at the Bush, he was always very hostile to us.

RF: Leaving aside some sour personalities and some inefficiencies and structural problems, it sounds almost paradise for an independent producer to have that kind of back up and backing. Is that just in retrospect that it all seems so marvellous.

SG: You know who crept into paradise. And he crept into Independent Producers.

RF: Were his initials JD

SG: Yes. That was the chief thing, I had a lasting mistrust of accountants, despite the fact that one of my best friends is an accountant. I have a lasting distrust of them from every point of view. When you promote accountancy to a leading, central role in film production, serving a large numbers of units around the set, because there was Two Cities and so forth, you're in trouble because you're building a bureaucracy, bureaucracies don't make films.

RF: The interesting question to me and I think it's unanswerable is how one maintains discipline on the part of the people making the films.

SG: I can't solve problems like that. And no one as far as I know has ever followed the theories I have, because they're partially negative. It's the old thing, horses for courses, you back the people who do well by you, you've got people in the paddock and you give them the chance. If it's a god awful catastrophe the first time you try someone, does something horrible to you like Caesar and Cleopatra did, well then if you've any sense you drop them. But short of that you give them a really fair chance.

If you take someone like David Lean, very few people would say that he's anything other than an overall very considerable financial asset to the film industry and to the British film industry, I don't think anyone, Ryan's Daughter or not, could deny that. But when you consider David only slipped twice at Pinewood, he gave them 5 or 6 films, I say he have, he directed the, all of which must have made money, Blythe Spirit, Brief Encounter, This Happy Breed, Great Expectations, Oliver Twist. He makes two, Passionate Friends and Madeleine which for one reason or another, acceptable reasons I feel, he failed and they drop him. David couldn't get a job for a time. When he went to Korda, Korda boasted that he got him cheap and he'd only made two films, so you can't run. You must try and be reasonable, you don't back Lawrence Irving because he's got no background and he's not likely to suddenly develop a new career as a director, you don't keep Gabby, because he makes a god awful cock-up and anyway he should have six policeman watching him and so on. Horses for courses, and if it doesn't work bad luck.

I often think I greatly admire a producer at who after making a great success from a not too highly prized film then goes out and buys himself a very nice modest tent with a gas heater and makes his next film from there as his headquarters instead of taking a few suite of offices with Goldcrest on the door, paying themselves enormous salaries and having enormous offices and making enormous flops, travel light. My theories are simple and probably totally inadequate to anything, travel light, follow the winning horses, control cost by one means or another, very difficult but attempt to, discipline is necessary but don't build huge studios, which are in the past now anyway, don't build big offices, don't have lots and lots of people, travel as light as

you can and if you have four or five successes, done in that way, at the end of it you have a lot of money tucked away.

RF: Do you consider Pinewood and Denham at that time oversized. Denham was the cross that Korda bore, it dragged him down in the 30s because he had to keep those stages filled, but the Rank Organisation with all it's production companies should have been able to keep Pinewood going.

SG: This brings to a totally different question. Studios were necessary at the time we're now on because you needed studios to make films. And you couldn't make them outside because endless lighting problems, principally because stock wasn't fast enough. We did more work outside than most people. We shot and various other places, even on State Secret I shot inside buildings in Italy and that sort of thing. It wasn't easily done in those days and needed a lot of problems being attended to.

The problem with studios is slightly different, the problem with studios is, forget the period when they were crammed full because it was exceptional, the middle and end of the war, and just take Shepperton, Pinewood, Denham, Elstree, there are people sitting there with overheads going up on the studio, the fatal thing is to say is "God these stages are empty, we must fill them." When years later, I was chairman of Shepperton I took Mick Balcon around the studios there. He said "Sidney I must tell you one thing. If I were you I would not walk by the studio and see those studios stages empty without doing something to fill them." I said "Isn't that the sad story of British films, you say that, you fill them with films, the films lose money and the studios are closed down." And the worse thing to do, which we've all done, is to make film to fill the space. It's lead it's half the story of the 30s we're talking about, at Shepherd's Bush, films to fill the studios, we musn't have empty stages. It's quite a sound economic argument as far as the studios are concerned. It's quite unsound as far as the films are concerned. And we've all done it, everybody's done it. But it can be cheaper to shut down the studios on a part time basis, in the end, it's hard on the labour, but in the end it may keep them there much longer.

RF: That was the difficulty because the unions were so powerful.

SG: Exactly. No problem now.

The last time studios, when studios really started to be empty was when people started to shoot outside, which happened to coincide with the Americans withdrawing and the two things happening together made it very difficult for them at Shepperton. Because some of our very American customers disappeared because of American financial legislations, the fact that they made some bloody awful films and lost money too. And then the other withdrawal was caused really by lack of success, so you had two factors operating. No, the other factor was the tendency for films to move outside. Now when Ralph Bond wrote those letters at the time I was shooting at Elstree about the absurdity of a Shepperton film being made at Elstree, the truth was that the whole studio situation in the country was under threat, not because of things like that but because of the four walled predecessor which was shooting outside and leaving the studios

empty. From the ACT or any other union, I got no backing at all when we asked the union to support the studios and not support the exterior shooting, you know shooting in a house or something like that and they wouldn't give us any help. They wouldn't tell their members, now it may have been impractical advice but the point is they shouldn't have criticized the studio owners for not filling their studios when they were doing nothing to stop their members setting up films to shoot outside the studio altogether. The two just don't fit.

RF: There is another element to all of this which is the rise of television and the loss of the cinema audience.

SG: 1950s. Again the circuits, the monopolies, the duopolies did nothing at all, the cinema owners in this country did nothing to combat television as compared with what the Americans did. The most they did is copy the Americans. The only statesman like act that John Davis ever did when he was in charge was to copy the American widescreen system, he went and saw it operating in America and copied it here. But it had the amusing result if you want to go into logistics, I did a count on, I had a scene I shot in a film and there was a crowd, say full a crowd of 50, if you looked through, we were still using wide screen masks in those days, if you looked thorough the wide screen mask the picture was bigger but there were 35 people in it. If you looked at the old academy screen the picture was smaller, or would be smaller on the cinema screen, but there were 50 people in it. So the great advantage of the wide screen, if you wanted to be satirical, is that you got 35 people for you money instead of 50. But that's the only thing John Davis ever did. Even Southern television, as an example, they could have gone into Associated Redifussion and else where. But they stayed aloof from it, they didn't really believe in it and in the end the only thing they could go into was Southern. I think they lost that in the end.

RF: They did lose that in the end.

SG: Maybe in Davis defence, I don't think it really is a defence, you know this legend arose, a licence to print your own money, well this became true but it was not true originally. I know because I was in TWW and Frank and I had pledged quite a large sum which we had raised somehow, I think it was £24,000 each, £12,000 each and that was to be our stake in TWW. The thing started, meanwhile had been going a year or more, and they were losing money hand over fist, they were the biggest company at that time, losing money. And the Daily Mail, Rothermere who was behind it, the principle investor withdrew from it altogether, cut his losses and got out. And I said to Frank "Look we may have faith in this but look what's happened. I think we're risking, we've got to raise this money, some of this it all, we're risking losing it all. I don't believe we will, but do you or do you not, you're a gambler, do you or do you not think it would be wise to halve our stake?" And he said "Yes, very wise." And we did.

It caused a lot of trouble then, but in the end they sorted it out and the result was that we lost probably £30,000 or £40,000 of what we might have got. But it was a rational decision to make at that time.

100
RF: Going back to round off Independent Producers, was it in general terms a profitable enterprise, both financially and all the other rewards that come, for you as individuals and as corporate entities.

SG: We had a fee for each film and we had a share of the profits. The share of the profits divided in different proportions between us, our share was on the first five films, I think I'm right in saying, 25% and the net profit, after everything. On Blue Lagoon, for reasons to do with something, like deferment, I don't know what it was, for some reason, we were raised to 37% and a half per cent. One reason was that they had realised what had happened over the bank interest on Caesar and Cleopatra and they still hadn't allowed for it on films, so they added bank interest to the cost of Blue Lagoon. As a result of that we had a smaller share, so they increased the percentage to 37 and a half%. So on our successful films we would have received between us a minimum of 25%

RF: How creative was their accounting.

SG: I can't answer that. There are so many aspects. One is how creative is the cinema accounting, how creative is the distribution accounting how creative is the PIFFL accounting, I suppose it counts and how creative is the studio accounting, you could rule that out on most of them.

RF: Your film showed a profit to you.

SG: Overall they showed a profit to us, a handsome profit. Some of our films didn't. I don't know what they've done since because we don't get the cash returns anymore, I should have thought one or two would have caught up by now but they won't have got into our profit area because we haven't received any profits.

RF: How about television sales.

SG: I can't speak for those that didn't reach the production figure like London Belongs to Me. London Belongs to Me was again an exception. They'd got too short a licence on it, so we couldn't take any advantage, it got very little for television because of that reason. It's a bad story buy, they only got a short lease.

RF: It was a very popular novel, I suppose he drove a hard deal, Collins.

SG: I forget what terms it was, they shouldn't have agreed to it but we had nothing to do with it. I don't know about Captain Boycott, but Dark Stranger must have broken even now. You see they haven't exploited them in this country, they sell them in a package and they put too many in each package.

RF: They're on quite frequently.

SG: Yes, but it's probably Channel 4, they bought them for our season. In 1985 we had the Christmas season, 5 weeks, Channel 4, and they obviously bought them bought them for three runs or whatever it was. And that's why it's running, for that reason. It owes more to us and Channel 4 than it does to Rank.

RF: But they're still owned by Rank.

SG: Yes. They must be. Because we got the prints from them for the Cannes event.

RF: I feel there ought to be more I could ask about the last days of the Rank Organisation.

SG: It's very sad it happened the way it did. But I think the condemnation is that it happened to all of us, over a very short period of two or three years. It happened to Cineguild, who were breaking up internally anyway. It happened to Frank and me who weren't breaking up internally, and Mick and Emeric who weren't breaking up internally. Incidentally it also happened to Ian Dalrymple although he hadn't been so successful. The whole thing just broke up, quite unnecessarily. Oddly enough the last letter I had from Micky Powell, he almost all of us of going to Korda and deserting Rank, we should have stayed with Rank, but he was the first to move.

RF: He was inclined to misremember.

SG: I did point that out to him in the reply. We hadn't initiated it, we'd followed him there. It was very sad, but one has to be realistic. One could draw a glowing picture of Independent Producers continuing but we weren't a very compatible lot. Lean was very much a man to himself, Neame was a man to himself. Partly why they broke up, Havelock-Allan, they'd got rid of before that or had gone.

RF: They brought Eric Ambler in

SG: I don't know in what capacity.

RF: I think he was supposed to be a writer producer. I don't know

SG: I don't remember him sitting round the table. He made a film called October Man. That was the time when we had this argument about Uncle Silas, when he was doing that particular function,

RF: Did he write Uncle Silas?

SG: He produced it, October Man. Uncle Silas he never got round to, that's why he gave it to Irving. It's a pity because Eric if he was an enthusiast, and he must have been to register it, would have done so much a better job than Laurence Irving who apart from being a novelist himself he was a director on it.

I said about that film, I remember, I said if they get the scene wrong where they take the girl away and she thinks she's going to France and she wakes up in the morning and she's been drugged and she wakes up in the morning and she hears the bell of the clock in the courtyard of the house they've taken her from, and knows back there, she hears the clanking of metal and she looks through the window and hears them digging a grave, now it takes a genius

162

to bugger that up. And it was totally bugged up at great expense in Uncle Silas.

When I once offered quite seriously, but I thought I better smile while I said it to John Davis "How about my doing a remake of Uncle Silas for you." He took me quite seriously, although I wasn't making an offer because I wasn't free too. But he took it serious enough to say "We'll never, ever, ever make that again." It's not the only good subject

RF: Two of my favourite stories are by Le Fanu.

SG: The BBC bugged it up too. Thoroughly bugged it up. I couldn't watch it and it's a wonderful story.

I tell you one you should read, if you haven't read it, Checkmate.

He wrote some I've never heard of and I got them from the London Library and others someone smuggled out of the British Museum for me

Checkmate is the most ingenious, it depends on plastic surgery, there is too much padding in all of them but The House by the Churchyard is number one. I tried to get a treatment out of that.

RF: Did they give you a farewell lunch when you went to Korda.

SG: Rank? No, they didn't give us a farewell lunch and we left on a somewhat sour note.

RF: Because it was all collapsing around Arthur's ears.

SG: Not at that time.

RF: You went what year?

SG: These things are all dated back, by the time a picture appeared you'd been working on it the year before. We joined Korda towards the end of 48, sometime. I don't think the real troubles at Rank appeared until a bit after. He was still happily doing Independent Frame then and did at least two more. I think it came pretty suddenly when the accountants suddenly realised they had a £16 million overdraft facing them.

RF: Which I always associate that with 48, because I was a youngster trying desperately to break into the industry then and always came up against this barrier, things closing down.

SG: But they didn't want to lose us, they wanted to discipline us, and that had been on probably six to nine months before we started to drift away so you had to backdate things a bit. They did some of the typical things. Frank and I very largely introduced a system into Pinewood, it was actually was at Denham that it operated, bring on young writers. We got half a dozen writers, some of them who weren't all that young under the

leadership of Gordon Wellesley, who was not great but an extremely experienced writer and organiser, I said "Gordon we're putting you in charge of this, we'll give you six writers. They'll be paid small salaries every week and give them an opportunity. Amongst them was a gentleman called William Rose, remember Bill Rose, Genevieve, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Ladykillers, and others. He was getting £12 a week and that was about the standard for these six writers. And when the crash you're talking about came, they settled their contracts, they'd only got a year contracts, they'd got about half way through or whatever it was. They settled their contracts rather than pay them £12 a week for another 6 months. That was their seed corn. What happened to get one proper writer is excellent and they had Bill Rose, but his future was afterwards when they let him go, that's when he did Genevieve and Ladykillers, Smallest Show on Earth, and then in America, Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World which could have been bought in England if there had been an organisation.

RF: I don't think motion pictuerr executives have ever been noted for their foresight have they.

SG: What saved Davis from ignomany was something called zerox.

RF: And that they say was more luck than judgement.

SG: It was brought to him, in Chicago or somewhere and he took it by some miracle. He couldn't run hotels, he couldn't run marinas, he crucified people. And you know the reason why Rank when out of film production, I am quite convinced, when he had that second phase he was not going to have anyone make a success where he had personally failed. He was a great British film disaster. But if the motto had been great oaks from little acorns grow, a bit different from we've got to get a lot of oaks out by next week.

RF: If it hadn't been John Davis, it would have been someone else, because again the whole history of the British Film industry is marked by it's disasters. No matter how charming a man Korda was he had two major failures. Putnam in our lifetime is another one.

SG: I always thought a lot of Alex's were avoidable, in the sense that if he'd reflected a little more, he had many, many great qualities but the priciple of reflection was not one of gifts the almighty gave him, he was too impatient aman to reflect. Once he made his mind up, he couldn't reflect. I had to do the job of writing an obituary for Alex for some pamphlet or magazine, I don't know where it was, I know what everyone will say, I said we all know Alex is the filmmaker, Alex is the genius, charming almost comical Hungarian and all the rest. But what no one has ever given him the credit for is the hard work he did in getting film industry legislation, things for the betterment of the filmmakers through, he fathered the Eady plan, ehe fathered endless thing, he was a man who was very easily bored and he was very, very bored but he stuck to it and did it.

RF: Was he bored.

SG: He was bored with financiers talking at him. But he really

did things for the business.

RF: A lot of people think he got bored making films and he became more interested making the deal.

SG: He had a Hungarian's natural interest in the deal, I don't think he got bored by deals, I don't know whether he got bored of making films or not, but he certainly got bored talking to legislators and trade unions and all that. And he stuck at it and he did very good things.

16 June 1990

RF: There seems to have been a genre of British films in the late 30s early 40s, was it The Lady Vanishes which established that activity or was it part of a cycle?

SG: One would have to go into dates but I would have thought that the type of film, it came from Powell and Loy, it came from The Thin Man etc. a new style of flippancy, we certainly borrowed from that. Night Train, no Seven Sinners, earlier, as early as 35, I couldn't tell you which, MacDougall and MacKinnon started it around the the same time, who was first I don't know. I would think that that there is very little doubt that in each case the type sprang from America.

RF: So the fact that Frank latched onto The Wheel Spins was recognition of not only a good story but it fitted very well with what was being paid to see at that time.

SG: Well you have got to realise that first of all the novel had nothing to do with the film in that sense because much of it was invented. There was no relationship that I can really recall equivalent to Redgrave and Lockwood as it was in the film.

RF: It says in Geoff Brown's book that Frank bought the novel for the studio and was busy and turned it over to you for treatment.

SG: He had the agreement to do the script but wasn't free at the time so I started on it down here. It was the first thing I started on down at this house. So I did two or three weeks on it, more or less sporadically until Frank joined me. And I was very grateful because so much of it was picking stuff out of the air. I think the nearest we ever got, and then we changed the whole style, the nearest we got to a faithful adaptation was Green for Danger, and in the case of The Lady Vanishes it was a very free adaptation, very free.

RF: What would motivate the changes, would it be the tastes of the time, would it be pursuing a cinematic script rather than a filmisation of the novel?

SG: I think, without reading too much into that it the primary change was political, in the sense that, as I remember the book, I think it was about a governess who is coming home and because she knows something has gone wrong in the Royal family or dictators' family or something, she becomes a target for disposal. Well that is not so in the film at all, definitely a spy. She was obviously working for, as we used to say, the Foreign Office. Therefore the whole thing took on some sort of political note, if only the plot was political. The connection with Hitler was there originally, the Nazis and so on, but it wasn't made in order to exploit that in any way, we simply followed a story line and made it up as we went along really.

RF: If there were this idea of a kind of British Thin Man genre in operation where would that have started, on what level.

Who would have perceived the trend, who would have said I saw The Thin man last week, very effective film, why don't we do something like it. Would that have been Micky Balcon, the Ostrers.

SG: If you took The Lady Vanishes as being the first of them, I'm not making any claims, but if you took it as the first we were simply we didn't start off consciously like that at all. Seven Sinners was the first one. I think that must have been before everything and I think we must have hit that vein before MacDougall and MacKinnon because that was written, part of it, in 34

RF: There is also an element in Hitchcock's work at the time, the relationship in 39 Steps.

SG: Yes, if I wanted to be perverse about it, I'd say it came really as part of the inability to real find a love interest in British films, it became an antidote to the love interest. They were good mates instead of lovers. And censorship didn't help to make it any different.

RF: Was that sterility more due to the British character, censorship or inhibitions in the boardroom.

SG: I think one could enormously exaggerate decisions in boardrooms, I don't believe in them. Somebody may have sat down and said what we want is this or that. And no doubt they did, but it's effect was largely minimal. What people did was the old thing, get names together and subjects and the difference between Frank and myself and nine out of ten of the others was that we had such a very high proportion of original material. But there wasn't any boardroom policy. We very much got on with Ted Black as a team. I quite often wasn't there. But it wasn't the old boss in the boardroom.

RF: That came later surely, because Rank had his

SG: Rank was once asked by David Lean "What is a good film to you?" and there was a dead silence, this was after dinner at Pinewood, one of our interminable dinners, and so David said not ununderstandably "What do you mean?" He said "Films which people make happy" That was Rank's second, the first definition was that films which made people happy were very good films. Then he said "What do you mean by that?" it really boiled down to box office. David was quite visibly shocked. He didn't know what to say. It hadn't occurred to him that Rank was going to equate good films entirely and simply with box office, keeping people happy really meant making enough people happy to make the cinemas profitable. I think that was the beginning of disillusionment on David's side.

RF: Wasn't he perhaps being somewhat naive expecting a different response from a corporate chief.

SG: Yes I think he was but equally it was not unreasonable as Rank was always going on about wanting to make good films to ask him what a good film was in his opinion. I think we were all naive looking eagerly towards Rank to see what he would say. We were all equally surprised I think.

rf: Was Rank easily influenced by other people's opinions, could he be easily persuaded, if he weren't sure what a good film was.

SG: I honestly think that one has to be thoroughly cynical about this, there isn't a half way house. Every important decision Rank made after a certain point was made entirely along the line of mechanism, conveyor belt, filling in slots, that governed the Rank Organisation just at the time it should have been stopping governing.

RF: It began with the circuits, the fact that he had 600 cinemas.

SG: No, I don't think it did really. I think that the idealistic period stopped about 1946-47, the idealistic period didn't stop until as late as that.

RF: And there after what.

SG: Thereafter it was the solid eye of commerce and John Davis, I suspect, trying to prove that he was as good as anyone, even if he couldn't write a decent letter, he was a good postman.

RF: The personalities are fascinating because they did have such a far reaching, particularly Davis, effect on what promised.

SG: They had a crucial effect, that is the watershed, 19, call it what you like but between 1946 and 1948 was a real watershed and that was symbolised by one or two things. One of them was the break up of Independent Producers and I think was the most disastrous because it was the only loose, easy arrangement, though not as loose and easy as it perhaps should have been, but it was the only one which didn't have huge targets, all it had to do was fill Pinewood Studios and make the films we liked with certain minor restrictions really. On the whole that we did very well, all of us fulfilled that except Ian Dalrymple who was never really in that league.

RF: And Pascal.

SG: Pascal by that time had gone. It started as Gabby Pascal, glorious independent Gabby, somehow I suspect through his agent Chris Mann, Powell and Pressburger came next. I think that they had a very strong sense of loyalty but they could not take rebuff to their pictures, even before they'd been tried on the public. And Cineguild had really broken up before through their own centrifugal force, or lack of it.

RF: The break up was what, the fact that they wanted to pursue independent careers

SG: I think the break up was that David, in one sense, can't work with anybody and he was fine when Ronnie was his cameraman and Tony Havelock-Allan was his producer, that was fine. When it came to Ronnie making his own films, David said in effect you're not up to it, you are a great producer, Tony by then was leaving you see, he said you can be a great producer and Ronnie wanted to direct films. Ronnie and I had very long talks about

that because he reached a state of very considerable uncertainty about his prospects as a director. I used to ring him up. I didn't realise at the time that Ronnie made his own decisions and what you said didn't really make any difference.

RF: The fact is that Lean wasn't unduly wrong about Neame, a competent director but little more than a journeyman director is he.

SG: You know you have to be careful over these things. If you said did Ronnie put his stamp on a picture, I would say no he didn't. On the other hand you could label many Hollywood directors, good ones, half a dozen at least, you could label journeymen directors but you have John Ford in their number. They were both people of straight flair and ability and journeymen.

RF: They knew their craft superbly.

SG: They were treated like journeymen. You look at a film they always said was John Ford's own personal favourite, it is not insignificant that by the time he had left the picture, they didn't want him any more on it and it's not a very good picture, The Sun Shines Brighter. It is not a very good picture, it is a picture with some very interesting things it's very untidy, messy picture and it was obviously cut about afterwards, so he could blame it on the studio. It was a very popular way out for directors whose pictures haven't succeeded. The great arch dealer in that line was Joe Losey of course. If Losey had unfortunate experiences with a film he invariably told the press first and from there on the producers got the blame. If there was any credit going, Losey still picked it up.

RF: We're talking round

SG: It's the old conflict between totally non-creative people and people who were pretty creative, because all Independent Producers, some were more equal than others, obviously they had different policies, but it was fundamentally that. And what happened was that when Uncle Arthur was more important and John Davis less important in the earlier days, the kind of idealistic "Isn't it wonderful to be in the motion picture business and bring people a lot of happiness" was the guiding thing. When the bills came in, that didn't apply any more. And from then on, there wasn't any future with Rank. There hasn't been a really notable phase in Rank output since 1948. There have been notable pictures but there has been no notable phase or trend.

RF: It was Independent Producers and Two Cities who made the films, those are the films people talk about as being the renaissance of the British film industry.

SG: The first act was to get rid of Del Giudice and then work the way through.

RF: Can you tell us about that. First of all it seemed ideal, you had faith in Uncle Arthur, was John Davis a known person.

SG: He was known, I can't remember much about him. He had been the company secretary, which company I don't know

RF: I feel it was Odeon

SG: We didn't really have much to do with him that I can recollect. In fact, the people we felt we really had to have our backs against the wall because we'd certainly be stabbed very rapidly, they'd be the background act of Independent Producers the background of Denham to Independent Producers, that is to say the administrative background, Jimmy Sloan, Bill who was an accountant, people like that, they formed a clique, some of them professed to be converted Methodists. They were the people who got in behind Mrs Rank over pictures like the Rake's Progress, made life exceedingly difficult. But behind that again is the non creative versus the creative.

RF: How that can if ever be solved.

Let's talk of the glory days of Independent Producers and then the point at which it clearly was going to break up and fail, you was it always at the beginning joy or were there seeds of destruction already there with the admin people.

SG: I must be realistic, as well cynical about it, the truth is that there are always seeds of destruction within any diverse creative organisation, we've seen it recently on a rather grander scale with Goldcrest. And there are always those seeds of destruction. So you can't say Davis destroyed it. You can only say it might have been different if Davis had not been there.

RF: Did it breakup with that confrontation between the administrative people and the creative people or was it the desperate personalities of the creative people themselves.

SG: You've got to remember it was piecemeal, first there was Gabby, then there was Gabby and Micky and Emeric. Now Micky had known me for a long time, because I was at Elstree just before he was and he must have, having the same agent, he must have supported the entry of Frank and myself into, probably after Millions Like Us, I would think, I don't know about that.

RF: The offer came from whom, South St.

SG: It came through our agent, Christopher Mann, and had obviously been engineered by him as part of this notion which could have been Micky's I just don't know. I'm quite sure that the grand concept of Independent Producers in itself didn't come from Gabby because Gabby was interested in Gabby, not a lot of other people. So I would think that was probably as much Micky's as anybody's. Then there were the three of us. By then Gabby was, you might say unconsciously on the skids because he was actually making Caesar and Cleopatra, although he didn't know it, he was on the skids. Well then you see came Cineguild, they came in about a year after, I don't know what the period was, and they already had their production line, through Two Cities, they'd done in Which We Serve with Coward and then they'd done, I get them muddled, they did Happy Breed and Blithe Spirit. Now I have a feeling that Blithe Spirit was for Independent Producers and Happy Breed was for Two Cities but I'm not absolutely sure.

RF: I'm pretty sure you're right about Happy Breed.

SG: The other one I'm pretty sure was done as the first picture they made for Rank as Independent Producers Ltd. Therefore, they came as a ready made team. Frank and I came as a ready made collaboration but we'd only done one picture each, plus Millions Like Us at that time. And I think that you can always say at any given time in films, there is always a strong conventional element and I think it did offend the people we're talking about, the camp followers rather than Rank or Davis, that we had been, that Frank and I had been allowed to make films which they regarded as eccentric. Millions like Us was nothing to do with Jimmy Sloan, but they looked at these films, Phil Ostrer was undoubtedly spreading around the thing that they'd be insane to let us make Millions Like Us and Waterloo Road, particularly Waterloo Road.

RF: But all three of those films had gone into profit had they not.

SG: Yes. They must have a very large profit between them. I don't know how much Millions Like Us took but I can tell you it recovered it's costs very quickly indeed because we were allowed a half share in the film, not a half share, we were allowed a share in the film in the form of deferment of half the salary, so we were paid half price for doing it and then we recovered half our salary after the film had recovered it's cost.

RF: And that was quite early on.

SG: Very early on. Because I won it back extraordinarily quickly, I didn't expect to.

RF: It would be interesting to try and pinpoint a) the causes, if the seeds were there from the start and who had planted them. It wouldn't have been any mutual antagonism between the creative units.

SG: Not really because although there were differences, undoubtedly there were differences about who should be paid what and that sort of thing, going on behind the scenes, the fact remains and the best rebuttal of any suggestion that at that time it was breaking up from within is was that we had our meetings together, always. There may have been the odd private meeting but by and large we met them as a body, we met Rank and Davis and perhaps the odd other person, I can't remember another person but I expect there was somebody there, I said these endless dinners, we must have had four or five of them, The dinners about 48

RF: So the glory years were around the time of I see a Dark Stranger and Green for Danger, you were relatively untouched and it was a happy relationship with South St.

SG: Well it couldn't have been or they wouldn't have wanted to change it.

RF: Are you saying that it never settled down to a pattern right from the start.

SG: They never gave it a chance to settle to a pattern. Had they waited five years, they would have been into the black for all

the Independent Producers output, I don't mean each picture but overall, they must inevitably have been in the black, because damn it, they got the production costs of Red Shoes from America, they must have done, because on a non outright sale, retaining an interest, we got something like £350,000 back on Blue Lagoon, on a straight deal because the Rank machine in America had collapsed by then. Therefore, if you would have said they got more for the Red Shoes, it cost more anyway, supposing they got £400,000 back, they had got the whole of it's English release, it's Empire release and everywhere else, because it wasn't so big in those days, I reckon 5 years would have seen a handsome profit. I don't know because I haven't seen the figures.

RF: Was there maybe a suspicion of the creative people either running amok or doing bizarre silly things and if so would it come down to the behaviour both of Pascal on the one hand and Del on the other because, that was quite early on Caesar was 44 or 45, that was the beginning of Independent Producers.

SG: Well by the time it was finished it was well into the life of Independent Producers. We made our first film, there was always a bottle neck for dubbing in those days so you're probably better to judge by when a film started rather than when it was delivered. So you could reckon started, testing started when the flying bombs were still coming over, July, August 44, that was the first of the Independent Producers pictures,

RF: I would go on the set at wartime and in fact he had a flying bomb on the back lot.

SG: I don't know.

RF: Yes they were all up on a set built on scaffolding above the trees. And they were fighting to get down as the bomb came down.

SG: Yes, it would have been, because as I mentioned before because Gabby was doing tests of girls to play Charmian and characters like that in Caesar and Cleopatra and that was when I was shooting Waterloo Road, so that would have been in 42, because I shot through Christmas in 42, finished in January 43 and they put it on ice for 6 months. Then I managed to get that stuff shot, by that time I couldn't do it myself and it came out when we were shooting Rake's Progress, early on, so you could say Waterloo Road came out about December 44, October, November 1944 so it was quite a long spell.

RF: I think Caesar was shooting for more for a year.

SG: Yes. I think Rank was easily influenced, the answer must have been yes and no, because he certainly wasn't influenced by us, other than in what you might call idealistic ways, concept. But we warned him of Independent Frame, we warned him of Caesar and Cleopatra, we warned him of the whole process of block booking, that it would come to an end and on none of those did he pay the slightest attention. Over independent Frame, Davis went quite insultingly across the views of 9 out of 10 independent producers.

RF: Other than Zerox Davis has a very chequered history as

corporate boss, making the right decisions.

SG: The fundamental thing must be the non creative element against creative, always, with all these things. I mean I wouldn't call Earl St John really creative but Earl St John's heart was on the side of the filmmakers.

RF: Who would approve of the film projects or reject them. Was that on the highest level of all, Rank.

SG: It wasn't possible with Independent Producers,

SG: They couldn't turn down a script.

SG: Yes if it was over a certain figure. But

RF: Was it a modest figure.

SG: No it couldn't have been a modest figure, because within it we did Blue Lagoon.

RF: I think you said it was £300,000.

SG: It might have been £350,000, I can't remember now. Oh you mean the limit, the limit was somewhere in the 300s, I'm pretty sure. I couldn't tell you exactly where and we were over it by £20,000 and we dropped the soundman crew, we've done all that.

I've always looked upon it as sad, that it is absolutely inevitable with a man like Davis and a man like Rank, his kind, it's inevitable that it should happen. The other interesting thing illustrating the atmosphere at the beginning, or earlier on, was that it was felt that we should have a managing director at Independent Producers and we succeeded in getting it quite clearly defined that he was to be our servant and not our master. And it broke down if it broke down, if it broke down on anything, on him being our master and not our servant. That was George Archibald, George wanted the authority, as inevitably happens And he was a non creative person. Again you get the same kind of conflict.

RF: In the light of just read the Goldcrest book that history operates in cycles and repeats itself because it was exactly the same. Suddenly there is a financier who has been to Harvard business school being the only person discussing scripts with Warner Brothers.

SG: I must say that I think however that the tragedy, if it is a tragedy, of Independent producers was not that it was unsuccessful but that it was successful. It should never have been wound up in that way. I think it would have gone anyway but that's a different argument.

RF: There is that so called collapse of the Rank Organisation in 48 when they realised they had this extraordinarily high bank debt, did they not. I think Denham was closed down and everything was centralised and the Bush was closed down

SG: It was sold, this imbecility, they had a successful producer of so many pictures, of a very mixed programme, Ted Black and then

they bring in Sidney Box and I was told I musn't mention Ted Black's name, he was persona non grata. Sidney Box not only name a balls up of it but lined his own pockets too, very satisfactorily. And so then they think it wouldn't be such a bad idea to get Ted Black back, but he didn't live to come back. Talking about decision at the top, they are the ones which were important, the decision not to persevere with Independent Producers, the decision to discard Black, the decision to give Box a relatively free hand.

RF: Was there maybe a core of misrepresentation of the component elements of Independent Producers by Archibald at a high level, was he defending his people's interests very well. I was thinking the reason for Sidney Box replacing Ted Black was that Sidney Box spoke their language.

SG: Exactly. Not only that, I have heard Sidney Box get up at one of these interminable dinners that I'm always complaining of and say that he had become a better man through his association with dear Arthur Rank, "I can say I have become a better person." Well you knew where he'd go next and it wouldn't be down.

RF: Was there a lot of that

SG: A terrible lot, always by the third rate. Micky did lay it on but Micky did it always from the standpoint of some wonderful filmmaking paradise which was on the horizon thanks to people like Micky and wonderful Uncle Arthur. Micky was basically a very loyal person. But the hangers on, they were dreadful.

RF: With Micky it sounds like the Korda school of flattery which was slightly cynical and mid European rather than the hypocritical English type

SG: He went back in his older age and said that we had been wrong to leave Rank. I think what he was really saying was that, what I've been saying, that Independent Producers shouldn't have stopped, because he was the first to leave that ship anyway, so he couldn't really turn round on people like us who merely followed his example. But it's a great tragedy, it's the tragedy of the conveyor belt against creative people. And no one has every learned the simple lesson that I learned but didn't put into proper application which is that there is nothing to stop a filmmaker travelling light, nothing at all. Alright, if he's going to make Ten Commandments, there's a limit. to get within the budget, but ordinary reasonable entertainment work there is nothing to stop anyone from travelling light except ambition and greed. And they're quite strong masters, it means you get I look back at our career, Frank and mine's, and think how extraordinary modest we were in what we asked of people We never asked for great luxury offices and we felt ashamed if by some odd chance one came our way.

RF: What was a good film to you. What were the aims, did Individual Pictures have a credo.

SG: To make individual pictures, a fatal one, for ourselves, entirely for ourselves, entirely in the sense that we wanted to make pictures which were individual.

RF: You never made arcane pictures.

SG: This was a totally fatal recipe with the press, because what the press wanted to do was make the same picture all the time so they could criticise it. As somebody said, a great recipe for success is to go on doing the same thing rather well, Hitchcock.

RF: Later on in your career, when you were chairman of Shepperton studios and British Lion, were you able to successfully follow that precept of making films for yourself or was it feeding a machine.

SG: Up to a point yes. The trouble was rather different. As I tried to explain to Mick Balcon, the trouble was that Shepperton basically had to be a letting studio. This did not apply to Denham in the period we're talking about, 46, it didn't apply. There was a tremendous scramble after studio space and you couldn't find it, you had to wait to make the film. In Shepperton days, as I said we had a lot of stages, we had 11 stages. We had H, I and J which were the largest in Europe followed by the two smallest, the I and J and K, so that's four straight away. Then there were four big studios, that's 8. And then there was the little complex at the top which would have been E, F and D, so there were 11, some of which were very small.

RF: That's not the original Sound City, presumably Korda had added.

SG: The original, no, the two main stages were Sound City, the biggest part of sound city except for H, the big silent stage which had been re-erected from Isleworth. So we had a problem of getting customers rather more than making films ourselves. It was about that time, in the last days of British Lion that Mick Balcon walked round the studio, and said you know Sidney, I couldn't walk round without worrying all the time, I must get something to fill the studios. I said "Shortcut to destruction." But if he'd asked, as he probably did, what do you do then, I'd have said "I don't know but I don't think that's the way." I mean it's absurd to make a film to fill a studio.

RF: I don't think there is that much to say about Independent Producers because there was no single cause, it was a whole variety of actions and reactions.

SG: Yes, but one thing one can hang on to about that, is that had you imagined the moritorium or had you imagined that the production continued and you had recast your accountancy five years, I say five year, three years maybe, six years maybe, but you would have found yourself with a very prestigious profitable organisation. But at that time, Rank was obsessed or suffering with the obsession that he had really got a bit slice of the American market, at enormous cost. And we heard with horror that they were going to sell our films outright. Well they couldn't do it with some of them, because they had already been out and already suffered from this meglomaniac conception, because the cost of putting out a film through either Eagle Lion or the other one.

RF: United Artists released a lot of them and then he set up

Eagle Lion. I know UA did the original release of Colonel Blimp in a 90 minutes version with a caricatured girl on the poster learing at a naked girl.

SG: There was Eagle Lion which was run in America by Brian Foy

RF: But Robert Young who was a mad railroad tycoon who wanted to be in show business, it was his money as much as Rank's.

SG: I was trying to think what it was called, but I got the feeling that most of the money went into Rank's main outlet which may just have been called Rank.

SG: Not in the States, he owned a sizeable chunk of the production organisation.

RF: Here or there.

SG: There. I'm trying to think of actually what happened.

RF: They were very big in Universal, which had dated back into the 30s.

SG: He had 30% of that.

RF: Decca Records, they owned Decca Records which affected their activities in the United States. He almost acquired Korda's shareholding in United Artists and there was a very strong connection with United Artists, I know they released several of the very expensive pictures including Blimp

SG: They had this organisation called something, it wasn't just Universal, and they had their own officers in New York and they did all the exploitation from there, a chap called Jerry Dale running it. Captain Horton was running that office and everything operated from there. I dealt with them quite separately so I've never been quite sure quite how they operated with each other. But I met Brian Foy who were making films for Eagle Lion by the way in America, they had their own programme and they took into it British films and made American films. In fact, they made one which was never seen over here, a character on tv, a senator, some thing like Senator Cleghorn and it was a series like Andy Hardy but on American tv and he was making a film, Brian foy, at the old Republic Studios,

RF: Republic were still working then, was it General Service.

SG: I don't know. But Brian had his Eagle Lion Studios in California. And the idea was that we would eventually reach the point of making films in each other's country for the same organisation, but that never really took off

RF: But Robert Young was the financier who was Rank's partner in the venture, I think he was the majority partner, I think he was 51%.

SG: What we find was, coming to the practical matters of our own films, and I'm including in that Independent Producers' films, they terrible problems, in order to mount them in America they spent so much money you couldn't get any profits back. I doubt

because they thought that's how you should sell films. I was only trying to describe what he looked like but it was very expensive and we didn't get back what we should have done.

RF: That side of the business, just as a side light, selling pictures, it really was tough to sell pictures not to play the Palace or Plaza or Warner Broadway, but every last little tank town in Arizona or Illinois or up North here.

I wonder if there is anything additional which you haven't said on these tapes or other's peoples on your last films as writers when you are the top writing team in this country.

SG: You have to remember that Frank was scenario editor then, so that greatly limited his outside contributions, if I wanted to work with Frank I had to go and work with him at Islington. Luckily Frank could generally swing it, so I would get the contract to write and then Frank would join me on it.

RF: Was he moonlighting or was it an above board collaboration.

SG: Moonlighting. Not really, there was only one instance, we did a Will Hay together that way and I got stuck with it because I didn't know the Will Hay routines as well as Frank and I did it for fun. And that was Ask a Policeman, and I got about half way through it and I realised it needed more of the routine line, by that I don't mean Frank had a routine mind, but gag routine, so I asked him about it and we finished it together actually. And I pocketed the money and I think gave Frank half. But it was nothing, a very small sum, that's the only time we did that. The others were all completely above board.

RF: They had quite a collaboration going on writing those Will Hays, Joc Orton and Val Guest and Marriott Edgar,

SG: Marriott Edgar, Joc Orton and Val Guest. Joc Orton and Val Guest hated each other and Marriott Edgar hated nobody, I think. Frank always said that he was the best. Joc, of course, depends on whether you were interested in golf by that time, but I didn't write for the team as such. In fact by the time I'd knocked off Ask a Policeman, they'd got so involved in the routines that I think you have had to work with them before to join in. In fact, there was far too much routine in Ask a Policeman.

RF: It became shorthand between themselves.

SG: Yes.

RF: You mentioned a moment ago about Girl in the News, you thought that it was an underrated picture.

SG: Yes, well Girl in the News has a ridiculous history and I'm not going to go on about it, but it was the novel that depended on the fact that a girl who was a nurse had been acquitted on evidence entirely circumstantial, nurse and patient relationship. The story was simply that she had been watched carefully after her acquittal and was placed in a position where she could easily bump off her employer, on the belief that she would instantly be suspected, which, of course, is true. The only snag with it is that the author of the book seemed to be unaware that you could

never mention the first case in the second case, because the laws of contempt of court completely forbid it. So you could only do it by agreement with the judge and defending council, maybe all three. Consequently the whole foundation of what they bought didn't really exist, because you couldn't do it that way. So I had to find a way in which the first case could be introduced.

RF: You say you couldn't do it that way, were you all such purists that you wouldn't use a plot device you warranted untenable

SG: I couldn't have written a case which depended on something which could never get into court.

RF: You would expect a streak of logic in all that you do

SG: Had the prosecution, and my belief is in such cases there is some form of agreement between prosecution and defence, but I think that the attitude would be that you could not mention it in courts, in other words you couldn't bring the first case as any kind of evidence in the second.

RF: I'm curious that you wouldn't just it in a film because it offended you sense of propriety or honesty, or whatever or were you worried about the letters you'd get.

SG: I never worried about the letters. I think I got the kind of mine which couldn't write a trial scene entirely based on a false premise. And I got round it in the end by defence introducing the first trial, but the weakness of the arguments doesn't matter to anybody, but the weakness of my argument was that how could the people who plotted this second charge of murder how could they possibly have known that the defence would take that lie in advance. So they're plotting on something which might even weaken a case, rather than strengthen it. You could say yes, she killed the last woman she was with, so she's likely to have killed this one. But you can't really conduct the trail on this basis. You can only conduct it by a fair trial by excluding, not by including.

RF: Don't you think that most people watching a film accept that there is one form of justice in motion pictures and an entirely another in real life. I really can't imagine Perry Mason.

SG: If you follow your argument in this case to the logical conclusion, I'd have had to have scenes "So you claim it was purely a coincidence that in each case your employers died one after the other in some what similar circumstances." I couldn't write that.

RF: That is the interesting thing. It would bother you.

SG: It would bother me because I couldn't think of a legal, not from a moral point of view, I couldn't see a legal basis, I'm not a lawyer, but I couldn't see a legal basis whereby it could ever get to court in the way that it got to court in the book. Why I took so long to discover this, I don't know, but I didn't choose the subject of the book. I was assigned to it.

RF: So you could never have written any of those serials where

end of part 9 they were down in the snake bit and start of part 10

SG: No, I think I couldn't do one, I couldn't do that because I think it was really sloppy workmanship.

RF: But Hitchcock, there are a lot of loose ends throughout his

SG: Hitchcock didn't have any story integrity really. Hitchcock was not really a script man, Hitch was a sensation man.

RF: Interesting enough about Girl in the News, the film still really works quite well within it's limits, I saw it not long ago.

SG: I felt rather stupid about it because I'd never seen it complete, I'd only seen parts of it. I was so angry about Carol's tepid treatment of the whole thing, I respect Carol as a director but I said to him once, he knew I didn't like it, he wanted script changes, I said "Alright I wrote the script and don't want to do the changes but the point is if you feel these changes should be made, change the script yes; but if you feel you don't want to make the script at all it is much better not to make the picture. Let somebody else make it who doesn't feel like you." And Carol would never go along with that, he went along with making the changes here and there. And, in the end I realised he was simply running away from all sorts of sexual implications, it became positively genteel. It was meant to be under the surface almost ferocious if you sat down and thought about it.

RF: You say his tepidness of treatment. I think one of the problems with British films generally at that time, they were tepid so one accepts that tepidness.

SG: That is true but there is no reason why this should have been. It didn't go very far but you have a situation of the butler in the household who is poking the mistress of the house whose husband is a semi invallid, and there should have been some element of domination, if you like, a sadistic eroticism in it, not of the kind you get now but implied underneath the whole relationship should be one of physical domination, in a way, with all that goes with it with the other characters. As it was you felt that he gave her a polite peck on his afternoon off and that all.

RF: So Carol Reeds hang ups could affect the way the film went out, could it.

SG: Oh yes.

RF: Was it sex or class or both with him.

SG: I don't know. I've often thought about it, I think possible commitment. Things to which he could feel committed, he did better. But I think his great failure, which was a totally unnecessary failure, was Our Man In Havana and I know a bit about because I did the opera libretto but I never saw the film until afterwards because I didn't want to be influenced and I was appalled when I saw the film. Alec Guinness was very disappoint-

ted in Carol's approach, so he says in his autobiography. And I didn't discuss it with Carol, but he was a great underplayer. I discovered an interesting thing through doing the opera that it will stand any amount of playing up. If you invent a man simply to get him on your book as an agent so you can pocket the money, and the man suddenly comes to your front door to sell you a vacuum cleaner, you realise it's the same man, it's a strong situation. It isn't one you can just chuck away, it's one you want to stun the audience as well as the man. And I realised this of situation and it worked extremely well in the opera. Lots of things in the opera didn't work but that element was very much played up, by instinct really. And it worked extremely well and I nearly got in touch with Greene to ask if he'd let me have the dramatic rights, if he thought the play would run, because it was quite easy to adapt it into a play than an opera, you can adapt much more easily into a play but I didn't pursue the matter. But I think that Carol was at times a gross underplayer. The other thing was that people had to be ladies and gentlemen or very obviously not ladies and gentlemen. You got that coming out as early as Kipps. Kipps story was a small town, Folkestone group of people who are pretentious and would very much like to be, I don't think it would occur to them they they could ever be remotely at the peak of London society. But whereas I would have seen the genteel lady as someone like Barbara Everest playing in her refined style, he played Helen Haye which is immediately gone down and translates her to Mayfair instead of Folkestone.

RF: What I find interesting is there you were hating this resisting this, I seeing a film of that time, I'm talking as Kipps, I accepted it as the conventions of the time, it had to be toffee nosed and inflated.

SG: The moral of the thing was, basically, it is stated on the fly leaf, a story of the pretentious, Kipps is trying to be a gentleman, not so much pretending as trying to be. All the people in Folkestone were trying to be something they're not, if you make them instead of something they are not into something they are, then a lot of the point has disappeared. And you have actual clashes, like in the drawing room where he goes to tea at the house of the Walsinghams and he sits on a chair and the chair rocks and she says "hat's what we playfully call our lame chair" and put something under it, you know immediately they are short of cash and they cannot live up to something they can't live up to.

If you feel that is their natural habitat and they are not pretending, then a lot of the point disappears. That didn't worry me so much as the general feeling, which was Carol's I know, we had a long argument was, he felt the moral was that people shouldn't pretend, not some people shouldn't pretend but all people, so Kipps shouldn't pretend to be a gentleman. The point is that he never succeeded anyway, people only accept him because he's got money in the story and it's not the point, the point is that all type of pretence lead to falseness, maladjustment, everything else. And it's born out by what happens in the story.

The other thing is the whole of the episode Chipper the actor, played by Arthur Riscoe was again underplayed to the point, it's like underplaying Mr Macawber, you cannot overplay Mr Macawber,

therefore you must not overplay it. If you got a really colourful character you do not present him in monochrome, I think that's what Carol did an awful lot. He didn't in a cosmopolitan thing like The Third Man which I'm sure everyone will think that is his best film, he didn't have those problems. But have you ever thought how many of Carol's films show a boy in search of a father.

RF: No.

SG: Kipps, is the illegitimate son of a rich man, Fallen Idol, the idol is a father substitute, the butler, he falls because he does not live up to the little boy's idea of how such father figures should behave. Outcast of the Islands, two father figures, Robert Morley and Trevor Howard and Trevor Howard has a little boy following him everywhere, he looks after a little native boy, he keeps shooing him away and then he accepts the fact that the boy looks upon him as a father. Equally Morley looks upon Howard as a son. In The Man Within, the one in Berlin, you have a little boy who betrays him unconsciously to the police by following him into West Berlin. In Kid for Two Farthings, the boy's father has disappeared to South Africa and the father substitute is the tailor, the Jewish tailor, who tells him stories, the thing his father should be. Third Man has a father figure at school, Orson Welles, and he goes to seek Orson Welles as an adult in Vienna. And you can go on and on. Oliver.

RF: It's extremely interesting, it does raise the questions of the extent to which he chose those properties or whether they came to him, quite how he became involved.

SG: I know with Kipps, Kipps was taken to Carol, but the fact remains he did it. If I was writing a study of Carol I would be careful to say that I have no evidence that he went out and selected it.

RF: Was his paternal origin known at that time.

SG: Yes, Beerbohm Tree you mean.

RF: And was there a stigma attached to it.

SG: Certainly in Carol's mind. I'd forgotten who he was, people told you and it didn't strike you as of great importance and I was out on the town with Carol and having a drink with him at the Cafe Anglais bar and I said "You had a famous father, who was he?"

And I realised straight away it went very deep with Carol.

RF: What was he reaction, do you remember.

SG: Yes, one word, Tree. That's all he said.

rf: From what one knows about it it was a very comfortable menage.

SG: He definitely felt it, there's no doubt about it.

RF: I think there were six children.

SG: Five.

RF: He was very secure.

SG: He undoubtedly felt it, there's no doubt about it and I think it affected his career. I think Carol not only felt it but it did govern his life to a certain degree. The other think was Jim Williams said of him, he's only really at home within one square mile of Shepherd's Market and I think it's true. He wasn't interested in the lower life. One of his best films, Stars Look Down, very good film.

RF: How do you account for that extraordinary decline from the commanding heights, someone who has made Third Man and Odd Man Out and some very minor master works to those terrible last films that the poor man made. Was it lack of commitment.

SG: I meant that in all sorts of meanings, really. Lack of commitment, the the sense of always having great difficulty, who doesn't, but perhaps exceptional difficulty in someone of his eminence in finding a subject he wanted to do. He was not creative, he was interpretive. So he was creative to the extent that he was interpretive but he was not a leading creative figure, he wasn't a writer. I did Young Mr Pitt with Frank, which meant writing a good deal of the story. And he tells Carol was always very hard to convince that Frank and I could write, we were screenwriters, that was all right, but we weren't really writers. And I remember.

RF: What was a writer to him, somebody who wrote for the stage.

SG: Somebody who's reputation was not in films.

RF: For the stage or for the printed page.

SG: It didn't matter, probably he had a slight bias towards the stage. I remember he complained about a scene, I think that I had written that particular one and I said "Well." He said "Couldn't you get Castlerosse to do something?" And I said "Castlerosse did." "Yes" he said "I remember that scene, it's a lovely scene, why did you cut it?" I said "Because you can't say lines like that." I said "Look Carol, if you think that you can go and direct a scene and get an artist to say the following lines, 'Had I but known I would have flown to my William on wings of love.'" And he said "I think it's beautiful." I said "Over my dead body, and Frank's too." He said "I tell you what, I'm doing a test," it was a test of Pat Burke who was a girlfriend of his round about that time and he said "I'll use that scene in the test and then we'll have a look." I was never allowed to see that test. No further mention was ever made, so I don't know what happened to the . But he hadn't got the belief, it was a kind of snob thing, that he believed that a gentleman would do this or not do that, so he believes a writer could write this but a screenwriter couldn't write that.

RF: You make him sound a poseur, that he was playing the gentleman.

SG: Well yes, but he had all the background except legitimacy. He had the public school background and everything else, and

theatre. Public school and theatre, he was no academic, no academic at all. But he had a very subtle mind. I greatly admired his word. For instance, nobody, with the material available nobody could have directed Night Train to Munich at that time half as well as Carol. And on the basis of direction, we have no complaint at all and his comedy with Charters and Caldicott was better handled than Hitchcock. I respect Carol very much.

You ask about decline, Ronnie Neame said to me in Hollywood, that would be about six years ago, we'd been chatting about this thing, he said "I don't think Carol's ever recovered from Mutiny on the Bounty." He said "I think it destroyed his confidence." And it may be that. But I think part of it was searching around not finding the subject. You see he did a contract with Korda for so many pictures. He starts frantically saying "I haven't made a film for 18 months, what am I going to make? I'll find it." You'll have all your problems with whatever you find, inevitably. And it goes on like that. At the end of five years you've completed your 8 years assignment and you've lost 3 years somewhere. And I think everyone, I don't think Carol's any worse at finding subjects than some other people, like David Lean. And David Lean has been able to build up a sufficient background of writer's relationships and success to enable him to go on for years, working on the same subject. Carol never really achieved that.

RF: Explain that about David Lean.

SG: David no doubt had his difficulties over subjects but his difficulties seemed to be convincing himself that he either could or couldn't make something. If you take Lawrence of Arabia they had 3 or 4 scripts, at least, different writers. Bridge on the River Kwai even more so, because they had a problem behind that over writers. River Kwai I think, I don't know the circumstances, I think that was a quick one. I think after that each subject became taxingly difficult and he'd go on for there or four years writing on them. I don't know where the money came from, whether it came from the picture or whether he paid himself a salary or what, but Carol was never in that position. He was never in the big money league. So the pressure on him was greater to find subjects and get them done. Then he would do extraordinary things.

I wanted to do A Kid for Two Farthings. Now the last thing which would occur to me would have been to take the Jewishness out of it. I would have been a bit worried about perhaps too much going in but I would never have thought of making it a non Jewish subject. But Carol managed to make the whole thing without a single reference to the character's background or religion at any point. And it was a very Jewish story. It lost a tremendous lot through not being a Jewish story. Whoever told him that Jewish stories keep people out of cinemas was talking nonsense. Anyway, if you feel like that don't make that subject, that's the answer. But all his little boys turned out to be beautifully well behaved prep school boys, that's the other thing. And this little Jewish boy becomes a beautiful looking young lad whose obviously sitting for his entrance exam. So you loose the whole thing straightaway. Carol didn't do a bad job outside that, if you accept that. But I think people do decline,

he declined, everybody declines. He hadn't got a structure, that's what I'm really trying to say, after a certain time he had no structure. And you know he only made Oliver by chance.

RF: He wasn't the first one asked to do it. I've often wondered, other than Odd Man Out, which lead to his leaving the Rank Organisation, they didn't want to know after that because again it was such an extended shoot and such an extended budget,

SG: Odd Man Out, I was puzzled because I always thought it was a great success.

SG: It was, but again it upset the accountants at the Rank Organisation and this is when he went to Korda and Korda was a marvellous patron for him I would think.

SG: But you have to remember, another thing, the same agent comes into it again, he had the same agent, it was quite natural that Christopher Mann should go to Korda, only if I remember rightly Carol went to Korda, yes he did, before we did, he wasn't part of Independent Producers, otherwise he would have been.

RF: He worked for Two Cities did he not.

SG: I think he would have been with us at Independent Producers if the callendar worked out different. I have a very great respect for Carol, he was very subtle cunning man underneath that rather bland exterior.

RF: If the beginning of Independent Producers was the watershed, the sea change had happened with the Rank Organisation and everyone there was either exiting of their own free will or they were no long required there.

SG: Did you ever know that in the Stars Look Down, Margaret Lockwood objected to the moral aspect of the part she was playing and said she was asked to play a whore, which was not true, she was just an unfaithful wife but she did. Maurice Ostrer called a meeting and said "She must be cleaned up." Carol didn't want this. Carol would never come right out and say "We can't have this at any price." Jim Williams did, he said "You'll ruin the whole thing." Anyway Bill Ostrer, for once, prevailed over Ted Black and they set about, they had already cleaned up the script. When Ted Black died, which was in 1948, I did a little obituary for him somewhere, one of the trade magazines. And I ran into Carol Reed in the hallway 146 Piccadilly and he said "I read your obituary about Ted Black and I thought it was very fair, very honest, did I ever tell you that story about Margaret Lockwood and The Stars Look Down?" "No." "About me and Ted?" "No." He said "Well you see I knew Jim was right about that." I'd been called in for my opinion, I forgot to mention that. so he knew that I knew the situation. He said "I was very upset about it. I knew that Ted on a Thursday night always went to the Palladium, arrived in the interval and had a drink with his brother and then they generally either went off together or Ted went home. I knew this was a Thursday. So I found a nice pebble and put the pebble in my pocket and I knew Ted parked his car at the Lex Garage, not so far from the Palladium. So I got there, allowed myself about half an hour at the end," is it Windmill St or somewhere else, Lex Garage on the corner off Brewer St. And he said he'd got

quite a long view and he waited and waited and no Ted and no Ted. Eventually he saw a figure coming up the far end of that rather narrow st, that's Ted, so he put this pebble in the gutter, he didn't tell me how many takes he had to have, but he put the pebble in the gutter and he waited until he was pretty sure it was Ted and he could see, he put the pebble in and kicked it along like this, and he saw these feet pass him and he thought "Oh god, he hasn't seen me." And he went on doing it. Then the footsteps stopped, he turned round, "Carol" and it was Ted alright. Carol said Oh, hello Ted." "Is something the matter Carol?" "No, nothing Ted." "Come and have a drink." "Nothing I can tell you nothing at all. No, no, no. Well worried naturally" and he laid into this business. And said "I can't sleep because this business, you are ruining the picture." And Ted was pleased to put some of the stuff back. A curious way his mind worked, so elaborate.

Talking about Carol's character, it's a very odd procedure, one he obviously enjoyed telling about. But he wouldn't normally tell you a story like that at all, something made him on that occasion, perhaps because Ted's death.

He was a very subtle fellow. I know once, I walked off Young Mr Pitt and by then I'd got to know Carol pretty well. And I said "I can't take this any more" and went off it. Not very long after this conversation about "Had I but known I would have flown to my William, etc." And he rang me up and I knew straight away he was putting on an act. He said "Look I don't want you to leave this picture I want you to come back." In the end I said "Come off it, Carol, you know the situation, I know the situation, no need to act it out." And so we agreed a friendly way to part.

RF: It was in the blood I assume, he had been an actor as well as a stage manager and director.

SG: And he looked very like it. I have one photograph of Tree where the resemblance to Carol is positively uncanny. And I liked Carol very much, he is not a mean or unpleasant person, or a snide person, not a bit. But he was very subtle, very indirect.

SG: It seem sad now that something which is absolutely no consequence affected his life.

SG: Oh, I'm sure. You can write off, you have 8 pictures in which this theme of looking for a father can be said to occur, where you could write off 3 of them but the others were more to do with his choice.

RF: From what you said you're implying snobism on his part, condescension but I remember Laburnum Grove, it played very well and I don't remember it being unduly patronising.

SG: He wouldn't be patronising, it was purely a mental attitude. To give an example, Castlerosse who was a bit of a Fleet St rogue, he became Earl of around this time I am speaking about, during the war, and he invited Carol over to his estate which must have been an impoverished one in Ireland. And he described to us how he went there and how Castlerosse went round

the estate with a sort of shepherd's crook and a cloak, and this veneration for nobility. He really thought I'm sure that a nobleman was something quite outside the ordinary common rung of humanity. I really think that he really felt that. This doesn't mean that he fell down and worshipped them or that he was a snob, it was purely an ingrained attitude.

RF: There is a wide streak of feudalism in the British character.

SG: But he wouldn't condescend to a workman; somebody might have done in the script and he might have left it in but it wouldn't have been Carol's nature to do that. Carol was a very courteous person and he wouldn't want to take the piss out of any class I don't think. He said "Come and have dinner with me, I want you and Frank to have dinner with me." And we went off and he was terribly funny in cabs, if a bomb fell at the corner of Grosvenor Sq, which I believe it did one night when he was engaged in an earnest conversation at the other end, he would turn round and give the area of the bomb a look of annoyance for interrupting his conversation. But when he was in the cab he was the biggest coward on earth and he would always sit on the partition seat and tap on the thing and slide it back and say "Could you please drive very slowly and carefully, my friends are both extremely nervous." On one occasion he did that. First he said "I want to tell you things you do when you start to direct films because I've learned a lot, one of the first and perhaps the most important is this, never shoot a scene for the rushes." How true that is, it was a beacon for me for a long time. I remember quoting it to Peter Sellers, "Your trouble is Peter, you judge a scene by the rushes, you do not shoot scenes for the rushes, we shoot them for the picture." It was Carol who drew that to our attention.

RF: Did he have the ability to send himself up or was he dead serious.

SG: Carol had a sense of humour

RF: That business in the cab, was he doing that with a twinkle in his eye, or was it a necessity that he had to blame somebody else for his nervousness.

SG: No.

SG: You were asking me a little time ago about Carol Reed's sense of humour, the last picture I made I had his son Max as a second assistant. He said "I'm going to have dinner with my dad tonight, any messages?" I said "Just give him my love, all good wishes." The next day he said "I've got a message from my dad to you." I said "What's that?" He said "Well, reminding you of a line you and Frank wrote for Night Train to Munich" - when Calders and Caldicott recognise Rex Harrison as someone he was at college with, at Oxford, also this man is a cricketer and played for England. Later they think because he's in a German uniform he must be a German agent, supposing he is old boy, in the lavatory in the train, a German spy who is now back in his rightful uniform in Germany, "Well, supposing he is, old boy." And they have this conversation in the lavatory in the train, "Supposing he is?" "What?" "A German spy. I don't think he can be." "Why not?" "Well he played as a gentleman." "Only once." and it was the "Only once" which Carol remembered.

For the feature

RF: You have a comment about an obituary on Rex Harrison who died the day after our last meeting and you have a comment you want to make for the record about an obituary.

SG: My daughter read to me an extract from what I think must have been a piece in the Evening Standard by Alexander Walker in which he appeared to be totally nasty about Rex. It referred to him as arrogant, selfish, an inveterate womaniser, presumably between wives, and also it said that he had come to an arrangement with his wife, Lilli that they would divorce, which is what it implied, that they would divorce so he could marry Kay Kendal who was dying of leukemia and then presumably he would go back to Lilli. I remember, I'm pretty sure this comes from Lilli's autobiography, which I've forgotten the title, and I know that Rex asked Frank over to lunch on Cap Ferrat around that time, the time when he wrote his own autobiography and he said Lilli had said this and it was not true and that he was considerably upset that she had, "Especially as I can't reply now" because I think his book was already out, I don't know But he was very emphatic it wasn't true, I'm damn sure it wasn't true because it's not the way Rex would have gone about it. He was, no one would every say it, but he was a man of extreme honesty in many ways, in many ways extremely honest, not necessarily in relationships with people. But if he said I think that I'm the best Professor Higgins I could ever imagine, he would be telling the simple truth from his point of view, which would mean he had seen the others and didn't think they were up to his own performance which would be an entirely genuine opinion. It referred to inordinate vanity, this article. In fact he wasn't particularly veined except in ways that pretty well every actor has to be. What he was rather conscious of was not having a very good profile and having to do things to cover up defects like being bald and use artifices of that kind that he detested using. But I found him someone generous to other actors, entirely selfish about his own arrangement, but he would say "Who is playing so and so in the picture?" And you would say whoever it was, Cecil Parker or whoever it was. And he would say "Oh good, I need all the support I can get. Now who's playing so and so?" His attitude was is he or she good enough, not are they going to get in my way or take my billing, his first thought was can I get

good support.

RF: And presumably he wouldn't go to the lengths of denying this story if it was true.

SG: He couldn't very well deny it, providing I have got my dates right, but I don't think that he could have done it without making a separate statement. I think his book had already come out. He said "It just isn't true." I'm sure it wasn't true. First of all it implies a degree of planning and almost cold bloodedness in the arrangement with Kay which was much more typical of Lilli than ever Rex. And secondly, it implies a certain detachment from that relationship which I'm damn sure they never had. I brought them together, so I knew what was going on at the time, and when they came back from the States after they were married, I met them at a party somewhere and they'd just come from New York together. I said "How are you two getting on?" She said "Oh we quarrel terribly and fight. The other day in New York we fell all the way down the stairs and started attacking each other again when we reached the bottom and then we looked at each other and started to laugh. Do you know what we said, we said if only old Sidney could see us now." This is not the sort of relationship which would go with that story at all. I think I'll write to Walker, it's vicious.

RF: He's gotten very grand, I thought he behaved so badly over Ken Loach's picture, to have somebody jumping up and down and attacking a British picture was uncalled for. It always seem to me that you had Rex Harrison at the peak of his form, he made a marvellous Adolphus Cousins in Major Barbara, that really is the definitive performance of Major Barbara and you had him in Rake's Progress and there after he started to be self imitative, playing playing Rex Harrison, he was so marvellously fresh in the 40s as a performer.

SG: I'd forgotten the performance in Major Barbara but I think it's fair to say that what he was when he came to me on Rake's Progress, what he was as Noel Coward said, whose been misquoted, the best light comedian in the business, and he didn't look on himself as any more. And I was doing that scene in Rake's progress where his father dies while Rex is talking to him. And he said to me "I need a bit of help on this scene." I never thought I was all that good in giving actors help. I said "Why Rex?" He said "It's outside my usual range you know." I said "That's alright, if that's what you think you'll be alright, because I perfectly sure it's well within your usual range, you're merely mistaking your range." And in fact he did it very well, he didn't have to do much because the audience does a lot of acting if you let them. I always regarded Rex, from the moment we got onto those kind of themes in Rakes Progress, I regarded him definitely as an actor of another dimension, obviously in comedy a leading one but more than that.

RF: He was one of those actors who appeared so effortless and that was the joy of his performance. Did one have to take Lilli along with him or did you write that part in Rake's Progress for her.

SG: What happened is that I tested various other people and Rex didn't even suggest Lilli to me. He was married to her at the

time, but he didn't suggest her. I didn't like any of the tests and I said "What about Lilli?" Frank may have suggested her, I don't know. I mentioned it to Rex. He said "That's a thought. Of course, it's very nearly her story in some ways. I don't know quite how she'll take it but I'll give it to her to read." And he did and she took it. But I can say honestly I think it is one of her best performances and she did have a tremendous lot of help from Rex and from me. We sat by the side of her, otherwise, Lilli's trouble was always this automatic teutonism, calculation, always. We had to break it down to stop being so glib, and you really had to break it down into sentences, half sentences, to break up the feeling that she knew what she was going to say next. And I remember I kept saying you've got to realise that you don't know what the next lines is going to be. It's not something you've learned, it's something you're feeling, so you just don't know what you're going to say next or how it's going to come out. Rex was frightfully helpful with her.

RF: Was she then as difficult to work with.

SG: Yes, but then Rex was the one who rescued her, she got him over one weekend in Cornwall, saying I couldn't go back to town, because she had to do a difficult emotional scene and I was leaving the cameraman to do it. Rex was doing another picture simultaneously and he came down to Cornwall and I had to join them for dinner and we discussed this disagreeable thing. And I began to simmer during the night because Lilli had not conveyed scenes between us, in relation to her release for this and that, accurately at all. So I thought I am not going to let this rest. And Rex wasn't in the shooting at the time but he came onto the beach where we were shooting Lilli. I said "Can I have a quiet word with you on the side, behind Lilli's back?" He said "Yes, of course, old boy." I said "Look, I don't know quite how to say this but Lilli's version is not accurate, it's not accurate, it doesn't represent the facts." Well, what are the facts then?" I told him exactly and in some detail right through with a fairly lengthy recall of dialogue. He said "Yes I see that. I don't think you'll have any more trouble. I think it will be alright. I'm sure it will be alright." He said "I would like you to do something, just stay for that one scene and then it doesn't matter." He said "I think that will satisfy Lilli and I fully accept what you've told me." And I had very little trouble with her afterwards, some but very little. But nearly always over the old teutonic business, give them an inch and they'll take a yard.

RF: And her stage training. I think we're now coming to Korda.

SG: Korda came as a result of the disintegration of Independent Producers and very conveniently Alex was there in the wings after having a good deal to do with setting up of things like the Eady Levy and he proceeded to pick up the fruit which was dropping from Uncle Arthur's table, the first being Carol, then Micky and Emeric and then Frank and myself and finally David Lean, just David. But David's star had sunk so relatively low on the basis of two pictures that didn't come off that Korda told me that I could make my own terms. And David wanted to bring Stanley Haynes in with him and Korda said "No, I won't pay for him. You can pay for him willingly but it must have been out of your pocket. And I couldn't have done that if it hadn't been for Arthur Rank you know." And so we joined Alex on the basis of

doing half a dozen pictures, three each, I think it was, over a certain period, I think a period was mentioned, I presume it must have been mentioned. And the idea again was independence, again we were independent producers, and again I think we had to have some sort of budget stop figure but the disputes we had with Korda were all the other way round, because we weren't spending enough in terms of international pictures, in his view, in some cases.

RF: Would he finance your development costs or was that something you did yourselves?

SG: No, he did the lot, I forget how it worked out but he would have funded that. But then our development costs tended to be ourselves up to a certain point. The offices, I think, were thrown in, I think we found rather to our amazement that we didn't pay any rent there.

RF: Did you have offices at the studio or in town.

SG: No not the studio, that would be different.

RF: No, I didn't mean shooting but you had offices at the studio I should imagine.

SG: They were always pinched if you did because there was always a demand for them by the current production. With Independent Producers, we had a set of offices in two which we used twice, we preferred to use our own home. With Korda, he gave us offices in a building, at Piccadilly, it was a very different sort of relationship. First of all Korda was a filmmaker, so if you had an idea and wanted to bat it around you could always bat it around with Alex, you were on equal terms with a filmmaker which made a big difference.

RF: Did you take properties with you from Rank, or did you leave original scripts behind.

SG: We had no original scripts which hadn't been made so that didn't arise. Properties, we might have taken one or two small ones, we never made them if we did, I can't remember any.

RF: Did you have a long list of things that you wanted to made.

SG: Mostly ideas, but you have to remember that we made such an extraordinary proportion of original work and some of the work that didn't appear original was, Night Train to Munich was a collaboration on a story from Gordon Wellesley and he got nominated for the Oscar for that story. In fact we used up the whole story in the first 10 minutes, and wrote our own for the next hour and a half. We never got any credit for that. You always tend to get these little bits of left over, but we didn't have much wastage really, you either proceed with an idea or you don't.

RF: The origin's of Rake's Progress, the idea that lead to that.

SG: That was entirely Val Valentine, he brought us the story, he thought of it on the bus.

RF: You said that Korda was a filmmaker and he had a marvellous gift of getting hold of diverse monies from various people,

SG: I think people have always underestimated the time and effort that cost him, I don't mean money necessarily for himself, but for the industry, for the filmmaker.

RF: He certainly lived well.

SG: He would not have denied it. He would have said "My dear Roy, people have said this to me before. People think it is so easy to get rid of a high standard of living, it is bloody difficult."

RF: It is difficult to know what to ask about Korda, he is such a legend. There is a theory Korda was a British agent during the war.

SG: I know one man who has researched this, who came down here to see me, though not particularly about that, and he said that he had no doubt that he was an agent and that it dated way back before the USA connection and probably began with either the Spanish Civil War or the rise of Hitler, which were to some extent overlapping and there were connections with the assassination of Heydrich and the attempted assassination of Hitler. And he would say unhesitatingly yes, and much more so than most people think.

The object of his book was the contribution of the Emigre to British Films, and he came to see me because I knew a lot of the refugees from Germany in the 30s, his name was Kevin Gough-Yates.

SG: They've all died and the people who would have been left over like our old employees at Shepperton wouldn't have been in that league. I didn't know that fact myself.

RF: Alex didn't tell you stories.

SG: No, not a hint, well not me but I wasn't an intimate of Alex.

RF: What was the perception about his knighthood, was it a favour which Churchill gave.

SG: I'll tel you what Kevin Gough-Yates thinks, he thinks that it was a reward for intelligence services.

The great thing was begin able to talk to Alex as a filmmaker and one of the great troubles was getting on the wrong side of him as a filmmaker, and we did both. But he had a lovely sense of humour. He didn't want Frank to make a film and he used to get lonely at lunch time, he was on a diet and he used to get lonely, so he would phone round to see who was left in the offices, then you knew you were stuck with him without lunch, because he wasn't, he was a very generous man but he wasn't going to give you a lunch if he wasn't eating one. And he called me down one day and I went down, and walking up and down "Frank is an ass." I said "I disagree." "He is an ass to want to make this film." I said "I don't think so." "I tell you he is an ass. I tell you Sidney, I would not make this film, not if you were to give me £100,000." I said "You would, you know, Alex." "I would, only

if it were tax free."

The other thing with Tolly de Grunwald, he had a violent argument with Alex about a contract, pointing out what was in the contract, what Alex had said, "My dear Tolly, I only want to point out to you that you are mistaking me for an honest man."

RF: You say you weren't close to him, but he must have been a charming man to be around.

SG: Alex could mix with anybody. He was at home with a Maharaja and at home with the chap on the door and both the Maharaja and the chap on the door sensed he was completely at home with them. He had this extraordinary gift and with it went the legend that Alex was an extraordinarily well read man, very erudite, which he wasn't at all. He wasn't ill read and he wasn't ignorant but he wasn't quite the suave, charming sort of figure that you sometimes get in the stories. The stories you hear are nearly always the same.

RF: What do you think he based himself on was it the Mittel European intellectual or the international charmer or the English gentleman.

SG: Artistic background, his brother was in the painting circles in Paris at a very productive time, a very good painter and not allowed to paint for bloody years, it used to be his complaint.

RF: By his brother, Alex wouldn't let him.

SG: Yes.

RF: The family origins are quite modest. I think an estate manager.

SG: Vincent went back there with his second wife some years back and told me all about it, because I kept in touch with Vincent, how he'd gone back and the first thing he couldn't find any reference to the name of the farm or the area, he couldn't see anything. And then he suddenly saw the name, the name was up outside the railway station. It hadn't been a railway station when he left there. Then he found all the workers were brought in in the morning and went home in the evening. He found it very difficult to grasp that fact. An economist came in to advise them, from the town, it's funny now. You know the story of Alex when he got his naturalisation certificate and Vincent was trying to talk to him and he was busy directing a scene and finally he turned round and said "Oh bugger off, you bloody alien" to Vincent who hadn't been naturalised at that time.

RF: Is it true at that time there was a sign at Denham which said to be Hungarian is not enough.

SG: That is the story, it's been told about Shepperton too. It certainly wasn't true about Shepperton, because the story was out before Alex was there. I don't know, it quite the sort of remark he would have made. He could manage in almost any kind of world, Alex.

RF: Was the Rank Organisation a good thing for the British

industry.

SG: No. How could it be, what has it left behind.

RF: The two part question then is did John Davis stitch it up or was it doomed to failure.

SG: Much as I would even like to extract John Davis from one prong of a red hot fork, let along the lot, I think that if you're going to list a whole programme of films you're going to make at a certain time in a certain place with certain artists, then you are already heading for perdition and therefore you can't in that context separate Rank either from the studios or his cinemas. He regarded the thing as a supply stream into which the British contribution had to be created and inserted, but it was always going to be part of that supply stream. He never saw it outside the structure of distribution, quota and exhibition. Korda didn't have these worries, he did have a distributor with British Lion but he didn't have theatres.

RF: In the 30s he became a partner in United Artists and he was a prime supplier of United Artists. The films didn't do very well in the United States but he was giving them product when they needed it.

The second part of the question was was Korda a good thing. He is remembered as much for his financial prodigality as the films that he made.

SG: He is and we got into trouble with the Rank Organisation after we left for saying it was impossible to make a film there for under £200,000; of course, I didn't include Independent Frame in that. And they were very indignant. To our amazement the first thing we found was that our pictures with Korda were costing less than our pictures with Rank did, if you took comparable terms and compared those terms which could be truly compared, there is no doubt that they cost more with Rank and were going to cost more all the time because of the degree of centralisation.

RF: Where was the differential, much higher overheads presumably with the Rank Organisation and Pinewood was a more expensive studio.

SG: I think centralise, you find it costs more and more and the more you centralise things into one middle, the more you find you don't need it all for one thing at a time, in other words you're bearing someone else's burdon. With Korda, he only had Shepperton and London Films and I don't know how he paid himself or what he got. But we tried to trip him up once over, I think it was Gilbert and Sullivan over some matte shots that we got, that he insisted we took from Ideal Husband and when we came to look at the charge, it was not excessive and we never had any complaints, we expected to, we never did. He hated having these, of course, we had terrible rows on Gilbert and Sullivan and he was highly unreasonable through a good deal of that. He was very capable of telling you exactly what you could do with yourself.

RF: Was he the Rupert D'Oyly Carte to your's and Frank's Gilbert. It sounds like a similar situation.

You say you had problems with him over that film but you had quite a lot of problems over that film anyway.

SG: I had an operation which lead to the thing being postponed and I wasn't really fit when I started it. Then Alex was away and came back, so any things. The real trouble was that the film was under-budgeted unless it could be made in one way and that way proved impractical.

RF: Are you a Savoyard, you've spoken of the opera librettos that you've written and you obviously like opera, were Gilbert and Sullivan especially

SG: No, I was brought up on opera, that's all. I wasn't a Gilbert and Sullivan fan. Only in certain things, when you're youngsters together in a rugby club, everybody think you're singing bawdy rugby songs but you're just as likely to be singing a patter song in those days from a Gilbert and Sullivan thing. But otherwise, I take it a fan means that you're prepared to pay your money at the box office.

RF: What drew you to it as a film, a strong story?

SG: I didn't choose it. There is widespread confusion. It was this fellow Michael Korda who started this. It was not my idea at all or my property or Frank's. Everyone seems to have forgotten who Alex's landlords were, he had a penthouse at Claridges at the relevant time and the D'Oyly Carte were thepeople. Far from me being the impresario bringing it to Korda, it was vice versa. He brought it to us.

RF: He was doing a favour for the D'Oyly Cartes.

SG: Well, it's worse than that. I did not know the extent of Alex's ignornace or knowledge, we had never discussed Gilbert and Sullivan, and I was going off to America, 1950 and Alex said boys, I have or I can get, words to that effect, a subject, it is the story of Gilbert and Sullivan, and he said "Those wonderful pattern songs." We gradually realised he wasn't saying patter he was saying pattern, he thought the word was spelled like dressmaking pattern. I realised afterwards, not at the time, that somebody had played him a record of something like from Iolanthe, "You dream as you're crossing the Channel and tossing, you're tossing about in a steamer from Harwich, which is something...while one the journey, you meet your attorney" and all that stuff and Alex was fascinated by it. I discovered afterwards it is all he bloody well did know about it. And so he said "What I said "I don't think the lines are very tidy. He said "My dear boy, there is a book out. Read it." He'd bought the book, I think, already; if he didn't he bought it as soon as I left. Because when I came back he got this book, The Gilbert and Sullivan book by Leslie Baily and he'd done six programmes for the BBC and Alex had already signed him up. When I came back I said "I don't see how this can gell." "Well have a go, my dear boy .I've got Baily anyway." I decided I couldn't do it, so for the second time I backed out of it. And then I thought I had the answer suddenly, I didn't want to waste the work I'd done, I thought I had the answer, it never worked out, my way of splitting it up and presenting it which was novel and original but turned out to be alas impractical and that was that.

But Alex had to persuade me and not the other way round.

RF: The mythology is that it is the other way round. He always covered his back presumably.

SG: That's quite untrue.
SIDE 14, TAPE 7

RF: We're really trying to get a purchase on Korda.

SG: As someone to work with, he was surprisingly easy when he wasn't being surprisingly difficult. Most of the time, you wouldn't have problems. On our first two pictures, we never saw Korda. And the only discussion I had with him through the whole of our first two pictures, once we told him what we were going to do, either to do with casting where he could be helpful from time to time or small points which arose on the production. But by and large you just didn't see him. So any friction would be rare and was rare in our case, the only real upheaval was on Gilbert and Sullivan. We had no major disputes with him. All the other subjects, we brought to him.

RF: Was he a working director at that time.

SG: It varied, he was not shooting at all but while we were there he did some pictures. We started shooting in 49 and Alex did one or two pictures at that time. He did one or two small pictures, oh what was it called, the one with George Cole as a guardsman, Who Goes There. I think he gave the credit to somebody else but I think he directed it, but I'm not sure. And then he did the one he always called Seven at Home which is R C Sherriff's Home at Seven, a very bad play which Alex made a very bad picture out of; but he skilfully gave the directing credit to Ralph Richardson or somebody else. I'm not sure. But generally he'd more or less given up direction during that time.

RF: Was it trying to get his hands on more money which mostly occupied him

SG: Alex was always trying to get his hands on more money but money wasn't the prime, he was supposed to make films economically, and we had the Eady Levy which was a good deal of his handiwork, and he used the money up. I don't think all that extravagantly, no, if I was revising his programmes in the light of history I'd knock out one or two of the small jobs like Who Goes There and Home at Seven because I don't think they achieved anything one way or the other.

RF: Was he politically adaptable, because he was very close to Churchill and the Tory Party

SG: Also, one of his good friends was the communist leader of the ETU Walter Stephens, he died relatively young and they were great friends. Certainly he had a high regard for Walter Stephens.

RF: Was the young Harold Wilson, as President of the Board of Trade, around the studio

SG: I never saw him in the studio. Doubtless he did come there.

But he did invite him to dinner once, I remember that, and he had a few dinners but nothing like the scale of the Rank dinners which were incessant.

RF: And better quality of conversation at the dinner table.

SG: Yes on the whole. But he was a very easy man in ordinary circumstances and he knew exactly how to entertain people and how to steer the conversation to keep the ladies happy and that kind of thing. He was a very good host, in other words.

RF: If you had to plump for one side of Korda, was he a filmmaker, or an entrepreneur or someone financing an extravagant lifestyle.

SG: He was all three. He was a filmmaker, he was an entrepreneur interested in getting money and he supported an extravagant lifestyle. They told him he must get rid of various aspects of it like the penthouse at Claridges and one of his Rolls Royces; but he said to me once "It is not so easy when you have two Rolls Royces to get rid of one, you think it is easy but it is not. There is always something in the way."

RF: Was there a morning Rolls Royce and an afternoon Rolls Royce.

SG: I have no idea, to tell you the truth I never saw Alex in a Rolls Royce although I know that he had two. He was quite an easy man. They loved him at the studio.

RF: I think one of his biographers say that when he died the only significant asset of the estate was the lease on the house on Kensington Park Green which is presumably where he entertained.

SG: He had to give the penthouse at the Dorchester because the government through one channel or another insisted on it. So he moved to the squalor of millionaire's row. It was a nice house there.

RF: I think the lease was valuable. You went armed with some ideas. Did you start afresh there, at Shepperton?

SG: We started off with an original story of our own which I had been trying to do for many years, I dotted it down just before the war. I found it very difficult to do at all during the war for story reasons and after a decent interval we were able to reconstitute it, State Secret, which I think is an underrated film. It got very good notices, people seem to have forgotten it. I think it has more in it than meets the eye.

RF: What then happened, was it out of tune with the times.

SG: It was a very successful picture. I think it suffered from The Third Man having come out just before, within a few months relatively. I think it suffered from Douglas Fairbanks Jnr, you need a very warm personality and we got rather a cold one. But the picture otherwise came off, the thing was highly profitable, got good notices, I just thought it might be better remembered.

RF: Shepperton always struck me as being a comfortable old shoe place to work in.

SG: Shepperton was a hotchpotch in one sense, but studios are very often measurable, the atmosphere is measurable by the atmosphere at the gate and it was always friendly at Shepperton, during the time I was there, I think one reason was Alex's influence, memory in later years, we always had a pleasant gate. Elstree always had a horrible one, and so on, up down the line.

RF: What about the Pinewood gate.

SG: The Pinewood gate wasn't too bad to begin with but as soon as the influence of John Davis permeated the gate took on the John Davis characteristics.

The commissionaires somehow take on the image of the management, the key note of the management.

RF: Pinewood had become very GI, how about Shepperton, were the unions very strong and tiresome.

SG: I think it applied to all studio at certain times. I wasn't there during the worse time at Shepperton, unless you say the strike over I'm Alright Jack must have been the worst time, I don't know whether it was or not. I think it was the first time a strike had ever taken place against a picture as such, against an actual picture, and a very stupid one for that reason. But I don't think our troubles were any worse than anywhere else. A lot depended on where Charlie Wheeler was at the moment.

RF: He had his clones, they were all over.

SG: Nearly always in the sound department. It's very difficult if you are on a remote location and you've got a shop steward from the sound department whose out for blood. And you can't refer back to headquarters. We had that on State Secret, very difficult. We found the chap was almost completely out of order on nearly everything he complained about but by then wed lost the battle, it wasn't happy picture from the union point of view. Neither was the last one.

RF: What were the points of issue.

SG: On State Secret, it was mostly day to day operations on overtime, overtime and locations in a foreign country. I couldn't tell you what they were they were now they were so trivial. But if you've got someone looking out for the book, you have a lot of trouble.

RF: You were not a hard task master.

SG: I don't think they liked me much, apart from that, I was mostly polite, not always. I don't think they had any particular love for me. It's difficult if you're the head of a studio because I'm sure they naturally feel every now again they must take the piss out of you somewhere.

RF: But at this stage, you are a functioning film director,

you're not the head of the studio. But even so there was still a definite them and us thing

SG: It just happens from time to time and you get this absurdity of being asked to strike against yourself. I'm Alright Jack cleared up a lot of these things, the case which resulted from it, although they lost the case, the unions acted on Gardiner's advice and there was never the same trouble afterwards. But I didn't have a happy run on the last picture. I just decided they didn't like me. I don't suffer particularly from Dicky Attenborough's besetting weakness, I don't think I did very much to put it right. But again I think that was because by that time, on the second picture, I was head of the studio though not head of the studio where I was working, so maybe I caught it twice over.

RF: Which was the worst unions for causing trouble.

SG: It's difficult to say because inevitably some of it was covered up by the thing called the works committee. The works committee goes into committee and you don't necessarily know which one is objecting or being co-operative equally. You find the system, I don't know if you have it now, was quite iniquitous, if you want evening overtime you have to ask for it so many hours before, or you used to have so. They then ask the individual members of the unit if they want to work. So you can get one person who can disrupt everybody else and that happened particularly on the last picture I did and I know who did it. And ironically enough, not an ACTT member I hasten to say, who we didn't want in the first place and we got to oblige an actress and then turned not to be properly qualified and took a day off whenever the gentleman felt like it. That fellow was the one who also objected to working in the evening. We didn't ask for a great deal of overtime but the atmosphere I felt was very wrong.

RF: The ACT and ETU were decidedly left wing then.

SG: They all were at one time, but you can't can't a studio, much as I felt like damning Elstree I couldn't really damn it because you hired this chap was a hairdresser, and you hired him from wherever you hired them in the ordinary way. You didn't hire him as an employee of the studio as such, he would be an employee of the production. So you can't turn round and say Oh this is the bloody mindedness of the studio." On the other hand when suddenly find yourself being threatened with a great pulling of the breakers, on an occasion when your last shot of the picture outside of the studio, then you look for the gentle little hand of Charlie Wheeler.

RF: For the sake of posterity let's hear your views on Charlie Wheeler.

SG: I joined the union, ACTT, without any trouble, I didn't have any problems with joining except one remark which was that they thought I should join because I didn't like people coming in from outside the business to direct. I'd been in the business a good 16 years, 20 years. Apart from that there wasn't any problem. And then Charlie made a speech on the floor, I totally forget what grievance, you know the air was full of grievances in 1944, 45, full of grievances. And Charlie made an heroic speech because if anybody was save in that studio it was Charlie

Wheeler, if anybody was safe in that studio it was Charlie Wheeler, if someone had fired him there would have been a strike the next day, the same evening. And Charlie made a heroic speech about he would defy the forces of forces J Arthur Rank to the last drop of his blood and made several very bad plays on the word Rank I remember. And that was followed shortly afterwards by a conveyning of all the unions, a general union meeting, which I also attended and that was addressed by Frank Kelly, what the dispute was I've totally forgotten. That impressed me enormously because I'd never stood in any institution or observed one which could pass two contrary votes and remain perfectly happy with either. I didn't know that it was standard union practice at the time, after all it kept the boys quiet, each side was happy when they cancelled the other out. So that was my first experience, one with Charlie Wheeler as a hero and the second was Frank Kelly solemnly aiding the passing of two contrary motions, so I didn't think much of the union as she spoke at that time

RF: It was that cynical

SG: My attitude was. I don't know about the others. It wasn't when I went in.

RF: It was cynical from Frank Kelly's point of view, when he turned gamekeeper years later and joined Shepperton I had many talks with him about the old days and it was a standard union practice, it has since been described rather more fully elsewhere.

He suddenly realised how threadbare many of union pretentions were at the time. I was rather disillusioned by it. When you saw that floor voting, voting by moving to left or right, and you watched three quarters of the workforce waiting to see of the majority, how can you have any respect. Then the other thing which was ACTT, the Boultings and I and probably Frank too were on a subcommittee of ACTT, what it was sorting out I don't know, it would have been about 1948, as members, we were co-opted into this probably through the Boultings. And I know we took exception to this, I couldn't tell you what it was. Someone said put your thoughts down on paper. So I wrote it in the form of a letter to the general council or would it be the committee, I wrote this and my letter was then condemned at the next meeting as undemocratic. So I asked why it was undemocratic; they said it was because you shouldn't have written it in the form of the letter. I said "So you mean if I express it verbally, so there is no record of it it's democratic; but if I write it down so you have to take some notice of it it's undemocratic?" They said "Yes." That was my third disillusionment experience with the union.

RF: I always wonder the extent to which they were serious about union business and to what extent was it adopted clothing.

SG: The argument would be that it made each side happy and nothing would happen obviously since there were two contradictory motions they automatically cancelled each other out. So the net result of Motion A plus Motion B was nil.

RF: There wasn't a much of a pot to share in films, there was

subsequently in television when I think there was a very cosy cartel between the union on the one hand and the programme companies on the other, sharing out the proceeds. How did studio management feel in those days about accommodating the workers, was there a benevolent attitude or were the workers perceived as a bloody nuisance demanding too much.

SG: I think probably both. At that time I was, I suppose, partly management about the time the ACTT was formed but I had nothing to do with the setting of wage levels at all, so I didn't come into contact with it. What I did feel strongly, I told Ted Black, was that it was quite wrong that a) crews should be asked to work the hours they were. My brother, for example, one of the industrious people I know, left the film industry because he couldn't stand up to it physically. He came back after the war. He was there about the time the ACTT started and he did 14 consecutive weekends without any days off at all. And he said "The others may be able to stand up to it physically but I can't." He left to join the RAF and then found his eyesight wasn't good enough and then the war came and that was the end of that.

RF: Were you instrumental in introducing him into the industry.

SG: Not really, yes and no. I didn't want him to come into the industry. He did. The family atmosphere became so tense that I had to introduce him to Ted Black, so he got a job as a clapper boy. He was a clapper boy on Lady Vanishes.

RF: Gainsborough I am told was not the worst studio in terms of hours worked.

SG: Ted Black was a very hard taskmaster. We had a good deal of swords crossing over. This is one reason why Maurice Ostrer, Bill Ostrer as he was commonly called, was more popular with a lot of people, he'd say what are you doing here, 7 o'clock, you ought to be home. That went down very well with some people. I think they respected Ted Black more because he was always there on the job, which Ostrer wasn't. Someone like Ted would be naturally hostile, by nature hostile to unions,

RF: I get the impression that Gainsborough was a very industrious studio. They might have been working

SG: They might have realised the benefits of continuous operations and I think they realised that a lot of the semi prosperity there was due to continuous production and tight budgets and no one was overpaid.

RF: There were studios where people were frivolously exploited if Nobody Ordered Wolves is to be believed, Denham was a Disney world theme park.

SG: Certainly a place like Julius Hagen, was supposed to be, as I only worked there as a tenant, an assistant director at a tenant company, I knew nothing but the talk was at the time that it was a slave driving institution.

RF: Do you have any memories of those places where the director wouldn't arrive until after lunch.

SG: That was Elstree when I first arrived there, that frequently happened. They disappeared, came back about 7 o'clock and say "Right we're shooting." They'd be out on their feet by then. They were certainly doing that in 1928, I never came across that myself afterwards, personally I mean. But it was common talk. I think the worse phase was, oddly enough, silent film, that is when the director was still god. So if he said well boys I can't do this now, you can imagine Alex saying it, I have a headache, a pretty girl to take to lunch, I'll be along in about...they would have accepted it. I never worked in an institution that actually did that apart from the first 10 months.

RF: Alex used to keep people hanging about. But that was presumably because his work load was such that he was off doing something else, but at least he was doing something positive.

SG: I have no experience of Alex on the floor. I was on the floor and Alex was arguing with me, it was the other way round.

RF: The films at Shepperton, are documented well enough in the Geoff Brown book, going down them, State Secret, The Happiest Days of Your Life

SG: They were literally side by side. We were at different studios and we used to send each other rushes over. Mine go over to Riverside and Frank's would come over to Isleworth.

RF: 1953, we come to the Story of Gilbert and Sullivan.

SG: 1952 actually. But Frank not only makes me look like a fan but the instigator of the film.

RF: And Michael Korda then has added to the legend. Shall we set the record straight.

SG: I didn't originate it neither did Frank. I know what confused Frank, his memory isn't that good anyway, he remembered our discussions because I was much more familiar than Alex was, when Alex raised the matter with us, he found out rather to his surprise I knew a lot about it. It was only because of my mother. And she used to sing leads in Gilbert and Sullivan amateur things so I know those operas that she appeared in very well. Some of the others, I don't know at all. And I tended to concentrate on those I knew well, probably mistakenly. That is where my connection begins and ends.

RF: And Alex came with you to one of the patter songs.

SG: When we started with Alex we went on the loose understanding that we would discuss the subjects with him but we were otherwise independent subject to certain budget things. And the first one was a story of mine that Frank and I proceeded to write in full called State Secret which also had the great merit that the title was the same in every language.

We did that first and that was pretty successful really. And then Frank did almost simultaneously The Happiest Days of Your Life which was a fairly low budget picture and in fact neither Korda nor Jarratt, who was the head of distribution at British

Lion, wanted us to do it. They were perfectly happy to make the film but they felt that we were supposed to do rather more major films for our contractual pictures. However, I talked Jarratt into making Happiest Days in our contract because I could see no point in spinning it out by inserting other pictures and I was able to convince him of the financial soundness of it which turned out fine. So our first two pictures were jointly very successful. Then came Gilbert and Sullivan and that arose just as I was about to leave for the States to recut State Secret for Columbia over there. At our last interview with Alex he said that he had had brought to his attention, in fact he had acquired or could acquire any time he like the rights to Gilbert and Sullivan, meaning presumably all the operas, any material going, some was out of copyright and some wasn't because Gilbert's copyright was still in force at that time, he died in 1911 and it was made in 1952. Frank was with me when this suggestion was made and although it's often been said we instituted it, it's totally untrue. Frank and I never had any idea of going to Alex with a story about Gilbert and Sullivan, we never thought of doing the story period. However, Alex indicated that he could get the rights and he seemed to have a good acquaintance with Gilbert and Sullivan work and he was particularly taken with the patter songs which he called the pattern songs. And we gave a somewhat middle of the road response. I was interested because I used to play the accompaniments for my mother who played the leads in quite a number Gilbert and Sullivan local opera companies, I knew a few operas extremely well. I was not a Gilbert and Sullivan fan. I had never paid a penny to go into a show for Gilbert and Sullivan, and for that matter I didn't get free tickets either. But I was probably taken by my mother or father to see things that she was going to appear in. Anyway, I was sufficiently interested to say I would read it and that was all. When I came back from America Alex had bought it, he may even have bought it before, I don't know, but he certainly had it when I came back and seemed to assume that we would do it. I said well I had read some of the material since and had two fears, one that the lives would not shape themselves into any sort of celluloid shape and the other was that it would fall between two stools: the highbrows would think it low brow and vice versa. However, it turned out that he had also acquired the services of Leslie Baily who had written a book about Gilbert and Sullivan and had done a series of 6 for the BBC and he thought it would help if I worked with him to see if I could be persuaded. I did this.

For a time I thought it was okay and then I decided it wouldn't work. We could never budget it, there were too many numbers to shoot. And most of all, we still hadn't found the right shape. So I went to see Alex and he agreed to release me from it, which wasn't releasing me from anything much because I hadn't been paid anything for it up to that stage. And he with great reluctance said he would have to look somewhere else. And it so happened by some ill turn of fate that I had an idea of perhaps moving a bit away from Gilbert and Sullivan and relating each episode of their lives to be dealt with something quite illustrative of the period, something like if you had an opera in the 90s then you would introduce it say not with Gilbert and Sullivan at all but with some sort picnic on bicycles and Daisy, Daisy give me your Answer do, which would give the colour, flavour and everything else of the day. And that was the understanding on which I resumed work.

That didn't really ever work out.

And in the middle of scripting, because by then it had then reached the stage of scripting, I was taken ill and had peritonitis. By which time, when I came out of the peritonitis, they were already doing a music recording, so I was more or less stuck. And from then on, it was a battle against trying to do the thing on the only budget Alex could allow which was too low. Apart from the first costs being absurdly high, they were absurdly low and it could only be done by my having a co director to do the numbers and cutting the art director's side extremely tight. What happened is that the design end of the picture completely came to pieces. And I had say "Look I can't continue to make this picture unless I have at least a little more latitude on the set."

This meant I had to call in Alex which was like letting the genie out of the bottle, you simply could not cork him back in again, we never did. And, of course, from having too little money we then had a lot more because he got some American money. They had different ideas. And to cut a long story short, the ideas I had for giving a shape of atmosphere and colour to different sections, even treating the colour differently, did not work out. The designer threatened to commit suicide. Vincent Korda was brought in instead and I was told I must finish all the directing. So they released the co director and I had to finish the whole thing off not in the best of physical conditions by then. And then of course we had to reshoot again for the American. So I think in the end the picture didn't represent Frank or myself, or the American money, and Lopart, although I think oddly enough today it looks a better picture than it ever did at the time.

RF: Despite all those aspects, was it a runaway production, or were there a great deal of retakes, or discussions on the script so you had to go back.

SG: There was a certain amount of disgarding rather than retakes. And because of the number of cooks engaged in, if not cooking the broth, stirring it up properly, you had a situation where people would come in with suggestions as to what numbers you could shoot and that kind of thing. And I think I controlled that fairly rigorously but, nevertheless, it did mean that some numbers were shot which were never used. And great slices were cut out. It wasn't a runaway production in the sense that the cost was ever out of control, no it wasn't, because we got extra money and the budget was adjusted accordingly.

RF: How did the genie work his magic, was he in the projection room watching rushes was was he on the floor.

SG: No he didn't watch rushes, by and large, after a time. What he watched was what we shot to date and some of it he judged, you should bear in mind this was a 3 strip picture, Technicolor old style, you used to see the black and white in the form of a blue record, which looked like bad black and white, very dingy. So all the stuff Alex hadn't seen in colour pilots, because we only had pilots in those days, there were no colour sequences cut together and the colour pilots were only snipped in here and there. And there were no colour pilots for some of the work at

all. Therefore, Alex judged them on this dingy record and would not listen to me when "I said wait until you see this in colour." When he did see it in colour, he rang up and said "I don't change my mind, I know what you mean but I don't change my mind, it's still better to shoot." which it wasn't in fact.

SIDE 15, TAPE 8

RF: Korda more than any one in this country had a long experience of 3 strip Technicolor, he had been using it at Denham in whenever it was.

SG: It didn't matter because actually I said I wouldn't go into it but the things that he never saw in colour or had never seen in colour were supposed to be the old Royalty Theatre in Dean St which is tiny. And that is where Trial by Jury was put on. So it was their first work together. And naturally as the big scenes later in the Savoy Theatre, we wanted the contract with the very small theatre. So Alex saw this tiny theatre with no colour, dingy blue record, the blue wasn't blue, it was foggy black and white. And so he never could judge what the sets were like at all.

RF: He didn't like little things anyway. I get the impression that to him sets needed to be

SG: I said at least see it and he agreed to see it, he rang up and said "I still think I'm right, reshoot it." The only result was that the first theatre didn't present so much of a contrast as it should have done when it was retaken. You got no advantage at all.

RF: You had this fight with him at one stage, you and Frank, misunderstandings and a row over these matte painting

SG: Yes we did to extend the beginning, most of these alterations were extending it, making it bigger, ironically the very stuff we'd had to cut out before because of the cost, now I had to destroy what we'd done and put bigger stuff in it's place. It wasn't my fault in any way. He said that he would let us have shots that we could use, matte shots, if necessary, from Ideal Husband of Hyde Park Corner showing people in the closing days of last century cavorting about in Hyde Park with the Great Exhibition still there behind, Crystal Palace.. So we did the matte shots of those involving the Crystal Palace, and I found it very difficult in doing these extra scenes to work without knowing exactly what shots he proposed to us. He'd gone away on a cruise on his yacht. And I tried to find out from Vincent, Vincent wouldn't tell me. He said I would sooner beefed at me than Alex beefed at me so there I was in this rather silly position. So I wrote rather a rude memo to Alex and promptly forgot about it.

Some weeks later, Alex was back by then and he rang me up and said "Frank is a fucking ass." And I said "I don't agree." "I tell you he is a fucking ass." So I said "Why?" "He has written me a terrible letter he shouldn't ever have written, you do not deserve your fucking independence, it is a joke your fucking independence." I said "I'm sorry, what is the letter?" He read it to me and I then recognised it as the one I'd written to him earlier when I was very angry and forgotten all about. I interrupted him said "Look Alex, you're embarrassing me, I now recognise it as my letter, poor Frank is quite innocent." "He signed it" he said. "Yes but he didn't write it, I did." "I

don't care who fucking wrote it, you do not deserve your fucking independence. Go and fuck your self" and hung up. Then Frank rang me a day or two later and said "I've had a terrible letter from Alex." I said "I thought you might." He said "I'm going to reply. What do you think I should say?" I said "I don't think you should say anything. I think we should delve out for the moment. We're going to show him the film next week. I shouldn't have written him the letter I did. I can sort that out but not if you write back." He said "I insist." I said "Please don't leave it two or three days." He agreed very reluctantly and I wrote a letter to Alex. No I rang Alex, I said "Leave it to me" and I rang Alex. I rang Alex and I said in effect "Alex you told me to go and fuck myself, I've tried it and it doesn't work, I so I thought I'd report back to you that your demand would be impossible." Then he laughed and said "Alright, come in at 12.30 and we'll have a talk. So I went in with Frank, and Alex came forward from his office inside with his arms outstretched and said "Boys you have sent me a letter you should never have sent. I have written you a letter I should never have written, let us forget the whole thing and see this bloody picture which we did and he didn't like it much. But that's another story.

RF: But he had been genuinely angry?

SG: He was very angry.

RF: It sounds as you tell it that it may have been a joke between you but it was very serious.

SG: It was serious at the time. Yes, quite serious at the time. It would have been much worse if Frank had written a reply. As it was it gave him an advantage. I should never have done it because it gave Alex an advantage in the discussions which were to follow, but otherwise he was an extremely civilised man. He would never bare malice for that. If I'd said yes, I wrote it and I'd write the same letter tomorrow, I don't think that he would have been pleased but he was not a man who bore malice.

RF: But he was a man of temperament and so presumably could recognise it in others. You showed him, was this a first cut.

SG: I showed him a rough cut, mostly in black and white. What he took was the line now we can settle down to work. But we must have more money. He admitted without ever saying I confess he did admit that I'd been hopelessly underbudgeted. He didn't want to continue our co director basis so he expressed that amount of confidence in me. I didn't offer to retire from it and he didn't threaten to remove me.

RF: So it was that serious.

SG: It might have been. It didn't I wouldn't have accepted in the circumstances any notion, my own let alone anyone else's by which I left the picture the particular faults of which he complained were really mine, I felt that they were caused by circumstance. He knew that I was reluctantly on it.

RF: Who owned the picture. Did he have a contractual right to remove people?

SG: He'd have to prove some sort of misconduct I suppose. In fact it never arose.

RF: When people like him were working for him and Anthony Asquith and Carol Reed, you had an enormous amount of independence.

SG: Yes. Apart from that reference, "your fucking independence" he never referred to it again.

RF: He really seized on the nub of it. He was being wicked when he said it but for him that was the crunch point

SG: But you have to remember in practice these impossible situations seldom persist. Somebody gives way. In this case it never arose.

RF: Well if people are still shooting, the picture has got to be made or it's got to be released, something's got to happen.

SG: I think he reckoned it would cost more for somebody else to come in and try and do it. He knew it was a very tough job.

RF: Did it go back into production.

SG: Yes, what we did, we only put in other number, we only put in new scenes where they had to go in to make sense, we didn't put a new narrative twist on it at all.

RF: How do you regard the film now? How recently have you seen it?

SG: I must confess I rather like it now, it's very light, and very tuneful. I'm still coloured by the fact that I never really was a Gilbert and Sullivan fan and just because I knew it well, he was a very good musician but it's not the evening I would chose for an evening out.

Another thing is that there was never a proper plan on anybody's part, and I don't know how there can be, as to exactly how much of a number you thought that people could stand and it's a pity to me that whole sections were cut out in the way of interior numbers. You take the Night that was shot in full length. That doesn't mean much extra in the way of expense since the only extra expense is electricity and film, the artists are there anyway. But what it does mean really is that you come to the point where everybody is saying need we have it at all, we've cut it down from 80 bars to 10 bars or 20 bars, do we really need the 10 bars. You find yourself getting to the state of mind, where any editor would recognise, where there is a virtue of cutting some more out.

RF: How easy was it making a musical in a British studio. It's a fairly rare item.

SG: My great regret is that's the only musical I made because I would never have chosen that, active life it would never be that one.

RF: At least it wasn't London Town.

SG: I never saw that, I wouldn't know what it was like but I wouldn't like to make that kind of musical. I would like to make a musical more in the spirit of Rene Clair, where the music is part of the film, and if I'd found one, I'd have done it. We tried it with Gilbert and Sullivan, the trouble was that every time you came to a first night performance you either had to find some way of integrating it in or dodging round it or making it part of the story or fantasising it. And I had one sequence which if it had been properly done could have been absolutely delightful, which is pure fantasy at the end of Iolanthe. And it just fell down on little things like flying ballet and the matte shots, in other words the technical advice didn't come up to it. Micky Powell would have shot it better than me because he was a better technician. But you needed someone really to design the whole thing and alas I never had it.

RF: When you said in the car that one of your ideas was to get Oscar and Boosey and Patience involved, is what you saying you wanted to root it much more in it's time and less a musical and more of a dramatic.

SG: I think with the benefit of hindsight I would probably have been able to anchor it a bit more. If you're going to cover a whole range of operas, you're going to be lucky if you can keep continuous characters going with a continuous story. But if you forget that difficulty, I think the whole advantage of it would have been that after all Patience was a satire on Wilde and his group.

RF: And most of the operas did have some kind of satirical reference. I that's a very viable way of getting into it, I would have thought.

SG: I think it would have been better if I'd listened to Baily on that although Baily's advice generally I think would have been disastrous but he did know that background so he had it all there. But his way was to document it in a BBC style. It would never have done. I should have kicked him out nice fellow though he was, if I'd done that and started off again with some sort of centre. But then you see you're going to restrict yourself an awful lot to just Patience if you do that, that's another draw back. But we did try and relate each opera to a musical event and a personal event in their lives. And to some extent it came off, only to come extent.

RF: Did it have a far reaching effect on Korda's fortunes, running his studio financially.

SG: It is difficult to answer that because the thing that happened, you know was essentially that the Treasury stepped in and put a stop to the NFFC continuing to support Korda. I think the NFFC was already somewhat disillusioned but that didn't happen, of course, until 55. No 54, 1954 and Korda, you see we did 3 films after that. I did a Rex Harrison film The Constant Husband, and Frank did two to finish our contract with London films. So we had 3 to go after Gilbert and Sullivan. And we got through those alright.

169

And while I was shooting the Constant Husband, I was visited one morning on the set by a Daily Mail reporter whom I happened to know, I had seen him on locations for the film and he came up to me and said "What are your views about today's events?" And I said "What events?" He said "They've appointed a receiver to British Lion." He said "Are you a civil servant?" I said "I'm not a civil servant until you tell me what my pension rights are and for the right price I'll join." So he said "No, it's serious, they're pointing a receiver and we want to know what your reactions are to being a civil servant?" So I said "That's a lot of nonsense, that's just your newspaper headline. But you may publish as far as I am concerned that at the moment I am engaged rather successfully shooting a pretty girl from a cannon in a circus and all I intend doing is keep shooting out of the cannon until I get it right. And you can tell that to anybody you like." So they printed that I think in the Daily Mail.

Then we found out that this situation was indeed quite serious and we were advised by our lawyers that we would be well advised to consider our situation or have a meeting before I shot any more women out of anything. So we had a meeting up at Piccadilly with Korda and with Jarratt and Jarratt agreed to write a kind of release with the receiver, the receiver was only our auditors anyway, Bill Lawson, to write a sort of discharge so that I would have an indemnity for continuing to shoot The Constant Husband which was the last of the 6, that's right. And we were going to do Geordie, our Olympic Games Highland Fling. And I was going to direct it and I ran into terrible colour problems with Constant Husband which delayed the release. Frank was advised as we hadn't got Geordie in our contract at all or any documents to prove it, we'd be well advised to carry some expenditure as soon as possible. So Frank took over the direction. I was still toiling with The Constant Husband colour problems. So Frank took that over, took Geordie, over which was the first film outside our contract, preceded by the St Trinians. Those two were out of the contract.

RF: Who was financing these pictures.

SG: British Lion, the same way as before.

RF: In receivership, but they had a line of credit somewhere.

SG: Yes, they had a line of credit, What they did. This wasn't anything to do with us so I'm not totally acquainted with it, what happened I think is that formed a new company, revalued all the films, put them in as assets, invested another £600,000 and that gave them a fund to carry on with. And we'd already incurred our own expenditure on some and we made a few of the first ones, I should think The Boultings came in and made some. But they were made by various people, not only by us, and they had the money from whatever the company was, British Lion, they had different names, British Lion Film Holdings, British Lion Picture Corporation. I'd forgotten which was the production company but from our point of view it went on exactly as before, the difference was that Korda had had to resign.

RF: How did Korda take it

150
SG: Badly.

RF: Was he shattered.

SG: I think he was. I was very angry with him because he hadn't told us anything. I felt a Charlie up there shooting this stuff and not knowing if I was breaking the law. I was near the end of it and as soon as I could get up there which would have been a week or two, I went up and saw him, and he said "This morning, Sir John came to see me," that was Sir John Healey who had been chairman of British Lion for a time, either that or the NFFC, maybe the NFFC, anyway he was administering British Lion affairs and he said "Sir John came to see me, do you know about what?" So I said dutifully "No." He said "About my successor. He asked me if I could recommend a successor and I told him Sir John, I do not grow on trees."

And that was the end of the successor. However Jarratt tried to soldier on but he knew nothing about production and he had no one to control production. He appointed Roy Rich who at best was a minor producer, I suppose, minor producer, actor, BBC personality, he appointed him and sent us messages saying "Would we kindly admit him to our stages and our rushes?" So we told him he couldn't come, why should he, and we had a row about that. And the next thing is we start getting a memo would we comment on the fact that we had a crowd of 250 on such and such a set and by 3 o'clock in the afternoon only 40 of them were being used. So we sent Jarratt a message saying if he thought he knew someone who could make the picture better he was welcome to try after due compensation. We didn't intend to waste our time on this sort of thing. We didn't like that much.

RF: Was this Jarratt in a bad situation or

SG: Jarratt not having the sense to keep his fingers out of a pie which had been cooked very successfully.

RF: it was interference again by people

SG: He didn't get a chance with us or the Boultings, we just turfed Roy Rich out. "It's not your fault old chap but we can't have people interfering with the production.

RF: Before obviously Korda had kept people such as he out of interference.

SG: I presume Korda did Korda sometimes never even saw the script let alone the picture. He was supposed to.

RF: How did it develop. You finished these two pictures

SG: Well in 1956 we did a picture for Columbia, so we weren't at British Lion, but we did, from a play of ours, The Green Man, we produced and Dearden directed it and that was okay, so we did two in that year. We also presented, not produced The Smallest Show on Earth so we got three films on the tally. But I think two of them were for Columbia, at least one was.

At the end of that year 57 an interesting thing occurred in the spring of 1957 but nobody noticed it, in the annual report of the

National Film Finance Corporation a rather cryptic statement appeared towards the end of the summary which really indicated that if anybody made a reasonable offer for British Lion it would not be refused. And to the dismay of NFFC board there no response to this whatsoever, of any kind. The reason was no one had noticed it. And consequently as no one had noticed it the situation behind the scenes was undoubtedly someone behind the scenes saying "For Christ's sake get rid of that company, we don't know how to run it, we and the Boultings, broadly speaking, were the only bright spots on their books. The Woolf Brothers did the odd picture, their's came off alright. But by and large we were the only regular bright spot. So we got a roundabout approach through our agent indicating would Launder and Gilliat like to make an offer for British Lion. We thought that was rather funny. We found it was quite serious. They said "We don't expect you to produce the money but you surely can find it. If you find it, you'll probably need a chairman who will probably have the money but we want to sell the company." which is how we found out about the statement in March.

Then we set together to get the money. First of all we said "You don't need just us, we can't buy the company, you must mean other people too. They said "Generally we expect you to bring in other people with you."

"Have we your permission to tell the others?" "Yes, under the seal of confidence." So we told the Boultings whom I didn't know as well then as I came to know them. Although I realise that with the Boultings there are many virtues, one virtue, or vice perhaps, is the belief that nothing important could have happened unless they were there. And I think they accepted this with great politeness and sincerity and promptly forgot it the next day. Anyway we told them and I think we told somebody else too, the idea being that the 5 or 6 of us would form a nucleus which would enable the thing to go ahead. And we found the money.

And then with the usual lawyers delays and the arguments about statements and when could we officially approach our colleagues and all this. And while that was going on, of course, different people, including the proposed chairman and their accountants on it and the accounts coming in for British Lion were getting worse and worse and in the end our chairman was warned off long before he could be chairman and the whole thing collapsed. It collapsed some time in the early autumn of 56, September, October. It collapsed.

We thought it was the end of that. We couldn't take it any further. Our chairman had gone with all his money and we couldn't go and raise another one like that, it had been hard enough with one. We gave up. Then, of course, they approached us about the turn of the year, a few months later, quite determined to do something and they offered us this job of taking a fixed salary and expenses, which very very modest total, and the idea being that we would provide films but we wouldn't be paid anything for the films. We were supposed to manage the company. But what they really wanted to do was make films undoubtedly. And in lieu of financial compensation, they had offered us a new issue, a special issue of I think they were shilling deferred shares and if we made those valuable, they'd make it valuable for us. So against my advice, I may say, because I was in a health farm with

my wife, and was in no condition to fight these battles; I came out having eaten nothing for a week faced with all these facts and figures and I said it looked a bloody awful deal to me. However, I was in a minority and we did accept. That's now we British Lion and what has never been published is the fact, I think they they did publish rather desperately that they had had it on offer the previous March but what they never published was the approach to us, the fact that it came so near to fruition

RF: What did you end up owning, was it the distribution company and the studio and the library.

SG: We inherited the company in so far as we were deferred shareholders. We didn't own any other shares but we would have had, we had whatever allocation we had, don't ask me what now, I don't know, of the shilling deferred, they became more valuable as the company did. What finally with the company that was finally sold, before that we were bought out by the NFFC who got fed up with us.

RF: Was the NFFC the principal shareholder, was there any kind of public shareholding? Did London films survive that particular deal.

SG: No, the only public holding was not directly with us, it was Shepperton, Shepperton had a public issue and that was part of the past, I don't think we had any shares, we might have been allocated as directors. We received a flat salary which included expenses, it wasn't exactly princely, it was £7,500 a year each and that included all our films.

RF: Let me clarify that, you mean your fees on the films

SG: Not our fees on the films, our fees on everything including management and films was £7,500 each, that was all we got.

RF: Were the Boultings on a similar deal.

SG: We were on exactly the same level, the four of us. David Kingsley may have got a bit extra as managing director.

RF: Did you see this as a new dawn for the British film industry

SG: No, as I told you I was against it.

RF: But they persuaded you.

SG: I thought it was a very bad deal and they said the shares could become valuable and Frank wonderful at producing optimistic figures from nothing, produced figures which seemed to me to be very optimistic. But, of course, we would have had a share in, we managed to better it a bit otherwise I don't think I could have gone in. We didn't have any more fees or anything like that, what we did have was a share of the profits but only cross collatorised. If our films didn't make any profits we didn't get paid anything for the films at all. If the films went into profit which would at best have been cross collatorised, we would take whatever the share was.

RF: Was the entire output cross collatorised

Were you also dependent on what the Boultings were doing...

SG: No. They had a separate deal from ours. We did it in sets of six, some came off and some didn't.

RF: So this is the beginning of your period as a mogul

SG: We must have been the worst paid moguls in the business.

RF: Take us through that. Tell us about that era,

SG: What I said right from the beginning and one of my principle reasons against going was that we would inevitably reduce output, there was no way we could avoid it. I couldn't see any of the four of us doing our job reasonably conscientiously when it came to looking over product and all the business of running a company, and the studio I could not see, it must take at least, at the most dizzy underestimate, nobody could say it would take less than a third of your time, as far as you calculate it. So you're really left with two thirds of you normal time to try and make films which is a considerable reduction needless to say. And I would say it lead to a reduction of just about that amount in our output.

RF: You were expected to keep the studio active as well as making your own films.

SG: Not so much expected, it was part of our inheritance of the studio which at that time was in loss. It was in loss partly because the rooves were unsafe and they had to be rebuilt, and that was already know. So they were at a loss for the first two years I think, and so of course was the company, heavily in loss. And then we got it into profit about the third year, and our treatment by the NFFC was utterly scandalous because I mentioned about the Boultings believing nothing really happened unless they were there, and when we had agreed to this deal we were invited in a casual way to dinner somewhere or other and we didn't know, just to meet some of the NFFC and celebrate joining the company, that sort of phrasing. And I found that John and Roy were not going. John had intended to go but had something else on and Roy had no intention of going and didn't even apologise. I said this to John "You know I have a feeling you should be there, John". He said "Well I will if I can." I knew he never would show up and didn't. Well this was a terrible blow to the NFFC because the whole lot turned out, the senior civil servant turned out Sir Frank Leigh, the admiral who was on the board of NFFC, he showed up, and they came with wives and everything. And the solitary absentees were the two Boultings and their wives, just blanks, no apologies. I apologised for them and hoped that would do. Well it was quite clear to me from the very pointed speach Frank Leigh, when he looked towards you, he couldn't look towards the Boultings because they weren't there, he looked towards Frank and me and said "We think that the natural future owners of British Lion are your good selves." It can't be put much plainer than that. And the next morning I went straight to John and Roy and said "The whole object of the exercise is to get rid of the blood company. It was transparently clear last night and we ought to be prepared for it." "Oh yes, yes, very interesting." Then it goes out of their minds like

that.

If they'd been there they'd have been writing letters or something but because they hadn't been there it had never happened. Of course, I didn't realise this, I didn't know them as well as I came to know them, it was just a kink they had, I always surprised they accepted the result of Waterloo because they weren't been there.

Anyway we hadn't been very long making films there, we'd been there a short time, the results, by the way, got worse and worse and worse and John Woolf, who was supposed to be part of the original outfit, threw it up and left. I never knew if John had left because he didn't like the look of the books or because didn't like working with the Boultings. Or it might have been a third reason, that he left and so we were left with a reduced number of films, a reduced number of people and a wish on the part of the NFFC that we should buy the bloody company when we hadn't got any money.

And within a very short time they were harassing us. John Terry got out a report which we were never allowed to see and he said that the company's prospects were poor and we should be urged to find a buyer and if we couldn't they would. And in the end it was Maudlin who saved, we ran into him, by chance he came to British Lion to see some commercial film, something about British Gas before it was British Gas, that sort of thing, to see this documentary. The Boultings ran into him there, they'd heard that he was coming and they made a point of it and buttonholed him. He said write to me about it and we did and he saw us and a lot of things were put right. By then, I may say, we had got the money together, a year had passed while I've been talking and we got the money together a second time and this time the NFFC agreed it, the auditors agreed it, because they'd recommended the figure, we got everything put together and the Board of Trade turned it down and that's when we went to see Maudlin.

He began by saying when we met him at the Board of Trade "Gentleman I must begin this meeting by saying that I've read through all the papers and it does seem to me that you have a case in thinking that you have been bugged about." Those were his exact words. He gave us a foot deal, I don't know what it meant, I never understood it at the time, but apparently it meant what was a one way option on their part became two ways, we could buy them out of our share or they could buy us out of ours but it destroyed one of their alternatives, quite by accident I may say but it did. As a result we were bought out by them, they had no alternative really because of that change, they found one of their options had gone, so they had to buy us out. And they did it for the most brutal perfunctory way, if they'd set out to insult you, there isn't a better way they could have done it.

RF: It is civil servants who are implementing this.

SG: Well the NFFC are civil servants. They sent the office boy around with our cheques.

RF: Was John Terry the head of the NFFC then.

SG: Yes, John Terry was the one that got out a statement. What

infuriated us that we could have got out a statement of our prospects just as well as the NFFC. But he gets one out which is totally pessimistic which to this day I've never seen. Only one director, the chairman, who was also a director of the NFFC was allowed to see it. So he couldn't answer a detailed document because he didn't even know the heading and on the basis of that we've got to rid of the company quickly, if we can't make an offer somebody else must. And it wasn't a true report and within 18 months, 2 years, we were being told that the offer agreed between all parties is too low.

RF: Who ended up with the ownership at this point, was it all held by the NFFC

SG: The NFFC up to the point I'm talking about before the cheque arrived. We only owned our shares and the NFFC still had their 600 or whatever it was

RF: And now they've bought you out.

SG: They bought us out.

RF: So it's all owned by them

SG: Yes

RF: What did they now do with it, what did they want to do with it, I thought it was an albatross, in effect.

SG: They sold it to Sidney Box so they thought and we created such a stink that Heath, who by then the President of the Board of Trade, Heath formed a completely new class of share and we bought it back, idiots that we were, because we bought it back under much worse conditions, it was not a goer really.

RF: Where did you go for the money, to the City or was it private money

SG: Well we had money from the NFFC for our shares, we put some of that in, we had a stake in TWW, Frank and I, Lord Darley took smallish stake, one of Arnold Goodman's clients took a stake and Humphries Laboratories, they took a stake and we took the rest, that's what it boiled down to.

RF: You mentioned much earlier that Arnold Goodman was your lawyer, he was one of the great eminence gris of this period, was he involved in all these negotiations.

SG: He was very much involved, when we first went to British Lion was when we were asked to join the company. They wanted us to give up all our other interests, if possible sell off any assets we had which might clash with the future operation of the company and to go on in effect PAYE, to go onto PAYE as servants of the company, all of which we did. Now those negotiations, because they involved contracts and things of that kind obviously, they were conducted on our behalf by Arnold Goodman, on the Boultings behalf by Henry Wield who was their lawyer for a long time. This was carried through.

When we came to the second lot of negotiations which were the

ones we were involved in would have been the ones I was telling you about, when we got a chairman who dropped out. They only concerned us then, do you see, because we hadn't joined British Lion at the time, so, I'm getting this wrong.

Arnold Goodman represented us when the wire came to us that NFFC wanted to sell British Lion and our agent approached us. We mentioned it to the Boultings and to somebody else. In fact, the deal fell through because the accounts got worse and worse and the proposed chairman ducked out of it on the advice of his accountant. That went but our negotiator was Arnold. It came to nothing, it also involved buying out Jarratt and all that was agreed. One of my more embarrassing interviews that was and Arnold conducted that. Anyway he came in again when British Lion wanted us to join them, so he acted for us but not for the Boultings. Wield acted for the Boultings. When we came to the third of these negotiations which was the one the Board of Trade had vetoed, Arnold by then acted for both parties and from then on he became the lawyer of British Lion, rather unwillingly I think.

RF: He always sounds much more than a lawyer, a great wheeler dealer, a great Mr Fixit. A dealmaker.

SG: I think he is quite a good a dealmaker but

SIDE 16, TAPE 8

What I was really emphasising in all this is the totally irresponsible behaviour both of the NFFC and the Board of Trade, because they got us into something and quite clearly from the remarks at that dinner wanted to implant in our minds even before the start of work under the new arrangement, they wanted to implant in our minds that we were the natural owners, they wanted to get rid of it. Within a matter of months, and I mean just months, they were harranging us over a sale, in other words could we buy the company or get someone. Then they began to threaten us, yet we were not even given the courtesy of seeing the forecast of our profits and losses, I still haven't seen them to this day. This happens twice again. And eventually, through Maudlin, we got a guarantee that we would not be interfered with for the rest of our contracts. But my contract and Franks were three and a half years and the Boutlings were five. Ours were either two and a half or three and a half, I've forget which, and the Boultings were five. So, Maudlin extracted as a quid pro quo that we would continue, both of us for a total of six years under the old contract and he undertook that we would not be disturbed.

However they still wished a sale, if we could do it, so they gave their blessing for negotiations for us to buy the company, the four of us. And then when that was all agreed after you can imagine, at least a year's negotiation, then the Board of Trade said no, that is when we saw Maudlin and Maudlin said right.

RF: How did you analyse in your minds this rather irritating sequence of events. Did you put it down to the general incompetence of civil servants or was there

SG: I think if ever there was a wrong man in the job, it was Nut Hulme, totally wrong in the job. He was like a bull in a china

shop. He had this business man's impatience with filmmakers and viewed us with dark suspicion. He regarded his brief to get rid of the company, that is why the advertisement, a lot of this is hindsight, that is why the announcement appeared in the annual summary of the NFFC in March 1957, that it was up for sale. But unfortunately, it was managed so incompetently that no one noticed it. Then they approached us with Nut Hulme's blessing, I know because I've talked to him about it. Then that fell through, again because of delays generally, couldn't blame the NFFC for that. When that had fallen through, deadlock, it got nowhere. So their original announcement for sale, our attempt to get somewhere on their big hint, big nudge of the elbow, that failed. So we were then faced with offer to join them as managers and filmmakers and within literally months they were after us over that. And I remember saying to Nut Hulme round a table, we got all very angry, you're asking us to run this company, it's like asking a novice to ride a bucking bronco when he's never on a horse before. And his reply, I remember vividly, was "There are a lot of people in that position in the city today." So we used to go to our chairman, Douglas Collins who was chairman of British Lion in those days and say "Can you get these people off our backs?" well he was one of them. He tried to raise the money for us and so on. Then when it was agreed, it was vetoed on the grounds that you could defend the deal where you'd made the sale and the company was going down just before the upturn, you couldn't defend the deal when they were clearly beyond the upturn.

SG: Was the Treasury also there in the background.

SG: Very much so because they were the people who put the receiver in.

RF: Maybe part of this was conflicts behind the scenes between various departments.

SG: But the whole system of the Board of Trade seems to me dotty. They seem to have a sort of semi permanent staff of x number of people, not very many. Then they have a rotating head who serves a five year term. I mean at one time it was a man called G , Sidney G who was first class, absolutely first class. Then there was Sommerville who wasn't half bad. Then there was Knight who was so so. Then there was Tibbs who was temperamentally entirely hostile to us and got more and more hostile as time went on. So in the end everybody was hostile to us in the most ludicrous way.

In the end, when I was still chairman at Shepperton ,it reached the point where we got the the equivalent to your Mr in the government at that time that he wished to see us, through a friend, they were both old Etonians, the old boys network. I'd rather like to talk to them. I think the friend was a shade suspect in the sense that he might have overplayed it a bit. Anyway we arranged the appointment, he's to come down to Shepperton and have lunch. And I said to Frank "It won't work, you know." "What do you mean?" "He'll come with his civil servants." "Oh, no, no, no. This is a private meeting. You wait." Not only did he come with his civil servants, they came without him; for the first three quarters of an hour and we had nothing to do but offer them cocktails. He was a Catholic and

he'd gone to the mass for Pope John and I thought he arrived a bit tiddly. Anyway he was very friendly and sympathetic towards us.

In the course of the lunch he referred to John Davis in these terms "I think he is a frightful shit." I saw Tibb's eyebrows go right up at that. After that, you won't believe this but I am absolutely sure that it is true, every minister, like Roy Mason, each one got a warning, look out for Shepperton hospitality, the clear implication being that we made ministers pissed. He arrived pissed, when he comes you've got to offer him a drink. And I was asked by Mason "When are we going to start the meeting around the lunch table?" And luckily I was prepared for him because Mick Balcon was there on that occasion and I said "I'm only chairman of Shepperton, Sir Michael as you know is chairman of British Lion." I think it's for him to say. Mick, as you know, never made up his mind about anything said "Shall I? Oh yes, yes, shall I?"

And then there was a request which came through from a chap called Wiggins, who was there recently, until the last 10 years or so, he actually said he didn't wish to have refreshments before the lunch, they couldn't have made it much more obvious.

RF: If you offered them a drink, their worse fears were confirmed

SG: How ludicrous. Can you imagine anything in my career which would lead anyone to suggest that I would try to be so foolish that I would try and get round them by feeding them with cocktails.

RF: I've never noticed city people or politicians turning down a drink either.

SG: No,

RF: So you were in harness now with some very big names. The Boutling, and Balcon was chairman of British Lion

SG: Don't forget that we were senior to the Boultings, we had a much longer British Lion record so we were much more than they were in the direct line of succession so to speak. Because although they'd made films for Korda, they hadn't anything like our length of services, continuous service.

RF: How did the association work with all these high priced difficult talents.

SG: The times with the Boultings were only as difficult as you might expect times with the Boulting to be, they had their tense moments but we worked together pretty well and the first six years were almost ludicrously successful, that's partly what annoyed the NFFC, because we shared in the success, they didn't like that. But, of course, the whole thing made it possible for the NFFC to be really solvent in the sense of British Lion.

RF: Did they re coop the losses, all the money they put into Korda films.

159
SG: What they did was persistently to present things as if they hadn't had any of it back; in point of fact, in our time we paid more than half. What happened before had nothing to do with us.

RF: I understand that, but from their point of view the money they had written off to a large extent seems to have been returned.

SG: The amount was £3 million. We I say we, we repaid in our time, and only in our time, was £1,750,000

RF: And after that time the films must have certainly

SG: They must have got some back, I don't know how much, but there would have been small amounts coming back

RF: It's surprising now what films make on world wide television release

SG: When you consider that they got the value of their own shares back, they got £700,000 from the purchase of British Lion, they did extraordinarily well out of our association with them and we were lucky if we got a civil word out of them. I'll give you another instance, Frank said to me one day, he was full of bright ideas, Frank, he said "Why do we always go on investing in things that you've never heard of?" I said "Who's we?" "British Lion I mean, we go in for these, something called that was I said "What do you want to do, Frank?" He said "Well it's British Lion money, why shouldn't we should invest a modest amount in the business, not in our films but in the business." He said "Look, I've made a list of films here that are showing at ABC cinemas for the last 6 months and as far as I can make out what they're going to show. And these are all very successful films, every one in the list. They're bound to have a good year therefore their shares will go up, we buy the shares, sell them after a year, I don't see how British Lion can lose." So we put it to the Board and the Board agreed, thought excellent idea. After all there was no record of cinema shares going like that or like that in normal times at all. They're fairly steady. So the risk element wasn't high anyway.

So we put this money in and we got an absolute caning as from a headmaster to a nasty horrible little boy, from Nut Hulme, "This is a most improper act." We said "Why is it improper?" "To put money like this without our permission into a speculative business." Well I believe I'm right in saying he was the boss on Old St so he might have had a personal thing in which case it was completely improper, but I've never confirmed that fact, so I better not mention it. The funny thing was that Frank and I were absolutely right. He said they must be sold at once. We refused flatly. "We will sell anything when we think the time is right, we will take your advice, they will be sold but we will sell when we think the time is right." So we sold them and made a handsome profit. And I think our profit for the company, at no cost at all to them, was £10,000 which wasn't bad. And do you know they sent John Terry round to our pre annual account board meeting, for one reason alone that this should be described as a non-recurring profit. How small minded can you get.

160
RF: How did the chain of command worked, You were to a degree autonomous at Shepperton. And you had an operating company at the studio, was that was the idea.

SG: The company was Shepperton Studios Ltd and Andy Worker for most of that time was the general manager of the studio, so the studio operated normally with the same staff largely, but not entirely, as before and administered by the studio staff. We had one of the Boultings and one of us as directors, and the first chairman was the same as the British Lion chairman.

RF: And they would answer to the British Lion Board which was the main controlling company.

SG: By and large yes.

RF: What did that consist of by the large. Were they filmmakers less than they were financiers and renters.

SG: The main British Lion board consisted simply of Douglas Collins, Chairman, David Kingsley, managing director, ourselves and the Boultings. We had two boards the holdings and whatever the other was called, and Wilfred was on one of them.

RF: Was that a congenial group.

SG: We had to be. Our interestests were the same, enormously successful.

RF: The successful years lasted how long

SG: Almost to the end. We did a total of about 14 and a half years, and they were successful until the last 8 or 9 months, the company was still in profit when were were bought out.

RF: What are the points that needed to be remembered.

SG: What I particularly remember is the utter crassness of Hulme and the NFFC primarily because I think that covers the whole of the next 14 years, one way or another.

RF: Where had the NFFC staff been recruited from, were they civil servants originally

SG: I think that the board. I think you can divide them into two parts, the board and the personnel. The personnel I think were mostly people with film experience, if only film accountancy experience. The board, as a whole, seen to be constituted on the grounds now I am retiring I should like to perform a public service, meaning I would like a knighthood.

RF: The great and the good.

SG: That's it, I think that's who they mostly were. Hillary Scott, Nut Hulme was the chairman, John Terry was the managing director during the time we are talking about. There was an idiot man whose name I've forgotten, to give an example of Nut Hulme's form he called a meeting at the Dorchester and appeared on the platform, this is to introduce some new fascet of the NFFC activities, don't ask me what. We were invited, we were by then

on the British Lion Board but we were invited to go as filmmakers to this and he just stood up on this thing and hectoring all these producers, bullied and hectoring them. And then at the end of it, this little man who was from the NFFC, he got up and solemnly read a list of things from the paper, a list of the timings of a take for television film, no relevance to ordinary filmmaking at all, they shot 10 minutes in a day. And then he sat down with a triumphal air and said what do you fellows think of that and was met with an array of perfectly blank faces.

RF: You must have enjoyed all that

SG: I got up and I infuriated, I can't remember what I asked now. I was so angry by it, Nut Hulme's whole attitude, primarily towards other filmmakers because we were in rather a special category by then, I forget what I said to him but I said something fairly rude and he didn't like it.

He later referred to us as wild animals with whom it was impossible to do business with. But I think he really meant the Boultings rather than us. They didn't really attempt to do business.

RF: You said you wanted to put things on record about this period. Are there points

SG: There is no good going into the last years of British Lion because when Mick was chairman it was a totally different era, we were all in it on different terms, we hadn't any contract, so it was totally different. We were salaried, PAYE chaps at British Lion 1, British Lion 2 we were owners or principal shareholders in the company that owned part of British Lion.

RF: How independent could you be, what access did you have to the companies resources, did you have your to finance you own picture separately or would the company automatically do it for you.

SG: We had an ingenious scheme worked out by Frank Launder which was the basis of our going in and buying, and new people coming in too, and buying the British Lion business. The system broadly was known as the group rules; when it was inconvenient everyone pretended not to understand them, especially Mick Balcon. What essentially it meant was, if you had 6 people round a table, five might be easier to calculate, 5 representing people round a table, they were theoretically equal owners of the equity in British Lion and they therefore had a line of credit based on that holding. Now supposing, I can't talk in millions because we never did, suppose the credit line was £100,000, your fifth in credit was worth £100,000, we worked on a system, so far as it ever worked which wasn't very far, that if, for instance, we wanted to do a St Trinians and nobody else did we would withdraw our £100,000 from British Lion by virtue of the group rule. We hope somebody else would come in, supposing they didn't that would be £100,000, if the picture cost £300,000 we'd have to get £200,000 from some where else before we could make the film. Now all the figures are nonsensical but they give you a rough idea of how it worked. Now if somebody else said we'd like to be on St Trinians, I mention that simply because it was certain box office at the time, then each of them could put in a fifth, so

you could have half a million on that basis if everyone wanted to come in, not often, on that basis. And that is how it was made up. And we did in fact do a St Trinians and nobody else did come in with us, and the financiers of the film were ourselves as people, as participators in the film, our company's credit, it wouldn't be £100,000 but whatever it was, and therefore if the thing cost £350,000 and it cost £200,000 we had to get the other £150,000 from someone like the NFFC or deferment or both which is exactly what we did.

RF: Very tidy.

SG: The only thing was that in practice that nobody ever wanted to work with anybody else. Therefore they didn't want to risk their money therefore under that scheme, the scheme changed as it went on a bit, but what were the films made: we made one or two comedies that didn't do as well as they should have done and the Boultings did Family Way and Twisted Nerve and it went on a bit like that. And Karel Reisz's outfit which was an off-shoot of Woodfall, John Osborne, a sort of second line or experimental arm they would prefer to call it, they did one called Morgan a Suitable Case for Treatment.

RF: That was quite successful in the States.

SG: We didn't really have time to see how that finally fared. But there were too few films made and one or two didn't work out, and then you get the clash of personalities, Mick Balcon didn't contribute anything except that he brought into it. He didn't have a stage. Mick always wanted old Ealing boys in but he hadn't got the credit line to back this up.

RF: What was he there for, to run the company, a unit, a production unit.

SG: You may well ask. What actually happened was sometimes the most unlikely things happen or fail to, what happened is that his job was never defined. I'm afraid I'm responsible for this because I met him with Dicky Attenborough and Brian Forbes at a New Years party at the agent, Dennis Fantale, he used to give very good Christmas parties and I went to one of them and Mick was there, Dicky and the others I mentioned, and they all clustered round because it was a great Christmas and all this had blown up. And they said "We feel we ought to be rallying round to help." Mick said "Yes, can't I rally round to help, I don't mind even if it's only as agent provocateur, I'd like to be in there somewhere." I said "Can I pass that on to my colleagues?" He said "Yes." I said "Right, I will." And Dicky was particularly fervent about the whole thing and Bryan too. The next morning with a New Year hangover I went into the office and promptly told John what Mick had said and he said "Let's ring him now. Do you think he's serious?" I said "He seemed to be." So we rang him up and he was in the office within half an hour whereupon the Boultings kind of dictated to him what they thought he should do, the idea really being to provide an opposition to keep Sidney Box out. I don't think we were being very constructive. However Mick then said he thought he could get John Osborne, he could get Tony Richardson, he was sure he could get Bryan Forbes and Dicky Attenborough. Of course, by the following Wednesday the only person who was still talking to him on that

issue, because he used to get the same train in the morning, was John Osborne. Dicky had mysteriously gone into a hole somewhere. Bryan Forbes was making hostile noises about the Boultings. And the only one who came through in the end was Mick plus John Osborne's secretary. But from that it started. Frank worked out the group rules, they were entirely his invention, and they were backed most enthusiastically by Tony Richardson who came to meetings, who said they were a work of genius and he'd throw his weight in whole heartedly, never came to a meeting or was seen again.

RF: Did they ever contribute anything by way of pictures that made money.

SG: Who?

RF: The Balcon element.

SG: I'm trying to think if Balcon made a single film. He could claim tenuous a connection with Woodfall, but don't forget he was bringing them in as a financing team, participating team, he came in with Border, I think he was chairman of Border, he brought Border in but I don't think Border had a full stake.

RF: But he was elected chairman of the board.

SG: What happened was that everybody had forgotten me, the terms were so onerous, we ought to have known better, but the terms were so onerous that everyone except us dropped out. So Mick was left and then he called us round to a meeting at his offices, I think it was, where the table was covered with the front pages of the newspapers all "Sir Michael has won, bravo Balcon." and so on everywhere, so Mick believed that he really had won. But, of course, he'd no more won than any of us had but they'd made him the figure head. very grateful. But during all of this it had occurred to no one to ask what Mick would do if we did win. And it hadn't occurred Mick to ask himself, so nobody knew. And we said what are we going to do, do you think he would like to be chairman? He can't run it because he doesn't really believe in any of these principles. So we made him chairman and then he had a sort of salary. We had to sort out his salary. So poor old Mick, once having got it there, it wasn't really his fault, poor old chap, he got stuck with an ambiguous situation from the word go. And it was just that the government's conditions got more and more onerous, so more and more people dropped out. In the end, there wasn't really a case to adjudicate on.

RF: Does this bring us towards the end of British Lion and all the upsets then.

SG: Yes, Balcon resigned and Goodman came in. Then it became rather financial. But the other people were drifting, you know out. Jo Janni's lot never worked and never made a film. They asked to be bought out which they duly were and then Border Mick got embarrassed about Border, and asked if Border could be bought out, so they were bought out.

RF: I though Jo Janni made quite a few pictures, that was all an independent arrangement.

SG: That was before. No he didn't, he only had on tap when I was there and that wasn't made within British Lion in the end. His connection was always a bit tenuous; he was the one who was underfunded at the end, he nearly dropped out.

RF: Are we into the late 60s now.

SG: Yes.

RF: And have the property developers arrived on the scene yet.

SG: There weren't any.

RF: I was thinking of John Bentley.

SG: I don't know how they arrived on the scene. What actually happened, which everybody seems to have forgotten, and I don't know how this happened either, but there was an arrangement arrived at and noted down with Star, that was Eckart Brothers, the Eckart Brothers did a deal on paper with British Lion; at the end of a certain amount of time the companies were supposed to have had time present their respective accounts to each other to the end of whatever the period was. Meanwhile the shares were all suspended. This went on and on and on. Behind the scenes, we were trying to get the figures, two difficulties, one the projections for British Lion tended to go down, the other factor was that, we never somehow seemed able to get delivery of the Star ones at all. And eventually, I can only put it from my own point of view, I was away and I had been only told, you'll never guess who told me it was Evelyn de Rothchild who happened to be acting as host for Arnold Goodman who asked us round to explain the deal.

He said "I understand Lord Goodman is going to explain the deal to you, how are you and what would you like to drink. No doubt he'll tell you when he comes." I never fully understood the Star thing. No one seemed to want to know my opinion, no one ever asked me to meet the Eckarts, I never met them in my life, everybody else seemed to meet them. So I decided quite possibly they were not looking forward to us as the senior members of the establishment to continue them, which certainly I didn't want to anyway, so there wasn't any problem there. I don't know what Frank thought. But in any event, suddenly, we what's happening to the Star deal, "We're still trying to get their accounts."

Then one morning I came back from Italy where I have a house and I'd been back a couple of days and I went into the office late one morning and found everybody fidgeting about, "Oh haven't you gone down to the meeting." Well, no one had told us there was a board meeting, there was no note of it in the office. When we got down there, everyone treated us rather like boys, the accountants thought we were both away and they hadn't bothered to tell us. When I got there there was everyone, Goodman and everyone round the table and we had this dreadful message from his lordship that if he'd been asked if he could kindly call on the Eckarts and the Eckarts were in income tax trouble and were very much afraid they were going to jail, which they did for quite a lengthy period as these things go. Of course, we didn't know that at the time. So his lordship said "What will happened to this deal? We now know

165

why they couldn't produce their accounts, we obviously can't be associated with them in any way." Fortunately we never had been, it had got no further than this. And so they said "Anyway, they've asked me if I would have a word with the chief inspector of taxes, I didn't think I could do anything, they are not my clients but anything I might do that can help, I'll do if they wish me to if it's alright with you gentlemen. Well I'm in a hurry, I must go now." He got half way out of the door and John Boulting said "What about these other people?" He said "What other people." Well, these people I sent to see you." That was Bentley. "Oh that little men, those youngsters, you didn't expect me to take them seriously, do you?" said Arnold. "Maybe not," said John, "but the point is we're a public company, we've got shareholders, you can't just ignore it, you can't ignore a chap in the street if he hands you a letter saying I intend to pay you £50 million for British Lion, how about it, you can't dismiss him necessarily as a mad man?" "No, that's true, do you want me to see him again?" "Well, I think you should, we may have to report it to the shareholders if it's a genuine offer we obviously will have to. "Right" he said. And that was the first I heard of Bentley and Barclay Securities. I thought that morning it was something to do with Barclays bank.

RF: Who were the shareholders at that time, was there a large institutional holding and did the board of directors have a sizeable chunk of shares, did you and Frank and the Boultings and Goodman.

SG: You mean in British Lion. Yes, not by much of a margin. In any event we were in a very difficult position. First of all, at the time I'm speaking of we only had the report of an aborted meetings, that's all. I didn't even know about that, neither did Frank. But Arnold didn't take it remotely seriously, he said "I suppose you're right, I have to see them."

RF: But Bentley was already notorious, searching my memory. Was he not. He'd pulled a couple of deals.

SG: He did Triang, but really we thought it a Slater Walker thing primarily by that time. I forget when but very soon after it came out that Slater Walker was backing him, Jim Slater was backing him at that time. And then Walker got into trouble immediately afterwards and his company became Britannia, don't ask me how, but that morning I thought Barclay Securities was something to do with Barclays Bank, it seemed to be spelt the same, I had no idea. And I don't see what we could have done in any event, in any context. Because it's quite clear now and I'm afraid very much in my mind at the time that if that deal had collapsed, we would have had the wrath of all the public shareholders which was 50% of them as near damn it, because how could we recommended them to reject it.

RF: There was a very considerable outcry, directed primarily at the Boultings.

SG: Obviously, you expect that. Well naturally, because more people objected to them making some money than objecting to us. A classic remark of Sid Cole's to my brother, my brother wandered into a Wardour St pub and there was Sid Cole there, and they all had a drink together and Sid was fulminating about the Boultings

getting all that money, terrible, awful, went on and on and on. He rather implied my brother knew something about it which he didn't. He said "What about you." He said "I'm not a shareholder, I'm nothing to do with it, nothing to do with it at all." "Well I think it's outrageous that the Boultings should do this, that,....I say, Frank and Sidney will do rather well out of the is too." totally different tone. The only choice we had, we had no half way choice, because that would have been totally irrelevant, so the only choice we had was either saying no or yes. Because if we had said no, that would have been recommendation to the shareholders, in effect, to say no, you can't have it both ways. And a year later the shares would have been worth very little so we could have been accused of misleading the shareholders of a substantial public company if we had said

RF: I'm sure there was a lot of emotionalism in it, first of all there had been that lawsuit between the union and the Boultings, but it was presented as a betrayal of the British film industry yet again. That people were making a lot of money and walking away and the poor bloody technicians.

SG: Even if you took that as being true, which it wasn't but if you took it was being true, I must say it took a long time to walk away, 8 and a half years, that's quite a long time to walk away. What about the others who asked to be bought out earlier, no one said that they had, they didn't make the same amount of money but they made a profit on their deal. But no one said how outrageous, they'd been in the company to make films, they hadn't made any and they'd left

RF: There was the golden share too was there not.

SG: I had nothing to do with that.

RF: Wasn't it part of it at the same time that it was relinquished.

SG: That was controlled anyway, the golden share was simply to stop certain things happening, that wasn't under our control, we couldn't have done anything about it.

No one understands it, but Terry asked me something about Barclay Securities and I said exactly what I said to you, I thought something to do with Barclays Bank when I first heard about it. He said "You mean you hadn't heard of them before? I said "No. Nobody had. There was one short meeting which John didn't know whether to take seriously or not, he passed it onto his chairman who didn't take it seriously. And it was simply a check up." That is exactly what happened. And it turned out they were willing to make an offer. Naturally it wasn't settled there or then but it became clear that they were serious contenders. I don't make any bones about it I was delighted because I reckon that there was no future in the company by that time that we could contribute to at all.

RF: He was after the real estate of the studio and maybe the buildings in town as well, but essentially it was the backlot

SG: There were quite a lot of other things you know.

RF: Had you bought Pearl and Dean by this time.

RF: We had Pearl and Dean, we had a very big library of films,

RF: There were two quite sizeable buildings in town, Broadwick St

SG: That was on a short leasehold. Pearl and Dean had some buildings, yes.

RF: They had two back to back buildings on Dover St and Albermarle St.

SG: I think they came with the deal. I don't know. I wasn't a director of Pearl and Dean when it was taken over and I only came in for observation when that deal was mooted. In fact I wasn't very keen about it.

RF: Well the ABC contract was money in the bank. They had a contract with ABC Cinemas,

SG: Pearl and Dean, yes.

RF: They still had some very profitable years ahead of them. I knew Bob less well than I knew Jack than Ernie and Dicky. You mentioned Evelyn De Rothchild, he and Bob used to hunt together and a lot of information came that way.

SG: I felt it rather much in a way that we'd never been really consulted properly about Eckart, I felt they could have been more courteous. They just forgot, you're out of the country and you can easily forget somebody. Nevertheless I could see no part for us in Eckart, if Eckart had come off I'd still have been out of the business in exactly the same way.

RF: Did it occur to anybody to look for an alternative bid, to keep the company as it were among the film world rather than the financial spivs

SG: I don't think there was any question of a matching bid, I don't think it was practical. From the standpoint of the shareholders of British Lion, it was a stroke of luck, I don't see anything could have reconstituted it.

SIDE 17, TAPE 9

RF: You say there wouldn't have been much chance for an alternative bid, nobody else would have been interested. What about the public shareholders, were they individuals or institutional holders.

SG: I don't know. The usual mixture. I can tell you one shareholder, at that time, not necessarily the exact time we're talking about was Hastings Bander and that was a name which did stick in people's mind, I think he'd sold out by this time. No, I don't know who they were at all, just ordinary people, a few institutions.

RF: It's just that institutions act differently to individuals.

SG: One thing you can be sure of is that if institutions knew that you took the line you would not recommend an offer which you should have recommended, you hear from them. A very difficult position. I was very pleased to be out of it for quite different reasons, I didn't object to taking the money. Damn it, we did six years on a relative pittance, and I may say for the rest of the time depended entirely what films were made, we received no salary, we didn't have contractual figures, anything like that. Really we worked on a very light financial basis for 14 and a half years which is along time.

RF: Did you enjoy that type of activity or if you had it again would you have preferred to just be a filmmaker period.

SG: Yes, when we first started to make the company go I quite enjoyed it but I learned one thing, if you lose money in a business like that, one thing you may be sure about is that the ACTT, shall we say, on the one hand and John Davis or Rank, on the other, will say "Umm I never thought they would do any good, that lot, said so from the beginning; I suppose they've lost quite a bit, serve them right." That would be the general attitude. If you make a lot of money, which was the whole object of the first British Lion, if it came of we would benefit considerably, which I never believed, but which was the alleged bait, if we didn't then that's that, but everyone then said you got far too much out of it. They don't say how clever you were to have got too much out of it. They don't point to the fact that the government got exactly the same amount out of it, this was the case. And they'd barely say thank you.

RF: There is always an element of envy. This is the time when ACTT was controlled by the Trots, there was that very decided political colouring and I think they were advocating the nationalisation of the film industry without compensation.

SG: I felt, looking back, that the measures taken to put us in control of British Lion was the only thing which could have saved the company, I cannot see any other combination of people doing it, for various reasons, no doubt you could pick a pair here and a pair there, but if you pick them too high up in the grade they wouldn't do it because they wouldn't do it for that money, they

wouldn't take that risk for that money. Can you see David Lean coming at £7,500 a year expenses included, I can't. In fact, the whole reason for British Lion relative failure, if you lump in the late years, is that the period when we bought the company back, which I don't think we should have done, the whole point of that period was that it coincided most unfortunately with the flight of American capital away from here, partly the result of shocking bloody American films made in Britain and that coincided with the flight of talent either to those films and when they moved to America. So you can name a really big senior household name director who is still working

We rather felt we were the last bastion of British films, but we couldn't carry that through, we were lucky to do it for the first six years. We couldn't have hoped to do it for the second. Because if you make a sacrifice yourself, there is no guarantee anyone else is going to see it that way and say "Oh what a good idea, I'll come and sacrifice myself too." And I can't see any of the people who could have been such help to us at British Lion ever agreeing to come there. Not one. I think I know most of them. I can tell people who would have come though. I don't know Jack Gold at all but would he necessarily have accepted British Lion terms at that stage, more as a symbolical figure because I don't know him.

RF: Yes, he is a man of total integrity.

SG: Then you get the personality conflict, you get a Jack Gold, you get people who would say I don't want to be subject to the Boulting Brothers, whether they would be so subject would depend entirely on the nature of what they wanted to do. But we had one or two cases where automatically it was said as soon as you made an objection to something, well we always get interference at British Lion. The trouble was getting the films, let alone interfering with them.

RF: The Boultings, I suppose it was Roy more than John, always a bit of a problem in terms of personalities. That seems to have been the story of their lives.

SG: I think that was so. I think that was felt by Bryan Forbes when there was a suggestion that he might come in. I think he probably felt that.

RF: And you say Dicky made himself scarce.

SG: He once said to me the only thing John Boulting and I ever had in common was Connie Smith.

RF: When all this happened you were what early 60s

SG: Mid 60s. It took some time because I think this deal finally came about somewhere in the middle of June 72, or July it might have been, it was latish, well into the year and we had obligations, more or less of a minor kind but they still had to be seen through so we didn't leave there till mid 73.

RF: Did you feel the time to put your feet up.

SG: I only had one determination which I couldn't see my way of achieving at the time we're talking of, to leave British Lion because I felt there was no future for us there any more, or unlikely to be and 14 and half years with the same outfit, however much changed, is too much and I don't think we were particularly wanted and I didn't to stay, whether I would have done I don't know.

RF: I was wondering if the physical job of making films had begun to pall, because it is hard work producing and directing.

SG: I know. I don't know No misses chances through being there. I had a chance of making a picture with Peter Ustinov which I would very much have liked to have done in some ways, but because of a combination off facts I wasn't able to do it, one was connected with British Lion, the difficulty of getting away, and the other was my house in Italy which I had just finished and I was in terrible trouble with. I got this offer the day I set foot in the house, even to get a telephone call through was an achievement in those days and I got one from New York and they wanted me to take the next plane, they couldn't understand why I wouldn't take the next plane and I turned it down. Well those things would have been manifestly multiplied had I'd been known to be out or freelancing or whatever it was. As it was, with British Lion you might otherwise be shut out, apart from what you made there, you could regard yourself outside of the business. And I regret the second half there, a bloody waste of time. It may have made me more or less independent but it is not the way I would have chosen to finish a career, I just did not want to go back into that sort of responsibility. Unfortunately my dear partner Frank, evolves a group rule scheme which was not so difficult as many people made out or as complicated but he did not send me a copy or tell me about it, other than in the vaguest terms, with the result I found that the whole of the board which after all was only a proposed board, since no one had yet come forward and said that they would join it, he'd sent a copy to everyone, the same time as me so everyone assumed that I had agreed to it and I hadn't the opportunity to digest it. Frank never thought of that at all.

RF: Did he assume you would go on.

SG: No, to be fair I don't think he did. He just forgot that he ought to give me a copy at least a day in advance of everyone else, that's all I would have asked. As it was I became swept along in a time of optimism, it wasn't really that, interest really. See we didn't know if we were going to get it and when we got it we only got the structure, we hadn't got a hard and fast agreement and I think myself I've always taken the view it was a balmy scheme, when responsible people tell you it isn't and they're all willing to cooperate, I didn't feel I wanted to ostentatiously leave my partner to one side while I walked over to be the sole one on the other side of the room to oppose it. I think it was stupid, I should have opposed it. Then you don't know what would have happened.

RF: Could that have been part of his thinking. Is that the reason you didn't get your copy the day before because could predict your attitude.

SG: It might be.

RF: That's purely speculation.

How have you occupied yourself since the 70s.

SG: I haven't done any film work since 73 or thereabout and neither have I wished to. The only time I could have done was when my wife was ill, that was a 5 years job and I couldn't have undertaken anything in any way, once five years had gone by you feel it is another business. I don't feel any affinity with the business today at all. I still like a good film when I see it. But I tell you what I think has gone from films an awful lot, is just a little thing called wit, not only in dialogue, visual wit as well

RF: And style. The interesting thing is that so many of those 1930s British films which were written off are now seen for what they are which is elaborately and well constructed and extremely well written pieces.

RF: I was also very sad that the vein you might characterise as the Rene Clair vein of satire with music was never really followed up. He never continued with it. I think it was a wonderful vein. Unfortunately his films didn't get better. If they had done, they might have started something which really weaved itself into the whole fabric of the film. You know in Le Million which was the first real one of his sound pictures, he had an absolutely charming idea of having different types of voices and different types music representing a character, so if you're sitting in a taxi going somewhere with something on you mind, you're one of the characters, agitating and looking at the traffic thinking will I get there in time, you have this little tune, and following the idea of the plot and urgency, and his conscience, is he doing the right thing, all done in a few lines of music by a totally anonymous voice. Never followed up.

RF: That was the advent of sound, I don't know where it develops too. I don't know if you can make too many films along that line.

SG: You wouldn't suggest it as a standard, no obviously. But that should have lead to something else in turn, you don't expect it to stay like that. It should lead to a much closer weaving, it has only been done in extreme forms like Les Parapluies de Cherbourg and things like that, done in an eccentric form, almost arigid form, every line has to be sung.

RF: On that score, I won't say you use little music but all your films are very literary and literate, they're very dialogue based, there is a great deal of verbal wit.

SG: They used to say that about us at one time, but looking back on films and seeing some of our old ones and some by others, I can't really only see that our films said very much more than the average film made by our colleagues. They used to say that, David Lean was apt to say that, that they were more cinematic.

RF: I'm not saying they were verbose, what I'm saying is what words there were were better words than the run of the mill.

SG: I had that impression myself too, if only through listening to people, that we were rather dialoguey, and I look through the pictures now and and the Rake's Progress there are some sequences that are very much dialogue sequences, but generally with a purpose behind it, they are such but it's all part of the purpose. But I don't find it looking at most of them now oddly enough in relation to their contemporaries, I don't find that they are wordy. They may use words better or worse but I don't think that they are particularly wordy as such.

RF: I agree with that, I wasn't suggesting that.

SG: It has been suggested a lot and I used to believe it

RF: I'm comparing the words say in your films to say a Sidney Box film for example. It's chalk and cheese. But I came onto that from your point how you might use music in conjunction with dialogue or thought or narrative and you didn't do that and yet early on you were impressed by Le Million.

SG: We couldn't do it, because as you rightly pointed out, you obviously couldn't make it a universal rule, you obviously can't do it all the time nor would you wish to. I think that there are certain films that you could do it with, b), as I said, it would have lead to other forms being interwoven with normal film presentation, whereas it's be n a complete dead end which I would never have expected from early Clair that he would finish as a complete dead end because there's nobody doing his stuff and hasn't been for many years.

RF: There has been a certain about of experimentation in Television or the sort of stuff you see at RCA degree shows. And they're generally not easy to watch I find.

SG: No, but nothing can be easier than Le Million. Or you go right on to A Nous La Liberte and Le Dernier Milliardaire. They are not as good films, the reason isn't because of the musical treatment, he ran out of ideas, it's as simple as that. I think the use of music became, deteriorated in America when the music got to it's best. When they got out of the routine and youngsters started writing good music for bad films, you began to feel that the score had an existence almost outside the film. And what you want is one which only had an existence right inside the film, and that we've never had, we only had the beginnings of it which is a pity. I don't mean all films should be musicals or even that they should have music at all but the music should be of a different association with the film and that line has never been developed, it may have been experimentally here and there, but never significant middle of the road way, and it was not a hi-brow idea at all. Le Million was totally a talkie, there weren't any silent sequences. These scenes in the taxi were an integral part of the film, they weren't silent bits with a musical commentary or anything like that. It may look very dated today, you know one reason why, it was a period largely German I think, of very light coloured sets.

RF: And a shakey moving camera.

SG: Not only that but you get all the specks and bobbles on the

background because it was so light;
it was a very German phase but he had it in Le Million quite a lot. The result is the copy looks older than it is, nothing shows up an old dup more than that kind of set.

RF: I've made a few jottings of names, Woodfall was part of British Lion for a while but you had no dealings with them.

SG: That was Osborne

RF: And Walter Reade was also involved

SG: Walter Reade was bought in by Balcon.

RF: So again, little contact there presumably. Goodman we've talked about. He still seems an enigmatic character to me.

SG: Possibly.

RF: I did want to ask you about your librettos and how you got involved in those.

SG: Our Man In Havana.

RF: And you'd did one earlier.

SG: That was done with Malcolm Arnold. I was a member of his club and I told him the idea and he did it. But the full length one was in the repertory of the English National Opera, I suppose technically it still is, because they took over the Sadler's Wells properties over with them, that was Grahame Greene's Our Man In Havana.

[Reference to entry in Geoff Brown's book]

The only thing I would add to it is that the events involved in our Man in Havana require highlighting rather than subduing and I think that the film underplayed events and it didn't work. It shows that you can even with a quietly written book, it depends on the events, on the characters.

RF: We've said nothing about any participation you may had in television which I suppose was an an investor.

SG: No I was a director. Well Frank and I really shared a directorship for the whole duration of TWW which became Harlech later. That was a real piece of skulduggery that we ever lost that station. Quite uncalled for. We did nothing to lose it.

RF: Pour encourager les autres.

SG: In the sense pour encourage les Gallois. In other words quieten the Welsh lobby or the Welsh speaking lobby

TH: It was the Welsh speaking lobby?

SG: Very largely.

RF: There was a writer, Wolfgang Wilhelm, I was interested in

what happened to him

SG: He died, I lost touch with him after the war, about the time I left Rank, I seemed to loose touch with Wolfgang and I last saw him at Piccadilly, at Korda's and I guess it was somewhere in the early 50s. I don't think I saw him much after the mid 50s anyway. He then went back to Munich and worked in Munich television, German television in Munich, and he was buying some films for television, that's all I know except that he died. I don't think Frank even kept in touch with him. I wasn't as close to him as Frank, but I don't think Frank kept in touch.

RF: He was an imaginative writer, a good ideas man.

SG: As far as I remember. But Frank worked with him more than I did. Whereas Val, on the whole, I thought I would have worked more with than Frank. Perhaps it just seemed more, Val could be like that.

RF: You were saying about Val Valentine, you were saying how difficult he was to organise.

SG: He was a lovely man but he was, as you say, disorganised. He was an ideas man, and on Rake's Progress he did get an idea getting on a bus and finished the story by the time he got off it, but it is true to say that the place he got off bore no relation to the place he thought he was going to. But he had finished the story and I think he was a brilliant man in a very limited way. You had to, it was murder to get him to set down what he had thought up but he had very good ideas. He wrote the original version of Waterloo Rd, the original story, but he had six stories and I used two of them in the end, two of the six. But the trouble was as he told you the story, the tape recorder would solve it now, that it was it, you needn't go back to him again, he'd never do any better.

RF: Did he remember once he said something

SG: He didn't remember if he had to put it down, no because he was a born story teller, if you could bare to listen to him, because he might be shouting your head off. But he was a born storyteller and he saw it as it went. And you'd just get it down somehow the first time, and you needn't bother him again, he won't improve on it, a lovely man.

RF: ACTT, anything further to add, on balance has your experience been a good one, a rotten on or just plain mixed.

SG: Mixed. I think that George Elvin may have been a most lovable man, and no doubt a devoted father, husband, uncle, everything else, but he was a damned slippery customer to deal with. When I was stopped by a gentleman in the sound department, I was shooting in the open air at Shepperton and I'd already moved the thing practically into the Studio, I think it was a bit of open ground in the car park and it started to rain, it was the last shot. So some helpful person from one department or another, not sound, he said "Why don't you just take this shot inside the studio, we can light it there, nothing to it. You only see a bit of the ground, you could paint that in 5 minutes." So I said "Yes, fine." and we just got set up and the shop steward from

ACTT, sound of course, said "This is against the rule book." All exterior shooting, normally it was night was emergency, as soon as you moved from emergency basis to into a studio spaces, you ceased to be an emergency and therefore ceased to be exterior location and ceased to be anything at all, so I wasn't allowed to finish. This was settled, as I thought between the Federation of British Filmmaker and the ACTT on the grounds that George was going to issue a statement which would say that, on the whole, in circumstances such as these, the ACTT would be the first to welcome initiatives to speed up shooting and sustain the economy type of thing. And this never appeared, having all been agreed it never appeared. So I got back to the Federation of Filmmakers, I said which I'd helped to find but which by then I'd only contempt and said "Why hadn't this appeared?" They hadn't followed it up, of course. So they get in touch with the ACTT, Elvin said "As the producers did not follow this up, we did not think that it was necessary to print the letter."

TH: All I can remember of George was in the pub round from Soho Sq and every time I saw him he was picking his nose.

SG: Let's face it they were villains, Tom O'Brien was a villain.

RF: Were they any more villainous than the people facing them across the table.

SG: I don't know the personnel officers if that's the right word, in most cases. I'm trying to think what we tried to impose on anybody, mostly we felt imposed upon, rather than imposing, we were seeking to assert a right we had rather than impose a new one.

RF: Along with getting the ministers pissed did you ever try that with the union people because they were very susceptible to the drink in the boardroom and the lunch at

SG: I believe such officials can't be corrupted by such simple means.

RF: You'd be surprised. There is an enormous element of vanity enters into it being treated as equals.

SG: Even George had some vanity, he used to do this, he had this thing with his fingers.

RF: I will describe for the tape the fact that you are stroking one hand on top of the other.

Do you have your own personal Harry Cohn story, you cut a picture at Columbia.

SG: Yes, I cut one and I got on very well with Harry. And he was most, well the first time I met him I was introduced, there is no better introduction in Hollywood or anywhere else, by Harry to his team round the commisariat table, they were having a sneak preview, all the yes men, so called, were round the table. They were, therefore, putting on a pretty heavy no man act, and Harry Cohn introduced to them all as the man who had come 6,000 miles to say no, you can't have a better introduction than that. He always behaved to me rather that way. I was always very mild with

him, being a rather timid person, I was rather mild. I told you before that he paid me this great compliment, whenever he used filthy language, he always looked round the room and lowered his voice before speaking to me. I'm sure he didn't do that with anybody else. If he referred to anyone as "That lousy cocksucking bastard" he would sort of say "That lousy" "cocksucking bastard" and that was clearly for my sake alone, I felt that as a great compliment if I had nothing else, I must have had dignity.

One night we were running a film through, because these people were enormous enthusiasts, and what I missed with so many British people from critics right through the whole film just enthusiasm, Harry Cohn had plenty of it. If you sneaked previewed your film and he had nothing to do with it, he would sweat during the thing as he did when he previewed his own film, because I've seen him do it. And we were running, starting a discussion at his house before running some changes we'd made and he said "Where's your wife, where's Mrs Gilliat?" I said "She's having dinner, I expect." "Isn't she coming?" I said "No, she's out having dinner with a friend." "Who?" I said "Who What." "Who is she having dinner with?" "Hitch." He said "You mean Hitchcock?" I said "Yes, I should explain, he's an old friend." He said "He's slipping anyway. And anyway you don't listen enough to that woman, you should listen more to her." Then we went on watching a baseball game, so on and so forth and eventually picks up the phone, "Beverly Hills Hotel" he says, "I want to talk to Mrs Gilliat." My wife must have just come back. He said "Mrs Gilliat what are you doing down there. Come up here, Harry Cohn, you get a cab an come right up." So she comes up. "You don't listen to that woman." - brings her into the whole conversation. Whereupon, he didn't know what he was taking on, in a moment of euphoria or whatever it was, he suggested that removing the word Royal from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra might conceal the fact that State Secret was a British film, and my wife said "Did I hear you a right. We're proud of it being a British film, we don't want to conceal it, we want to publicise it. What was that, just one moment Mrs Gilliat," and he presses a button and the whole film starts, "Say that again." And she did. And he was very nice. He said "Mrs Gilliat, I have the greatest respect for you and your husband, he can write his ticket here tomorrow, don't print that, now we only have in mind selling the picture, we don't mind if it's British, Udu or anything, but if we think it will sell better by taking a reference out, then we do it. She said "No., you don't. We're proud of it, and we don't want to do it." And he never did do it. I could have stopped him fif he wanted to but he never did. No virtue, of course, I'm not saying that that's a virtue of Harry Cohn, except he struck me as a man you could, up to a point, manage.

RF: For the man whom Ben Hecht called White Fang, I think you saw a very benevolent side.

SG: He paid me a greater compliment than that. Just when he showed me to my car from his pool, he said I don't very often take a shine to Englishman, Gilliat, but I've had a feeling you and I could drink out of the same glass. I didn't fancy it myself. I think Harry Cohn was a man who came earnestly to disbelieve in his own legend. In other words, he didn't want to be the man whom he was depicted to be, so he actually went out of

his way to try and stop it by being nice to people unexpectedly and that kind of thing and he certainly couldn't have been more friendly and helpful to me in ways that couldn't be faked.

RF: That is a new sidelight on the Harry Cohn of legend.

SG: Well he had a Friday club, I think it was, I forget what it was called but it met on Friday night he used to go to it and the atmosphere, I was told by other people, was Harry Cohn relaxing and being at home with his own boys. I'm sure it was an effort always to try and be the nice guy, and hence the posse no men, you got the feeling that anyone round him could say exactly what they liked and that was the atmosphere he deliberately created. But, on the other hand, here is a man who will get up at three in the morning and look at a tape, you know those audio tape things they play, audience research things were you press a button and he'd walk along a quarter of mile of this bloody tape at three in the morning, saying can we take a bit out of there. He mostly, even then, was working a 17 hour day. You cannot fake enthusiasm and that man had enthusiasm, so did Sam Goldwyn, so even did that awful monster Mayer, however, phoney some of it was they had enthusiasm and that is not something lightly to be kicked aside.

RF: Did you come up personally against Mayer.

SG: I sat at the same table as Meyer and was met in a condescending way by Meyer, but that was about as far as I could take it.

RF: Were you at the Savoy luncheon that Graham Greene writes about?

SG: No I was staff so I wouldn't have been invited at the Savoy. No I was on his table at Denham, when he came down for the day. I think he was a horrible man, he was a real horror.

RF: I was going to ask you what you would do differently.

SG: I don't know. I think I would lie to Mycroft again because I think I did the right thing in coming into films. Apart from that I really don't know. I suppose I would do everything differently. The trouble is if I'd said no to going into British Lion, which I did but nobody took any notice, so I went in, in the first place, I wonder if there would have been a British Lion that's all, it needed a body of people and I'm sure that Frank and the Boultings could have kept it going for a time and might have done as well or better without one extra person because overestimate what one could do. I think that it was an essential thing to have done just to keep the damn thing going but I often regret parts of it.

RF: Wasn't the plus side that it gave you some sort of home, some sort of base

SG: That was the trouble, my agent said you have to make up your mind if you want to continue to work in England, which we did, then you will have to keep some harbour and British Lion is going down the plughole, very definitely. He knew we liked making little pictures as well as big ones and I think that he felt that it would be our feeling that we ought to try and keep it going.

On the other hand I do think that you lose an awful lot of energy, inergic momentum, going into these managerial things. If you look at people, when they get into producer league, from then on they tend to run into trouble because of this diversification of whatever energy they have left. So I think, I don't know if I'd do anything again differently, but there are some films I wouldn't make again for a start, you wouldn't get me within 10,000 of Gilbert and Sullavan, if that came up in my second life I would have emigrated.

RF: But the artifact is there that as bad as you chose to remember.

SIDE 18, TAPE 9

RF: Despite this romance with Harry Cohn did you ever desire to go and work in Los Angeles.

SG: I always felt that I would have liked to have made a film there but everything would depend on what it was and the tendency, of course, if I had gone to Harry Cohn, I had films to do in England so I couldn't just up it like that anyway, but one can always arrange one film and I felt it must be absolutely the right one. Well he sent me a whole lot of scripts knowing perfectly well I wasn't a free man, but he sent me quite a number of scripts and they were all what you would expect, if you know anything about the backlist and coffers of Metro, you get anything with a British background, so you get that old hardy perenial, Royal Mail, which is always coming up, they like royal, Royal Mail is different stories, it had that title attached to it, number of times over the year and you get that class of thing which you don't want to go near. I don't think except in fantasy one could see a lovely career there, I liked Hollywood but I've always felt that I wouldn't succeed there if I did go. But I've never been even on the point of signing a contract so it hasn't arisen.

RESTRICTIONS ON USAGE

Some of this stuff might well be classed as confidential, some might be libellous or scandalous. Obviously it is confidential as it stands. If you wish to publish or make available in one form or another certain excerts, anything which could be called publication I think I must give my permission, which I would not be tardy in giving. If I'm not here, then it should be got from my estate, simply because I have a manuscript in progress which will incorporate some of the same stories, so naturally there is no point in giving the copyright of those away and secondly some might be embarrassing to either my friends or colleagues. But providing somebody can contact me, explain exactly what they want to do, I will not be awkward about it at all. Otherwise I wouldn't have given the interviews obviously.

SG: No one would dream of wanting to attack Rank, any more than if you're in a wood there is no reason why you should single out the babe and make a bee line for the wicked uncle, poor Arthur

179

Rank, I think he just got into the hands of the wrong people
People all start building too big.

RF: It's sad it didn't work because the British film industry
could have been saved.

SG: It will go on just the same. People always start building
too big. It's much better to build your
cottage before you decide you're in excellent shape for building a
castle.

RF: Ultimately it is an insoluble dichotomy in that it is a
creative business which attracts people who want to make films
and on the other it costs a lot of money and they have to raise
the money and the films have to be sold and that's a whole
different class of gentlemen.

SG: Yes, except these people who are selling these objects in
the kind of field you are envisioning are, in a sense, in the
same field, they are selling stuff more or less in mind is the
nature of the stuff, whereas John Davis was filling in 52 slots
in the year at the time we're talking about and wanted to reduce
the whole thing, so much so that when they forgot Green for
Danger, they did totally forget it, they were bewildered as to
what they could do because all our slots are filled up.

RF: It seemed to me clear that he didn't understand the
business, I'm not sure he understood any business when you look
at all the ventures that he took Rank into, leisure activities
and so forth and were all disastrous and funded by that
accidental decision to go into partnership with Zerox. If it
hadn't been for that, the Rank Organisation would have disappea-
red years ago. And what do they do, when occasionally they go
back into production they try a remake of 39 Steps.

SG: Terrible when you think of the opportunities they might have
had. I would like to see one concern and their associates making
say 5 good films in 14 months, different people in that umbrella,
and not trying to make 25. There is less danger of that happening
now. So you can start from a small base, if you can, it may not
be practical to do it but I'm quite sure that this business of
trying to fulfil a huge market by say, the only thing we lack is
the product, in other words the Sky Television situation. The Sky
Television situation is having a lot of sky and lot of apparatus
and having nothing to show on it really.

RF: And they're not about to fund the product which is something
the programme contractors in this country have been doing until
their business was being taken away from them in the last two
years, three years.

18 June

SG: I think that one should look at the whole of the British Lion
experience as if it were one run of 14 and a half years because we
were never out of the saddle, in one sense or another, during
that 14 and a half years. Since in the interim period, when the
government was making up it's mind, in 1964 we were still running
the company by general agreement, so we were continuously there

for 14 and a half years.

When we were first joined British Lion, as you know from what I've already said, the object was to keep British Lion going quite specifically as an independent concern, distributing and making films for the independent producer, not necessarily exclusively but as the prime intention it was to look after the independent sector of the market. This situation was always helped by the fact that as the NFFC had a stake in British Lion, a very large stake, that the fact that a government statutory corporation, know to have been set up by the government, means that the government virtually has an interest, financial interest as a owner of the company and that should be retained. This, all this would apply once we joined the company in 1958 and did apply, as far as we were concerned, during the whole of the time up to the change over in 64. So from 58 to 64, which is 6 years, the company was run entirely on that basis. However, during much of that time the NFFC was harrassing us to purchase the company or threatening us with selling it to somebody else if we failed to come up. And this went on during the whole of the first three and a half years, in one sense or another. It had, as I mentioned in the previous day, it had become obvious to some of us from the beginning once we were inside the cage, we were supposed to buy out the zoo. How nobody knew at that time.

We made two attempts to do that, that also described elsewhere and those came to nothing and it finished with both the Boultings and ourselves extending the total of our engagement to six years each. By the end of that time, it was hoped on the one side, as I said, that we would buy out the NFFC and therefore become owners of British Lion; and on our side, it had been made clear for some time, and it's important to mention this because it was later denied, that it had been clearly stated for some time that we would prefer, having been on short for six years, we would prefer a) not to continue but a new company, any new company, on the same basis, we didn't want to own the company and have all the obligations of running it any longer, we were willing to be partly bought out and to preserve the rest of whatever interest might be agreed and to run the company with extra partners brought in. This did not seem to ring any bells with the NFFC or the Board of Trade and I suspect from our contacts at the time with Mr Tibbits who was the Board of Trade that it was the Board of Trade who were the primary pushers in this respect, they wanted, like the NFFC, who were under their orders, to get rid of their interest in British Lion.

So we were in a position where we were willing to be partly there and partly in control and partly paid off. We had various meetings to resolve these difficulties, who would come in with us, but it was quite clear that Nutcombe Hume wanted us simply to make the purchase and run the company and that was the end of that. And therefore never discussed the nature of any buy out of us, or any partial buyout, I should say, of us.

So this situation continued. There was one terrible acrimonious meeting with Nutcombe Hume and him alone, we had the five of us, British Lion, and Nut Hume in one private room in Wheelers Braganza in which he was going to bring a new scheme where we could set up a consortium that might be able to meet some of our targets. It turned out when we got there that the consortium was

going to consist, broadly speaking, of ABC and the Rank Organisation. They were going to be brought into it. Therefore, the relationships were going to be harmonious instead, as they accused us of making them, abrasive and all would be happy in the home. This completely ignored the government's earlier insistence, six years before, that the company must be run for independents by independents and was totally against all the principles on which we joined British Lion. Furthermore there was no response to our suggestion that in any new set up the government should retain some stake, even if small. We felt even a token stake was worth a good deal when you're bargaining with the circuits. Of course, in this way you wouldn't need to be bargaining with the duopoly, they would be part of us. So not unreasonably tempers got a bit high over this issue and one or two acrimonious remarks were made, as a result of which virtually all communications were withdrawn between the board of British Lion and the Board of the NFFC, instead meetings took place only with David Kingsley, as our representative, and the NFFC on the other side.

RF: Had there always been a difficult relationship with the NFFC?

SG: Yes. I think I documented that. One of the things I instanced when we made our own investment in ABC, the circuit, the company, instead of putting it in the usual ways the NFFC used to put it on the ground that this was a good commercial investment, and we got the most heavy handed ticking off and it made a profit of £10,000 which they sent Terry along to tell us must be described in the annual report as non recurring.

RF: Did you ever try and account for that difficult relationship.

SG: Yes often. I could never understand why they were so adverse to us so quickly, except perhaps they realised they hadn't got quite what they bargained for.

RF: Could it also be that you were tarred with the Korda brush.

SG: No because Korda's failure led directly or indirectly, after 2 or 3 years, to our being invited to British Lion. If you'd asked me further about that I would say, yes, perhaps with some reason that the NFFC, a certain distrust, again the old gap between the administrative and the creative, there was some suspicion, some of it with reason, of producers, but they had no reason to be suspicious of us, indeed why should they have invited us. I don't know, I can't account for it. There may have been some left over friction between Kingsley and Terry. Terry was nominated by Kingsley as his successor and took the job but I don't know anything about the detail of that. I can never account for it being so rapidly.

RF: It was a key factor in all that happened.

SG: I think that perhaps in 1957 they thought that they were nearer to a sale than they really were, and so they thought one had come very quickly in 1958, but they had no reason to think so.

At the end of this lunch at Wheelers Braganza, as I said Nut Hume walked out and later we were told that he had described us as nothing better than wild animals with whom he could not discuss serious business. Certainly, we never met him again until the final showdown. Therefore Kingsley represented us. Now David Kingsley quite openly did not want to continue himself and was not part of the original offer that we had made to stay on on condition that we bought out. He wanted to be bought out anyway and to leave the company. And as he represented us in discussions with the NFFC, it is possible, one doesn't know, that he was influenced by his own view that he would like to get the hell out of it. What happened after some interval of nothing happening, was that we received one day our cheques for our shareholdings, requests for our resignation and these were brought round, the actual cheques and requests for our resignation, by a junior clerk from the NFFC offices, well it might have been a senior clerk, but whoever it was it was bought round by hand. So we found ourselves with quite large cheques, though not large, I think, if you relate them to the fact that we'd been on a pittance for 6 years and there we were.

We demanded a meeting with the NFFC and we were finally granted an audience at which the hostility was patently obvious and we asked who the new new purchaser was going to be, because that had not been announced. In fact no announcement had been made at all. And with great reluctance they told us Sidney Box and a group of associates which included Lord Willis. And we thought that the timing was rather, the timing of the whole exercise was rather significant because this was just before the Christmas break of Parliament, just before Parliament rose. I had no information as to when the news about Sidney Box was supposed to have been announced but because of our questioning it could not be held back any longer and it became public within 48 hours, I suppose, and was in time to be the subject of an adjournment debate before the House rose at Christmas, only a few days later.

RF: Was it leaked or was it announced.

SG: I think it was leaked.

RF: Was it your side or their side.

SG: I think it was more likely to be our side. I didn't leak it myself. Then, of course, started all the caffuffle with the press and Parliament and our lives were made a misery for the next few weeks, in the course of which we met Balcon. And it is quite clear that our agitation lead to a new assessment of the situation and the deal was suspended and the government settled down to produce new measures.

And one of the problems which arose was what was called the golden share, I'm not quite sure how golden came into it, but the object of the one share which was to be held, would it be by the NFFC, was simply so that tax losses from the early period, the tax losses for the first 6 years were those used of the previous period, in other words the company had tax losses when we were asked to join it and those were used in offsetting the loses. But it was felt that if the company went into private hands, it would be wrong for these tax losses to be carried forward beyond that. And we agreed with that view. And the other thing we felt

strongly was, as I said, any new set up the government should retain an interest, we also renewed our offer of a partial buy out if it could be, but they denied any knowledge that we'd ever made such an offer which seemed rather remarkable, but they did so deny it.

RF: How would that offer have been made. In writing or at a board meeting or in conversation

SG: It was twice in conversation, once by me in Kingsley's presence to Nut Hume and once to Tibbit at the lunch we had just the three of us, Kingsley, Tibbit, Tibbit looked a bit pale when it was mentioned, I didn't realise the extent of this hostility.

Some months before the expiry of the contract, we made it clear both to the Board of Trade, this is a memo to Arnold of about 5 or 6 years ago, we made it clear to the Board of Trade and to Hume that we were really only interested in continuing after the 6 years on condition that:

- a) responsibilities be spread and lightened by bringing in new associates;
- b) part but my no means all of our shareholdings should be bought from us as we had been on short for 6 years;
- c) the company would continue to serve independent producers, that is independent to the circuits; and
- d) ideally the government should retain through the NFFC at least a small interest on the grounds that it gave us some muscle at least when facing the duopoly of Rank and ABC.

And then in brackets, it was later denied that we ever expressed a willingness only partially to be bought out. But you have my assurance that I myself made it clear both to both Nutcombe Hume and Tibbit of the the Board on several occasions. There is reference there to a letter, but I have a feeling I did dig a letter out, where it is now I don't know.

RF: Casting your mind back did you ever have the feeling that you needed to put things in writing or to have reports of meetings, that you were dealing with some slippery characters.

SG: No, not at that time because these were conversations. Also there was a slight awkwardness that Kingsley didn't want to be bought out partially, he wanted to get up and go altogether. But he was with me on each occasion that it was mentioned so he knew perfectly, in my belief anyway. And I think the others would have gone with him. Whether we would ever have agreed on proportions, I don't know but the valuation wouldn't have been a problem because the company had been valued by the company's auditors and there was no dispute about it's value, it had been accepted both by the NFFC and ourselves.

RF: But it was more than just a vague wish, it was a very definite wish to be bought out.

SG: Partly bought out. We said we don't mind staying providing the company can be broadened, we can be partly bought out of the shareholding. It is what I said.

RF: It seems an informal way of tackling it, just in conversation, not putting it on an agenda of a meeting.

SG: It was, but the point was that they were never forthcoming on it. What they were doing was temporising while they were trying to work round. You can see it now in context, quite easily, that Nut Hume's ignorance in bringing the consortium into the frame, ignorance of what our reaction must inevitably be, is part of the general blindness and deafness on their part.

RF: And also a reflection of his ill will towards the four of you.

SG: Yes, though I think the ill will may have been there from the time the Boultings never showed up for this special dinner which they should have told them was a special dinner anyway, nobody told us that. It was very badly managed.

RF: Even if it were an example of bad manners, empires should not fall because of that.

SG: I just don't know. I can't explain that side of it. Terry is a better one to ask.

RF: Was Terry pulling strings, was he more the eminence grise at the NFFC than Hume himself.

SG: It is very hard to tell. I know I offended Nut Hume by making a satirical response when he called that conference at the Dorchester and he was very blunt in shooting me down. But he made an idiotic point anyway, so he should have been shot down. But he never showed any personal resentment. But every time he tried to threaten us into buying the company, we always came back with very articulate objections and remonstrances, so I suppose he thought we were a difficult lot to deal with. Quite the wrong man for that job. Now how much of Terry rubbed off onto him and how much of Nut Hume's views rubbed on to Terry, I have no idea.

So that was an interlude. We'd our cheques and then came the thing I described about how I ran into Balcon at Dennis Fantale's New Year's Party and he said he thought the whole thing was outrageous and he would do what he could to help. So we promptly asked him over, and in due course it became, somehow or other, the Balcon group. We were awarded the company, the right to purchase the company providinf we could but the scheme, let us say the financial end of the scheme together some date in March 64, it must have been.

RF: Can I ask a sideline, Balcon around this time is about 70 years of age.

SG: Coming up to 70.

RF: Did you ever ask yourself what his interest in involvement was, was it to be helpful, was he still ambitious for himself.

SG: To be fair to everybody, we hadn't got ourselves organised at all, because all our time since just before christmas, if my memory is accurate which it probably is on this point if not on others, I think the adjournment was the Friday before Christmas and I think the Friday was the very date they adjourned. My meeting on Mick Balcon was only on New Years Eve, so that's only 10 days, 2 weeks at the most, in advance, after the news was blown, it is only two weeks later, so we'd had no time to organise anything other than some degree of protest. And it was because of the publicity that not only Mick but Dicky Attenborough and Bryan Forbes came up and offered their support in any way they could.

I passed all this on and their messages to the Boultings and Kingsley the next day and they invited Balcon round, he put in a letter from his standpoint, complaining that nobody had been allowed to put in a rival offer; if the thing was going to be offered, why wasn't it put up for tender in such a case, why was it just awarded by the NFFC without consulting anybody to Box. It was then, Balcon was asked round simply to see how he could help and in what way he could help and it ended with him seeing whom he could get together as a group to buy it, I don't think necessarily as part of us, we could go in if necessary. And what happened is that he got a few of these people and they started to disintegrate. Attenborough disintegrated, Forbes disintegrated and the only one left in was little Woodfall, John Osborne. And Mick used to come up in the train from Sevenoaks, or somewhere, and it ended with our, I don't know exactly how it got to that point, but after a short time, the Balcon interests became merged with ours. But I don't think it occurred to anyone until the press, with their genius for labels, jumped on it, to call it the Balcon group until it was actually awarded. And then Mick was the one who was interviewed. And then Mick, I think, became completely convinced that he really founded the group and it was all his.

RF: He saw himself still as the active participant or did he see himself as the elder statesman.

SG: It is so difficult to know that, with a person like Mick who was seldom given to very positive statements. I don't know the answer to that question. I think he started off simply wishing to do anything he could to help; then he began to see himself as the elder statesman. Then when it was called the Balcon group, and the Balcon group since everyone else had hurriedly retired upon hearing the conditions, he was left holding the baby which included us. And I think it then, for the first time, occurred to him that it was really all about his group and him. Whereas, really, it wasn't. And from that point, he had to decide what he was going to be. And it was mutually agreed by all parties that he would be chairman and then they fixed his terms of remuneration, etc. But I don't think that was anyone's fault because nobody knew a) what was going to happen and b) the situation was changing the whole time. And unfortunately Mick came in, and brought Border with him, but he had no personal stake, so that he was in a bad position both as chairman and having no personal stake in bringing, for example, some of the old Ealing boys back into it or trying to. It was an invidious position. Also they didn't fit in with the group rules and the group rules had been accepted by the government in effect as a satisfactory way of

operating. At which stage Frank thought of the group rules I can't remember. I think it was after this consortium got together and nobody knew how to proceed and then Frank produced this group rule system, that you get as much as you're backing. If you had, I think I might read this passage out:

Naturally with such a disparate group as it eventually became, the new consortium, called the Balcon group of British Lion, had to have an agreed principle of operating. At first, we couldn't find one but help, if that is quite the right word, is at hand. Frank Launder evolved a cooperative scheme principally designed to stop anyone else spending our money. This principle, however illiberal it might have been, did mean that a general scheme for working was evolved in spite, perhaps of the illiberality, the general principle being that each constituent company would have a line of credit based upon its capital stake. The parent company would provide finance independently on a strictly proportionate basis. For example, if there was six companies, the parent company would contribute one sixth of the total finance for each film. If a producing company's film were successful, then it's stake would increase according to the profits and with it the credit line. If the film failed, then the company's credit would diminish proportionately. If the other companies wished to participate in one another pictures, then they could do so, again proportionately. That is what the group rules were.

What happened was that we got the company, amid scenes of great but in my view perhaps unwise jubilation at Broadwick House on the part of our staff and to begin with it worked reasonably well. We were, of course, principally concerned with backlogs, things which had gone before. And there was some dissention on Mick's part after a time about how the group rules were to work. This became acute later on. But it worked after a fashion, people began to get projects together. But the great drawback was that while the Boulting Brothers companies and ours, Launder's and mine, were uncommitted to any other film outlets, in other word, we were not hampered by any other competitive offers, everyone else seemed to be fully engaged. Osborne, Richardson and co had a steady programme, mostly financed by American companies but made in England. Similarly Janni had some arrangement, I forget with what company but he had been steadily making films with John Schlesinger and he had an obligation to do two or three at that time. Border had no experience with films and had only their investment. That means that of the group of 5, 3 can be ruled out of any immediate contribution, you might say any commitment within a year would be difficult for any of them. With us, we had things to work on. Unfortunately this situation, to simplify a controversial issue, this situation did not improve and I think during the whole run of British Lion only possibly two other films were made outside those that Boulting and ourselves contributed. Those films were Morgan A Suitable Case for Treatment and Ulysses which was in an odd position, because while it was released through British Lion, Balcon had disowned it and he had a sort of working partnership with Reade who would represent, I suppose, the sixth company I was looking for a moment ago. It was Walter Reade 1, Border 2, Woodfall 3, Janni 4, Boulting Brothers, ourselves, that's right, 6. So out of the other 4 companies, only 2 made films, and only one each and they even refused to use their best endeavours as their contract called to take Morgan to Shepperton, they wouldn't take it to

Shepperton. So we lost, neither would they agree to send the film to Humphries Labs and they were both shareholders in one sense or another. And they didn't, I don't know where Ulysses when to but certainly Shepperton and Humphries got no benefits from Morgan.

It so happened, I couldn't tell you at what time, people began to leave the ship, abandon ship, I don't know whether it's the right word but one after the other they asked to be bought out. I don't know now quite how the dates worked or who went first but eventually Kingsley and Janni asked to be bought out of Tiberia, Woodfall asked to be bought out of their interest and Border, who I think was the last, asked to be bought out of theirs. Something else happened to Walter Reade, I can't think what it was, I know he was killed but I don't know how his relationship with British Lion finished from memory.

RF: Did they have a right to cash in their investment.

SG: I don't think they had a right but they asked to be bought, I can't tell you now on what sort of basis they were bought out on, it must have been some sort of valuation. But it may not necessarily have been the same for each side. I don't remember. Anyway, as so often happens in these cases, these periods of dissention were accompanied by a period of prosperity which really owes more to the past than the present and we had a lucky stroke of films, if you like, not merely from Boultings or ourselves but also from other films we took under our wing, some of them probably didn't deserve it but they did very well. And the company and a very prosperous studio, I suppose we're into about 66, 67, somewhere around that period, up to 68, that period appeared to become prosperous. Balcon had gone by the time I am speaking of and Max Rayne had come on the board and Arnold Goodman had become chairman and from that point on I would say that the company became more financially orientated in the

SIDE 19, TAPE 10

SG: Rayne had been a new investor. I can't tell you the financial structure because I don't remember it. Presumably Rayne came in and took somebody else's shareholding, whether he bought it direct, I don't know any of that now. But all I know is that by 68, they wished to get fresh capital to make films with and we got a mortgage on part of the studio, a mortgage to get production capital, and we also made a public issue, in other words we went public. This was masterminded by Max Rayne and Hambrose and people who knew about it but we didn't pretend to know much about that side. But, of course, we got the extra capital; so we had more funds to make films from that time on until the general terms of trade swung against us. It all went well until as late as 1970 but the handwriting began to appear on the wall even if hadn't got as far

RF: This was not just British Lion, it was far more general, the film industry was going through one of its periodic downturns.

SG: The down-turn really started in the second half of the 60s, but you don't always know at the time. These things there are always leads and lags as they say in the City. Things were very high at that time, the issue was about 5 times over subscribed and I was on the allocation committee, it was quite a new experience for me, I never realised how many villains there were in places like Shepperton Studios, but you would be surprised who made how many applications, who now would be ruled out, but there were some people who made colossal applications for shares.

FR: Senior people

SG: Rather interesting. I was on the committee which had to throw them out, but no one could say that these were genuine applications. We had a priority scheme for people from the studio and 90% of the applications from the studio were okay, but there were these two which were obviously cooked up together and had some modest total like a couple of hundred thousand shares or something like that. But they were not, we asked the advice of Hambrose, he said "What do you know about these people?" He said "They cannot be in possession of such funds. It isn't possible."

RF: They were fronting for somebody or the other?

SG: He said "Well, if in doubt disallow them." But generally speaking quite a few of the studio people came in on what I call modest normal terms.

RF: The operating personnel do you mean.

SG: I forget who these two were now. We laughed at it at the time it was so transparent. I think the whole trouble with that period when you look back, we served there for 8 and a half slogging years and we got very little out of it because we had no salary, we had some minute consultation fee I think which it was felt advisable to have so there was an obligation to do conscientious things like reading scripts which otherwise weren't provide for in our contract. But that was nothing, it was utter,

utter, utter peanuts. So we had nothing else at all. From the standpoint of making films, if we'd made a film we could ask for market terms, but if we didn't make a film we got nothing. Whereas previously with British Lion we got paid whether we made films or not but the pay was so small that we couldn't, even with a certain amount of profit sharing we couldn't do brilliantly. So the situation financially for the whole of the 14 and half years was not very good, except purely in terms of being bought out.

We, I can't tell you the exact progress, because I have to look at the company reports, and I don't have all of them, I know, because I looked for them, but obviously we began to badly from about 70, it couldn't have been before that because we were going beautifully for a couple of years. And things really happened very quickly. We lost out very badly on four films, taken collectively, in no particular order, Forbush and the Penguin, Every Home Should Have One, Loot and Three Sisters,

RF: Morgan

SG: No, Morgan we didn't lose on, that was very early on. They really, I think, plus the loss of trade at Shepperton, which was entirely due to the alteration of the terms of trade, the fact that Johnson, President Johnson in America, changed the rules for investment overseas. There was a flood back of Americans back to America, the employment prospects of people who worked for American financed films in Britain dropped accordingly. So by 1970, we were into a depression area, or at least it was in sight and when it happened it happened very quickly. So that our position in every respect by 71 was getting visibly bad. I don't know to what extent John Boulting's health affected the situation because it was quite clearly deteriorating at the time, and I don't know to what extent ourselves and the board might have been influenced by the fact that Frank was now into pensionable age and I was within a year of it, so I realised that we were beginning to fade within the British Lion firmament. We were fading stars and could not look forward long to making films. But at that time, I can't tell you much about this because I never did know much about it, but the board developed a scheme to go into some sort of merger or takeover with Star Cinemas.

RF: A minor provincial chain.

SG: This was to be, I don't know what it was, a reverse takeover perhaps, I don't really know, they were anxious to go into some sort of film production and it was felt that we were too exposed to continue on our own. And, therefore, we arrived at a provisional deal which nobody seemed to approve of, nobody seemed to object to in the trade, whereby we were to merge or be taken over or take over Star. And this led to the suspension of all dealings in British Lion shares while this was in train.

But in fact, it stayed in train for a very long time. We envisaged about 3 months to begin with but it was still going on probably 9 months later. And then events happened, nothing to do with British Lion, when we asked at board meetings what was happening we were told "Yes, we're still waiting for the Star accounts." And it turned out that there were some difficulty there which later led to police action, which had absolutely

nothing to do with British Lion or any of us. Of course, we didn't know at that time it was going to lead to police action, or quite what would happen.

And while we were still waiting for these accounts, this approach, which apparently occurred while Frank and I were away, some weeks before, an approach from Barclay Securities to buy the company. And with Star's permission which, I think, looking back with hindsight could not really have been withheld but we didn't know all the facts at the time, so they gave us permission to deal with Barclay Securities. Their offer was very good and we had the dilemma, which it was, of deciding whether or not to recommend the offer to shareholders. If we'd been the principal shareholders, the half dozen or so of us, whatever the number was, we decided you could only do one. You couldn't recommend acceptance of the shares to the outside people and not accept it yourself because you couldn't recommend it on one hand and accept it on the other. So we accepted it and recommended it to the shareholders, who of course did very nicely out of it, so did we.

RF: Did Bentley just appear out of the blue one day or had they been looking for some sort of injection.

SG: I think he must have just come out of the blue, except for one thing that he was apparently, I knew during the very last stages that he was partly back by Slater Walker, or whatever Slater Walker had become. I knew Jim Slater, Walker was long since a government minister and out of it, but Jim Slater I knew had been interested in film production because I got through a roundabout connection, I never met Slater myself, but we had, unwittingly as far as we were concerned, become owned by Jim Slater. When we put up our separate companies for the purchase of British Lion, we had some private shareholdings, one was TWW Enterprises which was the business end of Television West and Wales, when they wanted to diversify, they formed TWW Enterprises. TWW Enterprises Ltd invested in Launder-Gilliat and there were two other private shareholders in Launder-Gilliat so, this was before the going public had come up, and the major shareholder of those three was TWW Enterprises. When TWW Enterprises lost their licence, they sold it, which, of course was a big concern, TWW Enterprises, they sold it to Slater, because they hadn't got the licence any more so they started to get rid of their assets and they sold TWW Enterprises to Slater, or Slater Walker or whatever it was at that time. We thus found that we had become a sort of subsidiary to the extent of a shareholding, not a subsidiary, we had become shareheld by Slater Walker and we didn't want to be. And we told the chairman of TWW Enterprises that we didn't want to be. And Slater, very kindly and I think quite generously, sold it back to us at cost so that we owned it, which meant that we had to scrape around to find the money and we found the money and we paid him off so by the time that was over, by the time we went public, we owned everything.

Whether that led to something that happened earlier than that I don't know. It is just possible that he may have been recommended to approach us through Derby, I don't know. But Slater had an interest in going into films, personally not financially, he was interest in going into films. And he had an approach made to him by a small producer. And he asked us for our opinion of it. We gave our opinion which was adverse, I may say. And he was

rather testy on the phone and we said "No, we don't believe that this is sound. It is someone we know, you must you use your own opinion but there are certain defects in the way this is set up." Now whether the previous ownership of some shares which became Launder and Gilliat or whether it was private recommendation which led him to shove these propositions our way I don't know. But it did make me think that when this offer came along some the years later, it made me wonder if Slater wasn't trying to get into films through some other avenue, because he'd never taken up the proposition put to him by other man,

And I don't think that belief or thought was justified. In fact, I don't now think tht Slater was actually still interested in making films, I don't know, but at that time I thought it was quite reasonable that anyone backed by Slater would be interested in making films. That point never has been covered. Everyone assumed that Bentley would asset strip and not make any films, or would only put up a show. But the poor fellow was attacked from the day after onwards in such terms that Slater had to move him off and change the whole thing round, I don't remember exactly how, but poor Bentley, poor chap, he was attacked from the time he bought the concern.

RF: I have a feeling that he made no secret that he wasn't coming in to invest in motion feature production.

SG: It is not my recollection of the press cuttings. He said rather contradictory things at different times. But, of course, you can guess what happened, the press, the immediate thought was, apart from asset stripping, was what stars they could photograph him with, the general approach was girls on the one side and asset stripping on the other side. I don't think he got a very fair hearing but I did at the time think that it was very likely that Slater was using this, not as a front but as a financial way of getting into the film business by buying part of it. Otherwise, if he wasn't interested at some time, why should he have been interested in looking at people's propositions. This proposition was for a series of film to be made over a period of, I won't tell you who the producer was but you would know his name straightaway, perfectly reputable as far as I know, but it was to make so many films over so many years and he had a cashflow and everything. And, of course, we had to point out that cash flows don't mean very much in films, it's what you think. A film might well do a million dollars in Minnesota, it's almost that sort of thing. You then put a million dollars down as the cash flow and oddly enough it's always the financial men who never rumble it, strange

RF: They do when it crumbles around their ears and then there's a hiatus when investment disappears bit by bit.

SG: I remember Max Rayne saying to John Boulting "How much do you think that this film will take?" And he said "Well, I haven't finished cutting it yet." "But you must know how much it will take." John said "No. We hope it will be very profitable, and we think it should be but we don't know." He said "You mean you couldn't put one pound." "We could put a modest figure down, but your can't say this is going to gross £450,000 between now and such a date, because the honest answer is we don't know. In that sense there is no such thing as cash flow, you cannot

project it because you do not know. At a certain time you can say we now think that this film will take so much more, you can update it. But even then you're updating is doubtful." And Max couldn't understand that.

RF: You said a while back that with the advent of Goodman and Rayne, the company became more financial orientated, does that mean they were imposing financial structures and strictures or were they also trying to get involved in the creative financial side of filmmaking.

SG: No, I think it would be quite wrong to look on Max or Goodman as in it for the city buck. No they were interested genuinely in film programmes. Max Rayne very definitely and Goodman as much as his time allowed him. I think they were both very conscientious but they were both men trained in high finance so they did things and suggested things that we wouldn't even have known about. For instance, we would never have thought of going public, I'm sure. We had to have it advised to us that it was a good thing to do because I don't think any of the four of us would have had a clue about how to set about it. Indeed we were very hard put as to what to advise because we didn't know enough about it. We advised consistently, so far as we asked for advice, you have to emphasise in any statement made that filmmaking is speculative. You can only say how the prospects appear to be and how far they've turned out so in the past. You can't issue written guarantees of prosperity in this business. You've got to say the film business is whatever it is. I think the odd effect of going public, which was quite unforeseen at the time, was that it meant in the end that we had no choice about taking an offer whether we wanted to or not. I make no bones about it, in my case and I think in Frank's too, at our age, knowing the background and tht we would have been out the minute Star came in, I think I wouldn't have any hesitation in saying "Yes, I recommend the offer." Because I couldn't see any more enticing alternative.

RF: You seem to have been torn throughout those 14 years at British Lion between running a company that size and also being still an individual filmmaker.

SG: That's why you have to look not at eight and a half years or six years, but at fourteen and a half years and add them up. Because we were in that position in varying degrees throughout the whole of the fourteen and a half years, and a situation of harmony. Because when we were the first British Lion company, we were never left alone by the NFFC, in one respect or another. When we started the new company, we had disharmony with colleagues, disharmony with the circuits, if you promise to be good boys nothing happens, you get very few of the things you ask for that are of continuing value. And I think it is completely clash between the administrator, the organiser and the individual filmmaker. I would say with the second British Lion we virtually ceased to be individual filmmakers, that was almost a side line.

RF: It affected the number of films you made.

SG: Disastrously.

RF: Were you as an individual torn, did you have this interest

or was it just forced upon you as it were.

SG: It goes back to the first suggestion that we join British Lion, that the immediate thing, you chaps must realise that you are going to make fewer films, Frank wouldn't accept that, not being all that practical at times. I said "Of course, Frank, it's going to cut all our production, whatever we think it is going to cut it." The idea I'm sure at the NFFC, and I'm sure David Kingsley and Douglas Collins too, basically was that David should run it and we should make the films for a song. And, therefore, we could make many films but you can't imagine the Boultings ever subscribing to a view that they could reasonably keep out of management when they were directors of the company, you had to know the Boultings to know they could never do that. But I might say neither would we have accepted that situation.

RF: Why did you stay with it so long when it wasn't a rewarding situation either financially or in terms of effort.

SG: Overall, it was very rewarding financially but not for the reasons we wanted. The first thing was legitimate in terms of what things we wanted in this sense, we were given shares well we had to buy them but they were essentially created for us in 1958, anything we did for the company which was good would benefit those shares. Therefore if at the end of 6 years we transformed the company, which we had, then it was right that we would benefit from the capital appreciation of those shares, subject to auditors expert evaluation.

Now that was money that I was very pleased to receive because it was connected with what we'd done with the company, which was largely due to the films we'd made and the decisions we'd made. The second time I didn't feel the same, because we'd never expected the benefits of selling to somebody else as such at all, or if so in an separate and different way, in some totally imaginable situation. I didn't like to benefit merely from somebody coming in and making an offer. If they'd come at an earlier stage, 4 or 5 years earlier, ironically we might have turned them down because we were doing so well. As it was, I didn't like to come out of it having made money which in itself was due to a purchase, not within the ordinary framework of the company. So I hate to do that, I don't mean I hate to receive a large profit, but again whether that profit was assessable as very large if you look back over 8 and a half years when you might have been making films, I don't know, it's very difficult to assess. I suspect that we did better out of the deal that if we'd stayed longer and made more films, simply because the terms of trade were turning in that period against the filmmaker and for no other reason. But I didn't like getting out of it in that way. But you may say that the blow was softened not merely by the profit involved but also softened by the feeling that we were on the way out anyway. In any future set up we wouldn't be wanted after say next February at that time. We would have had resign when the Star deal was consummated and at that time therefore we expected to leave the company in say 6 months.

RF: What happens to filmmakers as they get older, is it that the times change or is it that they change. Do they lose touch.

SG: It's a good question. I do find that some of the, just

being entirely or reasonably frank about myself, I think I made some misjudgements during that period; and that those misjudgements tended to be much more lethal at the end of that period than than they would have done at the beginning. I think that was partly because conditions were worse, but partly because my judgement wasn't right. I think you can easily make a mistake over one or two pictures but I did begin to wonder if I wasn't completely out of it, mentally, to the extent that if I was going to consider another film at any particular time, I might seek ways in which I could ensure against some loss of vividness like, for instance, doing a historical picture, which automatically gets you away from some of the problems of keeping up with the time.

RF: It gets you into quite serious other ones, cost and audience appeal.

SG: But I must say Loot, The Three Sisters, Forbush and one other, all worried me from the standpoint of what I said at the time. Loot, I agreed, it is true that the conditions changed and they shouldn't have been allowed to change, but that is another matter, I agreed to the project. It became hopeless trying to explain, even to Frank, because he was doing something else at the time, where the picture had gone wrong. You couldn't explain to Goodman, he wouldn't even be interested. Equally Forbush, how much was bad judgement, how much, I don't think I ever thought had we done Mr Viola an injustice because the picture was such a terrible hodge potch

RF: His account varies, but it is understandable because Al had only experience of making commercials up until that point. This is a totally different area to operate.

SG: It was as much Bryan Forbes' mistake as ours, in fact I think he made a great mistake in putting Hurt in it instead of Crawford, whether it would have made the money I just don't know. But at least we didn't agree to that proposition, but one rather different. And then Three Sisters, I felt afterwards I should have voted against it.

RF: There is a criticism of John and Roy that they found it impossible not to interfere in other people's films when they were at British Lion.

SG: I was very very conscious of that at the time. In fact, John fell over backwards to try to be tactful as long as it was possible to get anywhere over Loot I know. I was very worried about it because they always said we interfered a lot but what can one do in a case like that. In a case like Forbush, I recommended interference, it was the only way of rescuing, not saving in the sense of ensuring it's future, but from saving it from its present dreadful fate. Three Sisters was a totally different dimension and the real villain there was I think the American share withdrew at the most critical moment and left us carrying another £100,000 or £200,000 which we never intended to carry.

SG: Still on the Boultings, would it not be allied to your theory that nothing was happening unless they were present and would that not also be applied to filmmaking really.

SG: Think to some degree and I think more to the fact that neither has a brilliant memory, and I've never had a brilliant memory, and I rather used to think John had, I used to think he was always conning me, but I came to the conclusion he really didn't have a very good memory. But I do think that the dinner, the famous NFFC dinner, they listened most attentively when I gave them a run down of it the next day, but then I didn't realise for a long time, years perhaps, that they had never really seriously considered it, probably because they had an unconscious thing, subconscious, that it couldn't have been awfully important otherwise they would somehow or other have been there, even though neither had bothered to show up.

RF: I got the impression when you spoke about it first of all that they'd cut it, not that they'd forgot to come.

SG: They knew it was on. Roy had always been rather rude, grand over those things. John did intend to come but probably had got involved in some domestic upset, I suspect. He got very testy when I said, I didn't know then who was coming but I said "It's going to create a wrong impression." "You know how we feel about these functions."

RF: It is extraordinary that that evening that the British film industry took a whole new track.

SG: Well, I don't know what we could have done about it; I mean all I could after all told John was that the government, in the form of the Board of Trade and its boss and the NFFC, were solidly concerned with the rapid sale of British Lion to us. I did tell them that, of course, but you couldn't take it beyond that, you couldn't take it beyond that impression. And after all, within three months, we were being threatened with it being sold off on the side if we didn't buy it quickly. So they were soon acquainted with our situation. But I just felt that something got off on the wrong foot there.

RF: What again is so peculiar in all this is that so much was being done by the NFFC and Board of Trade with nudges and winks and tapping the side of their noses rather than sitting down and having a forthright discussion about what to do.

SG: If you look at the history, the annual Report, March 57, mentioned in scarcely veiled language that if a buyer came up for British Lion they would sell. They handled that so brilliantly that nobody noticed. I don't know whether it was David doing a bit of intriguing on the side or what but David Kingsley then apparently goes to our agent, Christopher Mann, and draws his attention to that paragraph, several months later. And we hadn't noticed it or heard anybody talk about it. Then they said "Would you be interested in buying it?" Everyone knew we hadn't any money. I said "What do you mean by buying it?" "Well getting together some money to buy it." "And what do you think will happen?" And Chris Mann said "I think you should consider it because you've stayed too much in the middle of the road, you're not as easy to sell in the States as some of my clients but your have a very good outlet here. Now if British Lion goes, your outlet may go and people like you. I think it is a good think. Obviously the government can't run it. They've got rid of Korda.

I think it's appropriate that filmmaker should run it, an actual practicing filmmaker." And we said straightaway we wouldn't want to do it alone but have no objection to a consortium being formed. But when we get down to it, it all has to be done in a roundabout way, so much so that I never discussed directly with Nut Hume that we were preparing to negotiate to buy British Lion. But in a conversation about something else entirely, what I can't remember, because I met him hardly at all, but in a conversation about whatever it was, he said "Have you seen Jarratt?" And I said "What do you mean?" "Have you negotiated with Jarratt?" Well this clearly showed that Nut was a party to the discussions which were going on but he never came out and said so. I made a remark he made, I made some remark about not looking forward to that, or something of that sort, and he said Well, I don't think you ought to be too long in the job, just got a young wife, you know what marrying young girls is supposed to do to your longevity." I remember him saying actually that. Yet he never officially said, except in the unheeded report, that they were selling it and not a word about the negotiations. The reference to Jarratt meant that he knew all about it.

RF: That was a deliberate tipping the wink to you. It seems such a peculiar way of going about it.

SG: When it fell through Kingsley was very put out and it fell through because of the variety of reasons I told you about before, the way they went about it getting us to join them was rather round the corner, by then they knew I'd approached the Boultings, with their permission, Kingsley knew it so therefore Nut must have known it, so when they came with the offer to us some months later, and the Boultings, the Boultings were included but they'd dropped one or two people off the list I'd put forward. I asked Kingsley how they came to be dropped off some time later. He said "This particular man, too much of a nuisance following up his films." Not a bad producer, they hadn't put him on the list, because we had no control over that by that time. The whole thing was clumsy. First they brought one scheme up and then they came and said it wouldn't work and the Board of Trade didn't approve. And then they came up with a scheme with seem to be utterly dreadful, I was too debilitated by a week's health farming to say no to, I said "I don't see how you boys think this is ever going to make any money. Where will we all be, earning very small sums and getting into a lot of trouble for not making the company a fortune.

RF: Did you give in easily or would you state your opinion and then go along with

SG: I've done that repeatedly. I certainly did over this deal. I think they did improve it. I have a feeling it might have been because of my objection that they brought the profit sharing element in but they consisted on cross collateralising it. If you looked at our pictures in the past, you'd generally find that one tended to cancel out the other, so you might finish exactly nil and, nevertheless, it did work out fairly well because we had big hits between us, I'm Alright Jack and Only Two Can Play, they made a lot of money. Consequently although the pictures they cross collateralised didn't make much money, if they made any, it meant there was a handsome cushion because overall they made a profit and we had a modest percentage of it. You couldn't depend

on that, obviously, it didn't work for more than 50% of the product.

RF: I mean't to ask you when we were taling about the natural life span of a filmmaker, how generally did you base your decisions, on instinct or careful consideration, individual pictures but also as a guiding star. Was it more instinct than judgement or very often a combination of both.

SG: I think very often in our case, which isn't true with most people, it was an idea we had which we very often wrote ourselves. It may not have been our idea, it may have been an idea brought to us. But very often it was one of the other. I don't think anyone had a higher proportion of original subjects than we had. If you go right through, Rake's Progress for Rank was original, Green For Danger wasn't, London Belongs to Me wasn't, Waterloo Rd, before that, was, Millions Like Us, before that, was. You've got a proportion of about 4 to 2. Then State Secret was original, Happiest Days was a play, Gilbert and Sullavan a hybrid; it was original in one sense but not in another. Constant Husband was original, Lady Godiva was original, so we always achieved 50% of original material, 50% of original material is very high.

RF: But given an idea, what made you decide to develop it. Did you think ah that will make a good film or that will make a good commercial film or the combination of those two thoughts.

SG: Very often both. I think a lot of it, somebody said, at some symposium of directors, I don't know where I heard it, but somebody said he said he approached every film with a total lack of confidence. I think I tended to do that an awful lot, which is why it was good to have an optimistic partner. You're very exposed, if it's your own script you're very exposed. Although I had terrible troubles with Peter Sellers and that drained one's energies enormously, nevertheless, if you leave that aside I had a much easier time on Only Two Can Play, although we worked with the writer, it was somebody else's script, Bryan Forbes. So you didn't have scenes that you'd had read to you before they're written down, things like that, well they were very funny when I read them, you had that as a background. But with yourself, you see, I thought that was funny when I wrote it but is it now. It's a very different mental approach.

RF: Was Only Two can Play brought to you as a script.

SG: No, idea. From Kingsley Amis' That Uncertain Feeling. What happened was that John had done Lucky Jim which was an Amis novel, and I said "Look, I've had this notion that there is perhaps a good film in that Uncertain Feeling, there is some lovely stuff in it, but I hadn't any confidence in it in the sense that I don't think one would want to pay a large outright sum and then find, I wouldn't be surprised to find I didn't want to do it. Is there any way of doing it." He said he'd get Kingsley up and they sorted out a way of doing it financially. Then nothing happened because I hadn't had time to get round to it and then they had some approach from Bryan Forbes, I forget how. But whatever it was made me say "Would you like to read this? See if you think it will make a film, don't regard yourself as the writer of it but purely as an objective opinion,

as a writer, but not the writer of it, give me an objective opinion, can you see a film coming out of it and if you do, we might be able to do something." Bryan came back and said that he had this reservation and that but on the whole he thought yes.

SIDE 20, TAPE 10

SG: And Bryan thought that it might make a film. And on that understanding he did the script. At some stage or other, it went to Peter Sellers, I think the book went to him, I'm not sure Bryan didn't take the book, and Peter Sellers wasn't too enthusiastic but later he was won over. And, as I said, Bryan said our conferences were the best he'd ever slept through but I think such talk as we had was very valuable, some good ideas came out of it and we had a good and even story to tell in the end. It is one of my favourite films that we've made but end of story.

The thing I never got to the bottom, where I got the idea from for the theatre notice, you know he's the dramatic critic of the local paper, Peter Sellers character, and he goes with one of the head of the council's wife, the wife of one of the heads of the council and they leave after the first act of the drama by the local amateur company to court each other, as the phrase used to go, in the back of the car, which is her car, and actually you see the scenery start to catch fire just before leave and they pass the fire engine on the way and think nothing of it. Of course the performance is abruptly stopped but his copy is delivered to the newspaper. So you get the fire stop press and the notice in the body of the paper which is what gives the game away to his wife and leads him to him becoming the ex dramatic critic of the Aberdarch Courier, or whatever the paper's called. And I got that story from, I am sure, Theodore's Dreiser's autobiography, in which case the theatre was in San Francisco and he left even earlier and his notice appeared in the same issue like this, an announcement that the theatre had been burned to the ground and I've never been able to trace it. I read the autobiography, such parts of it as I could bring my self to read again and I've never met anyone who knows it. But it did happen apparently to Dreiser, or whoever it was, and we put that episode in. But apart from that, the picture was really a saga of the relationships with Peter Sellers.

RF: At that time he was relatively easy to work with still or had he become quite difficult.

SG: He was a monster. But you never knew were you were with him. because he would leave bright and happy by the end of the day, by which time you knew you couldn't get home without a scotch, you're utterly exhausted. When you go in in the mornign feeling refreshed and Peter arrived on the time in the morning in a state of suicidal depression. You never, he was a vampire, not a man, terrible.

RF: DId you ever achieve a theory why he did that, was he the empty shell people say he was and he had to clothe himself in a character.

SG: I don't believe that was true in Only Two Can Play because the only clothing he had to disguise himself was a Welsh accent and things like that gave him no trouble at all. I wouldn't call

that much of a cover. And maybe it wasn't, maybe that was one of the reasons for his difficulties. But he took against the leading lady at once in Wales and immediately ordered that she be removed from the picture and this I wouldn't do. And we never did and this led to a good deal of personal animosity.

Somebody told him it should have been a Welsh girl playing the part and how silly we all were and we always made this mistake when dealing with the Welsh or something like that, characters like Harry Secombe. We were shooting in Swansea and I'm sure they all said "Oh her Welsh will be terrible and we should have a Welsh girl. So he issued an ultimatum, entirely on the strength of running over the lines with her, he expected me to fire her on the spot. I said "To begin with Peter, I wouldn't fire her on the strength of a second hand conversation." "What do you mean?" I said "Well, I wasn't there, was I, so you wouldn't expect me to fire her just because you told me that." "She's no good, hopeless, a great error" and so on. So we managed, with the aid of John Boulting, to quieten the thing down and in the end it was forgotten. But no, he had a habit of writing to people afterwards saying he would never have confidence working with them again. He'd done that with two or three people including me. I just wrote back saying I had no intention of doing a particular thing he thought that I wanted to do. That I had other plans, but meanwhile I remained obstinately his admirer, and left it at that. But it was too much hard work of the wrong time.

TH: At that time you wouldn't get a Welsh girl to do a part, there was none, only Rachel Roberts as far as I can remember.

SG: There was Sian Phillips whom I gave a reading to but she wasn't the type for what I wanted at all. I mean I wanted a pretty girl who could hold some sort of competition in looks and personality and sex with Mai Zetterling, she's a difficult artist to match up to in that sort of part. In fact. Virginia Maskell, a funny end to the whole thing, I got a call from the British Film Academy, or whatever it calls itself, telling me that Virginia Maskell had been nominated for the best performance in a British film but not Peter Sellers. But there it is. That's part of making films.

RF: Is there any other area that you feel we haven't touched upon?

SG: Well as a general recollection that I would never put my trust in a government department or the Board of Trade in any relationship to films whatsoever in the future or listen to anybody set up by them. You meet more bad faith amongst the civil or semi civil servants, I much sooner deal with actors and agents even than deal with civil servants again. And I think one of the reasons for that is it seems to me, through my connection with them over the years, and my colleagues, that the civil servants always goes for the big battalions, he always goes on the side of the big battalions. He is reluctant to come forward with a judgement which upsets the present status quo. Actually you can't say the present status quo, the previous status quo. No, I wouldn't have anything to do with a government department, government promises or anything, and preferably nothing to do with any politicians either. But civil servants are the worse.

I discovered one thing, I being an innocent I would never have thought that it is quite possible for a minister to write a letter asking for information from a civil servant about a certain situation and it is quite easy, effortless for that civil servant, to write back and indicate in slightly more diplomatic language that the reason the person has complained to him or her that he, she or them is being highly unfairly treated, is because they want something. I know this has happened and it is quite wrong. I think that a civil servant should never be in a position of discussing people's motives. He should be concerned with the set up but he shouldn't be expected, you don't expect to hear from a civil servant remarks like "Do we know where Alex Calidcott's two Rolls Royces came from?" That is not in this department. And I know about us, that civil servants have made remarks which are totally unwarranted and unjustified, entirely because it suits their book to do so and they don't have to change anything or take arms against the big battalions. I think it is a bad systems and I don't think films should have anything to do that the civil service, that the civil service as such should have anything to do with films as possible. Next to accountants, they're the worst thing that can happen.

RF: Talking very generally what has given you the most pleasure in a long career.

SG: Pleasure, that's an odd word to use in connection with making films. the least pain you mean.

RF: I feel the word pleasure, maybe there is an element of massachism, but I think people wouldn't continue such an onerous task unless they were getting pleasure out of it.

SG: I used to enjoy writing scripts and very often used to enjoy parts of making them but it is a suffering business, one reason is that you seem to be taking so long, you get so little done on the film in one day that you seem to be with it forever. Sometimes I felt I was with a film forever.

RF: Were you happier writing the script than realising it.

SG: It depends so much on the circumstances, on the subject. I enjoy writing or did. I think it's a very exacting business. I think writing a three act play is exacting too but sometimes the limits help. The trouble, in a way, is that films are limitless in frontiers and at the same time they have to be reasonably compressed. It's a very difficult form to construct. At least with a play you know you have to get it in the three acts or whatever it is. Or else, you have an open plan thing, you don't really have sets at all. But I think screenwriting is very difficult. I don't think about television writing, it's getting more and more like film writing anything.

RF: What were the difficulties that you were conscious of in writing scripts.

SG: Just difficulties in writing. There are different rules for every subject. If you are writing abroad comedy, you work generally to a certain pattern, you always have what you call the final rally in the last couple of reels or so. I don't suppose

that applies now because the nature of comedy has changed a great deal. I think comedy has reached a low in some aspects and not in others. I can't think of anything much worse than Cannon and Ball or Little and Large or any of those people, just awful.

RF: You're a brave man even to have watched them.

SG: Who says I have.

TH: You must have to pass comments.

SG: Oh no, that's the last thing a critic needs. All they need to do is to read somebody's else's reviews.

RF: If you had been John Davis how would you have created the British film industry and made sure it survived.

SG: I don't think that anybody has or could do that, has done it or could do it. John Davis, to be fair to him, if one can stretch oneself that far, he had a structure and the structure was really awfully easy to run with the amount of films going at that time and the numbers of cinemas to take them, etc., etc. Only a dramatic fall off in audiences could do him any harm and he didn't want to change it. What he didn't realise was how quickly that harm could be done when it came and how widespread the harm would be. So he was not the man to deal with a changing situation all because he had a man of exceedingly rigid mind. So you've got to have a chap postulated to save the industry who doesn't mind change.

But change at that time meant fragmentation, in order to pick the bits up and put them together in a different way, and you never get that anyway. And what if he did, we were asked that question by the monopolies commission, when I gave evidence with Roy I think it was, Roy Boulting, to one of the hearings of the commission, about 30 years ago, the 60s, it was about the duopoly. And the point was put to one of us "Wouldn't this mean increased fragmentation in the industry?" which they assumed would be a bad thing. I remember I or Roy or whoever it was replied, "We thought fragmentation was essential in order to pick it up and put it together the right way." This was received in total disinterest and silence. But, in fact, that was the only way to rebuild the business. Easy to say that, much harder to do it.

RF: So you're not talking of only fragmenting production. You would have fragmented every single aspect.

SG: In order to break up the, this was strictly about monopoly, or if you like duopoly,

RF: Are you talking about exhibition?

I am talking of the Monopolies Commission hearing about, I should guess, 69, Rank and ABC. And I think our point was alright if it's fragmented it's fragmented but it could be built again in perhaps a better form. The cinemas wouldn't just disappear. But whoever was chairman had no time for that at all. He just thought it was incredible that anybody could say it didn't matter if it was fragmented temporarily. But you needed a drastic

solution to get anywhere but nobody's ever interested in getting anywhere in these things really. And the most that came of those hearing was a kind of gentle tap on the wrist, saying do try and be fairer. Don't pencil them in, just think them in.

RF: I'm curious how you would have fragmented? How would you rearrange exhibition.

SG: I can't possibly answer those questions because I'm totally out of date anyway. I'm only saying at this particular hearing somebody said "Wouldn't that mean fragmentation?" And we said "So what." And they didn't think so what was an answer.

RF: We're not going to get any solutions from you.

SG: No. If I had any I'd say "Alright, the best way to build an entirely new house is to have nothing except the materials. You don't need to start patching up the old one." I couldn't see any situation whereby that could be achieved. But you do start by not believing the circuits, what they tell you. That is an essential starter because they always tell you that you can't change anything.

I was thinking the other day along the lines of the same subject, of young directors and whether we've ever encouraged any. This started because I read some article about feminism and the fact that there were are now a few women directors and I thought did we ever encourage directresses. And then I remembered I think it was Thelma Connaught, formerly Thelma Myers who cut a lot of our pictures and she desperately wanted to direct and I think she was allowed to do a couple of Robin Hoods, that sort of thing, under the Hanah Weinstein regime. I said to her "Look, I'd gladly give you a chance but I want to see what you can do with a serious subject and for that we don't need 6, 7, 8, 9, reels, two reels will be ample if we get the right subject. But the problem is at the moment is that theatres won't show shorts. So we put it to the theatres and pointed out what a great benefits it would be if we could lose this dreary double feature thing, get over the second feature problem which had become acute then by having two shorts. And we bullied them or cajoled them into having a few experiments. But you always knew it was a waste of time, because the questionnaires were so framed, people are so inately conservative, you don't ask them what they want, you tell them what you are going to give them and then see if they like it.

And I always thought that before the National Film School came into existence there was nothing like a good short or a series of them to teach people how to direct a film, trailing everything else and a studio, an organisation like British Lion could have afforded it. You can't afford it if you can't get the stuff shown, you've got to get a return and ideally they've got to be profitable. But all we ever got was 3 or 4 showings and questionnaires. And they'd say "Oh, the public doesn't want them. They say they don't want them, they prefer the old double feature thing." Well you know the likely way in which they formed the question, they don't want to watch short stories. Within 3 or 4 years, maybe a little more, from the date of those conversations and experiments, everybody was watching half our shorts on a thing called television.

And the public never has the slightest aversion to seeing them for half an hour, not more. And I believe that if we could have developed instead of worrying about lousy second features, we could have done two shorts for probably less half the price, we could really have trained some people up. But you couldn't ever get that proposition past the circuits, never get it passed an experiment.

RF: Do you think that there was a lot of talent which was never recognised or fulfilled in this country.

SG: I don't know the answer to that one, I don't know whether there was or there was not, but I'm sure of one thing, that by the way we structured our own industry, we made it very difficult to compete with Americans for talent, which amounts to the same thing, because in the end they've all gone, so we might just as well not have had it. I can't help thinking there must have been some better way in the past to train up youngsters than by having junk double features made generally by old, last generation directors or not very good ones anyway.

I could tell you a whole lot about second features and the undoubted corrupt undercurrent that was associated with their making and selling. To give you an instance, Only Two Can Play, we wanted to play with a long short with was John Schlesinger's first film called Terminus, which was a semi documentary about Waterloo station. It ran about three and a half, four reels, very well made and we were perfectly happy with it and there was no evidence anywhere that audiences were not. Immediately they got off the London circuits, they put in a lousy, terrible second feature which some friend of a friend had made. We never found a way to overcome that, we tried making our own second features. We tried advocating shorts, we never got anywhere with either, but I don't think anyone would have denied that if those channels had been clobbered, we would have had more trained people and more talent.

RF: Part of the corruption of the supporting programme was Eady

SG: That was part of it. And I never discovered the real strength of the racket, never, undoubtedly there was on. We made a few second features under our own supervision, we did try a few at British Lion. And they all, some mysterious way, the booker didn't want it. And the booker's choice of what he didn't want was incomprehensible, dreadful films. That's what really happens when the bookers get a say, after all they ran quite a bit of the business on very slender qualifications.

RF: Unknown qualifications.

SG: I think Wardour St is still the wrong side of the street, the whole of that part of it. We tried a whole lot. Roy Boulting did one, it became too costly. But we had about four which we regarded as superior second features. Didn't really get anywhere with them, theatres just didn't care, if somebody had wrecked the place I suppose they would have done, they didn't care. But you see John Davis, for example, he wasn't a man who took pride in the product really. He took pride in whether the usherettes had got clean fingernails and the superficial decora-

tion and the great ambition of the Rank circuit was to have every cinema looking as near like every Rank cinema, looking as near like every other Rank cinema. So, as they said, they didn't really had to advertise the product, they only had to advertise the house and the family would go and once going they wouldn't stop. That was the Rank theory. There was a time when they never displayed billboards outside, not the big ones. I remember that Granada which is so badly situated because they built the elevated road right by it, Hammersmith, I remember that place when it was a Gaumont and they uniformed it into a typical Rank house. And apart from the Rank gong it was exactly like every other cinema, because they'd taken away everything individual at the time. So you wouldn't see a huge billboard coming out of the train or the bus at all; but the idea was to publicise the circuit, the house, not the rest.

R: One suspects there was a kind of desperate hope for respectability buried in all that.

SG: I don't know.

RF: That it wasn't quite the thing to have billboards and hoardings and things advertised.

SG: There may have been a Wesleyan puritanism behind it, of course, that's quite likely.

RF: But also, not being salesmen, not being in trade.

SG: I think an element of rogues and vagabond still hands around the whole of the theatrical business, undoubtedly, still hangs about. Now it's spread to television too as well as to films. There are still rather ruffianly people

RF: The point you made about training people, for a long time there was a kind of Darwinism operated in the studios, that people did come up that way. Then television came along and actually the BBC trained people extremely well, they had very expensive and elaborate courses to do it. But now that is in process of disappearing so they won't even have a formal training, they won't even have an informal one as they had in the studio because we shall have nothing but four walls and independents. That is a major problems

SG: But you have got the film school and that has produced some people.

RF: But they're graduates doing a post graduate course. It isn't like the Eastern European schools where people are trained up from a total lack of knowledge about film. There they go with some kind of academic status and an interest in film and they're taken on a further stage, but I don't think we have, to my knowledge, a good film school in this country.

SG: I don't know how they operate, but they seem to have found a few people. Didn't Puttnam come that way?

RF: No, he began in an advertising agency.

SG: Forsyth was, and wasn't Hugh Hudson.

RF: I'd be curious about that. I know he went to Eton but that's all I do know. Then he became a director of commercials and quite succesful at that. And suddenly there he is making Chariots of Fire

SG: To me Chariots of Fire, much as I admire it, which I do, could easily be an amateur film in parts. I mean none of those people concerned with that film would be content with the quality of the Games today. In terms of general appearance and everything else they would want to to something with it, frankly to get better lighting conditions than they had for much of the stuff. But they shot through quite obviously, there is a lot of very dull photography which nobody can help. That doesn't worry me at all, in fact, I find it quite endearing. But I feel if all those same people sat down and made the same film, it would come up very different today and it wouldn't have the same almost childlike quality of charm that that had.

RF: The important films directors now, such as Ridley Scott and his brother Tony, they're all out of commercials and there is a lot of glitz there but I'm not sure what else there is.

SG: Hudson, I've only seen Chariots of Fire in the theatre; I've seen on the small screen the Greystoke one which was well done, intelligently done. It wouldn't have got me to the cinema, but a good piece of filmmaking as such but I haven't seen Revolution which appears to me the trouble was of never having a script I would guess, having read a line of it or seen a shot of it. Who was Alien

RF: Ridley Scott

SG: That was very well shot that. They did a very clever thing. They had a space picture which is the only one which more than half convinced me that it was a space picture, yet it had the most economical means of almost any. The only spectacular stuff in it at all was the landing on that ruined planet, all the rest was in the machine. But beautifully done and there was more menace and feeling of some kind of horrible life in the shot with hum of the engines on it.

A great deal of atmosphere. I've lost my copy of that, alas. I've run it a number of times just because I think it's so well and economically shot without looking economical in the cheap sense. But I think Chariots of Fire does look economical in the cheap sense, the cheapness of cost sense. But they're old hat now. They've changed all the styles since.

I still think that the tragedy was the whole circumstance and the nature of the break up of Individual Producers with Rank. Had they been able to wait, that bunch of films made then would have proved highly profitable, as well as highly prestigious. And I think it was quite enough to provide a nucleus. Should they say or had said at that time we must get rid of something, we can't keep Denham busy and Pinewood busy and Shepherd's Bush busy, etc, we can't do all that, we have to cut down, they would still have had a very good nucleus at Pinewood and the Independent Producers set up which could easily have sporned a few offshoots. But it seemed to me that they tried to keep everything occupied at once,

to present an instant programme to America for instant slotting everywhere. And it all had to be played like balancing the books, operations to be gone through merely because you them and they had 52 weeks in the year.

But the people who run the business have never been spontaneously willing to change anything from what it was when they came it. In fact "This is where I came in" is the old chime you uttered when you went into the picture half way. It's so true, people like Davis the tragedy of them wasn't necessarily what they did to people, but simply they didn't want change, they wanted to keep to everything within the set up, to get more British films into it. Otherwise that was the limit of their ambition, they never regarded films as more than one of a row of cars on a conveyor belt.

RF: There is one thing I am always curious about, a few moments ago you were talking the baleful influence of civil servants on everything in general, life as she is lived, whether or not the seeds of the Rank collapse and the ascendancy of John Davis again government policy tied in to the fact that the country immediately after the war was totally broke and had this problem with dollars and it was a very unsympathetic regime in Washington, because as far as they were concerned we had a near communist government, and the business of the 75% ad valorem tax on American films, they withdrew, Rank expanded at Government request to fill the cinemas and then Dalton settled with the Americans. And suddenly here is Rank with an enormous amount of unshowable product on his hands, 3 year back log of American movies flooded in and the Rank Organisation was way way overextended financially. I think Rank had the rug pulled out from under him to some extent.

SG: I think that was appalling but when you put it into its context, it only took a few months. And it's true we got the floodgates opening, and we got all the American films flooding in which hadn't flooded in for 6 months but this operation that got Rank into that position wasn't just a six months, nine months, even eighteen months operation. It was one which had been building up. As you said the other day, Caesar and Cleopatra had as much to do with putting the skids under them initially as anything else, probably more than any other single factor. And I know that they came back, they used the Independent Frame pictures as an excuse, they used to make these films in a great hurry to fill the gap, as the government hoped they would, and of course etc etc what you've just said, and of course etc., etc., what you've just said. But, in fact, this in itself is not true because the Independent Frame pictures were planned way before that. We must have written our papers about IF at a guess 46, or 47 at the latest. And they were planning it actually then. They didn't use it earlier because they weren't ready to use it earlier.

RF: We're inclined to forget some of the great turkeys of that time such as Christopher Columbus, Caesar and Cleopatra gets most of the kicks but there were so many of them.

SG: How much did Christopher cost

SG: Well it wasn't cheap and it went through a whole series of

disasters of ships burning and very expensive cast

SG: You have to remember, too, that is going onto a sidetrack really but Sidney Box and his wife had an arrangement by which they got special fees everytime they wrote a script. So they wrote virtually all the scripts, a very simple way of getting an extra payment.

RF: Alfie Roome tells the story of being in Sidney's office at Pinewood when they had moved there and Sidney was making some sort of deal. And Alfie said "That doesn't sound very good for the company." But Sidney said "But its very good for Sidney Box."

SG: I went to see Sidney Box for what reason I've now forgotten and he was by then a year or two into Shepherd's Bush and he had Maurice Ostrer's old office at the end of the Polish corridor. And I had quite a long talk and he was speaking exactly like someone who had licked a difficult situation into shape and, of course, I knew roughly what the pictures had cost and what they expected to get back. I said "Well, Sidney aren't you perhaps making too many pictures?" Because he was paid by the picture. "What do you mean? "Well, Ted Black a man for whom I've got great respect, even if Rank hasn't, he said you can make a maximum of 7 pictures a year at Shepherd's Bush and he would be happier with 6, the 7th was always dicey. To supervise properly, get the script right," Ted was a great script conference man, "And he reckoned it took that and he would be uneasy with anything over six and certainly over seven." Well he was scheduling 16 in the second year, I think, Sidney. I said "I have worked here, I know how it works, I know your costs have one up anyway. It seems to me it is much more sensible to make fewer pictures." And he said "I don't suppose ours cost any more than yours." I said "What do you think ours cost? Take Waterloo Rd, I know what it cost, it cost £92,000-£93,000." "Oh nothing like that, you're quite wrong." I said "No I'm not. After all I directed it and I have access to the budget. I don't know the last accounted figure on it but I would be surprised if it was in excess of £100,000 and I'd be expect it to be nearer 92 or 93." He said "We'll find out." They sent down for the books and it was 96. He was staggered that it could be 96. He said it would cost at least £126,000 now. It's peanuts today but at that time, I said "Well you see, that was made in a system." I don't think he was using Islington at the time, but if you added Islington together with Shepherd's Bush, you could probably jack up the whole lot by not more than one or two films a year. That is the answer. There is a capacity, is there not, and supposing we always had sufficient talent in our days available to Shepperd's Bush Studios, Ted Black reckoned it could take 7 maximum a year and Sidney Box saying it was 16 and got somewhere near it towards the end. The place went bust really. And it's the answer, you don't do it by quantity. You get it by what you can get in or what you will take. Ted Black would never have worried if two stages were empty. He would have noted the fact and said "Oh, we must do something about that, make up for that sometime or other." But he'd never have panicked. He never regarded his job as filling the studio.

I got a call from a friend on the fringes of the business informing me that the French, he had heard from the British Council that the French had chosen us to be the homage for this year at Cannes. And the British Council wanted to know what films we thought of ours should be shown there and wished to make arrangements and hoped we could come. It appears that in the last couple of occasions that the French are the inviters, and this case they certainly were, whereas at the time of Mickey and Emeric, it was still a British invitation, although the French supported it. Now it's really a French invitation with the British supporting it and the British council gave us very good support.

We found that the President of the Cannes Festival, Gilles Jacob was very well acquainted with our films and received us very courteously and gave an excellent reception. The master of ceremonies was a gentleman called Pierre Rissient who was a complete encyclopedia on our films and asked the most amazing questions and also introduced us to the homage audiences. And we were also given a reception at the British Pavilion at which a great many British filmmakers, television people and journalist were present, even the Minister for Films, or whatever he's called, Mr Ford, I think his name is, although that wasn't necessarily in our honour. I'm sure it wasn't. He had a very frilly shirt on, I don't trust people in frilly shirts. And what can I say, the films went down very well.

Poor Frank couldn't go, having suffered this stroke in October, his wife deputised very ably for him, and I think the most heartening and encouraging thing was the knowledge of the French, the fact that while there may not be a Lauder and Gilliat cult yet in France, there seems to be a very healthy nucleus, at least, and I wish our British filmmakers and particularly critics and writers on films knew and were as interested and enthusiastic about our films as, for instance, Bertrand Tavernier who is regarded pretty well as the number one French director of the day and who was prepared to talk about our films for hours on end, certainly half hours on end.

I was met at the airport, the plane was late, by a festival car flying pennants. It's rather impressive to be, to find the police standing aside, opening barrier up and sending you the wrong way down one way streets.

On the whole, it was a very good experience and a very encouraging one. The only thing I feel is that we might have had a bit more attention from the British press because it is an honour, however ancient we may be as filmmakers, it is an honour to be chosen with the film history and the sophistication of the French, it is a considerable honour.

I had to make one short speech and I said I felt myself it was an homage a la veillesse which went down very well as a remark, but may have some truth in it; but, nevertheless, it is an honour and I think it could have been a little more openly welcomed by the British, not the British Council who couldn't have been

better or more supportive or better organised, they were marvelous. But perhaps we can look forward when our credits are on tombstones, we might look forward to a small clique of Launder and Gilliat fans in the next century.

RF: Do you know how the French perceive you. What it is especially about your films that interests them.

SG: Quite a lot of the dialogue, which is surprising, was spoken by them and Tavernier, in particular, who speaks good English, was very acquainted not only with the films themselves but with the dialogue and remembered lines and quoted them, two things you can't fake and undoubtedly it was genuine. I think they liked the humour, and in the case of the Rake's Progress, the social element, the life at the times, the fact that it does satirise in ways that escaped attention at the time, it satirises things which are now more easily perceived.

RF: Yes I'm sure stylistically the film was ahead of the time.

SG: I think that the British critics missed entirely the significance of the national government election being mentioned, it was never picked up and a complete sequence is located on the night of the great election of the national government.

RF: The English never take kindly to being satirised.

SG: I don't think we ever got much resentment. But an awful lot of stupidity, the Daily Worker, that great organ gave it a very good notice but they said that they were sad to see the old snobism still present as having the hero as an old Etonian. They missed the point totally.

RF: What other films were shown.

SG: Green for Danger and Dark Stranger. I was present at the first two but I missed Green for Danger because I was scheduled to visit Frank. But I was told that Green for Danger went the best of the lot. I would like to have shown State Secret because I think that is very apropos to the moment.

RF: How did they project them

SG: They had a gala showing the first night, They had a morning show in the same theatre the next morning, a nice theatre, for Dark Stranger and they had the next morning, the same theatre Green for Danger.

RF: Was it an invited audience or a paying audience.

SG: They applied for tickets, I don't think they paid, you just get tickets or you don't. There is the great business of applying for them. The chief demand is either for the sensational pictures or the competition pictures because you have to have passes to go everywhere, you can't get into a British pavilion without a pass.

RF: A brief word about Frank, where is he living

SG: Monaco.

RF: His health.

SG: He had a severe stroke and he is slowly recovering. He is recovering undoubtedly, very sad. He knew all about it. We were able to tell him all about it. I think he was very pleased really.

RF: He hasn't lost his mental faculties.

SG: No, I'll give you an example. I told his wife, because she didn't know him at that time, the story Frank had told me when he was at Elstree and he was sent on some important business, like paying for the rights of some book or something, I don't know what it was. And how he'd had a hurried lunch at Lyons' Corner House or something before he went to this office where he had to meet this, solicitors, accountants. And when he went to lunch he upset tomato soup all over a brand new suit he had on. Of course, you couldn't do anything with it, it was a light grey suite and he couldn't do anything with it. And I said, soups in those days for chaps earning a magnificent sum of £4 a week came hard, and Frank nodded vigorously. And I said to him I don't know what this happened over. And Frank said "Atlantic." I said "Do you mean the film, Atlantic?" He said "Yes." "What were you doing? Was it the rights?" "Yes." And he said "When I got there," and he said this quite clearly, "There were at least a dozen people there and I'd expected one or two and I was covered in tomato soup." He remembered all that and he was able to put me right on what it was, signing the contract for the rights of Atlantic, the Dupont film. Clive James used that, had a programme showing funny bits of the film.

RF: Atlantic always turns up with that piece of expressionist acting, doesn't it.

SG: Where he turns his back, John Longden "The ship has four hours to live." It takes about twice that long. The story around that is when Frank was present, when Dupont was shooting this scene, he came off the floor and into Mycroft's office, and he said "I need something to take John Longden off." Mycroft said "What do you mean, Mr Dupont?" He says "The ship has four hours to live, well, I've got to get him off, he's got to go back. I need something to take him out." "Well, we'll think of something." So they get in a couple of more writers, Monckton Hoffe, who was there at the time, Frank, Frank Miller, Mycroft himself, they all sit and think. Finally, no one has a sensible suggestion, it's a difficult thing a one liner. Finally Mycroft says "How about 'Well, I'm off.'" He remembered these stories quite well, Frank.

TRANSCRIPT ENDS