INTERVIEWEE: CHRISTINE COLLINS
INTERVIEWER: BRIAN LANGLEY
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BL: This is the BECTU history project, the date is the seventh of March, 1995. The interview number is 345, it is of Christine Collins. The interviewer is Brian Langley.

Good morning. Hello Christine, good morning.

CC: Morning Brian.

I wonder if you could start at the beginning and tell us your biographical details, in effect where you were born, school and how you progressed to your first job. Over to you, Christine.

Right, well. Well strictly speaking, I was born in Potters Bar but moved fairly swiftly down to Winchmore Hill, Palmers Green area, north London and the date was 1941 and I went to all the local schools and so forth and then progressed to what was called then Southgate County Grammar School. So it was just a general old education. Didn't like it much, but I was very average. I got average marks in everything; I came average, halfway down the class and all that sort of thing. I liked drawing and geography and I liked photography, still photography, I used to take quite a lot of it at school, not very well but it was photography, because my grandfather was very interested in photography and he also at one time, before I came around, had in fact a movie camera and did a lot of family filming which, much to my sorrow, he gave away the film to a distant cousin of mine and I've never seen it. But he in fact did build his own little home cinema in a back bedroom because his brother-in-law helped to, I don't know, pull down a theatre or cinema in Enfield many years ago, this must have been the thirties I suppose, early thirties, he had tip-up seats in there and everything. That must have filtered through to me to a certain extent. I left school when I was fifteen, as soon as I could [laughs] I left school, get rid of that, and I swore I would never say they were the best years of your life, which everyone said you would do, but I haven't up to now.

May I interrupt for a moment? You tell us you were born in 1941 – do you have any recollections of the war? Did it impinge on you?

My mother and I spent – because my father was in India – my mother and I spent the war, I think – well we were evacuated for a while to Derbyshire on a farm, I don't remember

very much about it, you know, the usual things about a dog and, you know, cows and the farmer saying, 'Mind the muck, kid' and all that. That's about all I remember, but generally speaking I think we lived with my grandparents in Winchmore Hill, the grandfather that used to like photography and filming and so forth, they ran a shop, they had a newsagent's and tobacconist's shop. And I remember hearing, you know, bombs and things, raids I suppose it was, but I wasn't that old really to work it out. And I also remember at one point I was woken up, what I thought was in the middle of the night, and someone said, 'Wake up, it's…' either VE or VJ, and I don't know which one it was, 'it's VJ night' and because the shop was next door to a public house everyone was dancing outside on the pavement and they made me look out the window and I was very cold and I really wanted to go back to sleep. And that's about it really. And I remember my father coming back from India and that's it really.

Thank you very much for telling us that, Christine. This tape is for historical reasons and people are interested in those details.

One thing I do remember, just to add Brian, is that again sort of a slight film connection, my father being in India, he was in the Royal Engineers to do with the railway, but they had a film unit come to them to film all these soldiers to say, you know, a message back home, and I remember going with my mother and sitting on her lap up to somewhere, I don't know where, it was rather like a church hall or something, we sat there and watched all these men in khaki shorts come on to the screen and say their message.

I can tell you the name of the cameraman, it was Jackie Achelor [ph], I think, because I was in India with a film unit and that message home unit turned up on several occasions, I remember it well.

Oh right.

Now, you just said you remember the cold and all that, and I remember you telling me that when you lived with your grandparents how in the winter morning you'd wake up and the windows were covered in frost because this was before the days of central heating. So modern people won't realise that in our youth, windows in winter became clouded with frost and snow.

On the inside!

On the inside, yeah, on the inside, quite so.

Ice on the inside.

You'd better carry on.

Right. Well, when I left school at fifteen, because I was in my grandparent's shop quite a bit, I used to serve there even when I was very small, we knew a lot of people and somebody who lived just down our road was called David Garner, and he was in fact – I left school at fifteen so it must have been 1956 – he was in fact, quote unquote, the editor for a new couple that had appeared on television called Armand and Michaela Denis. They'd first started by being interviewed by somebody or other – I've got it written down here somewhere – by I can't remember who, never mind [laughs]. Anyway, they were interviewed because they had made films of wildlife for the cinema and so forth, and they were interviewed and showed a few films on television, hence that led to a short series of specially made films of wildlife on television. Anyway, he was their London base and helped with the finishing of these films for the TV and he lived just down the road and I knew his daughter, also whose name was Christine, so we had a slight connection and I used to go and play with her and so on. Anyway, he asked my grandmother now that I'd left school what was I going to do, and she said oh, I didn't know. I hadn't got much interest in being an insurance clerk or a bank clerk as many of the girls at school, they all said, 'I've got an interview'. And I thought well, when I leave school I shall have the school holidays off first, treat myself to lots of time off, then I'll see. But I knew that I didn't want to do anything mundane, I wanted to do something interesting, something maybe with photography. Anyway, he heard this and he said well, we need someone - he'd got an office then at Southgate which was about a mile and a half up the road - we need someone, tell her to come up and see if she likes it. So I was up there like a shot. And they'd got this small series of rooms which were cutting rooms and sound recording and soundtrack compilation rooms, and I went up there and swept the floor and made the tea and at the end of the week he said, 'Well do you like it?' and I said, 'Oh yes, yes, yes'. So I was taken on. It was very basic. Armand Denis – the couple were called Armand and

Michaela Denis and their film series was called *On Safari* and I think about two years previously to that they had won the BBC award for the best factual programme, probably in 1956 or 4 or something like that. Although television in those days was only black and white and it was only BBC1, and it probably stopped at half past nine at night or something, Armand filmed everything on 16mm in colour, positive Kodachrome 1. And although we were cutting rooms he in fact did edit all his films himself at his home in Nairobi on the master Kodachrome 1 with cement splices, but without the titles. He would then write a script, commentary for each programme. Each series for the BBC consisted of seven programmes. [10:00] So he would write this commentary, he would record it all himself on to quarter inch tape, he would then ring round certain paragraphs that were suitable for his wife, Michaela, to say, because she wasn't terribly good at speaking, [laughs] so he made sure he read it all first. Then she would stumble her way through that. In the early days also they would record an introduction to camera, their cameraman was Des Bartlett, who is now considered one of the finest wildlife photographers around. He was Australian and they met him in Australia when they were doing some cinema films, but he came to live in Nairobi with them, or just outside Nairobi in Kenya with them. So they would do these to camera introductions, sitting on their balcony or whatever it might be, to introduce each programme. They were pretty difficult things to film because Michaela could never remember her lines and all that sort of thing. Armand had in fact, I mean bearing in mind this was late fifties, and they used to record the sound on to quarter inch and the film obviously was 16mm on an Arriflex, but it was a standard Arriflex, it wasn't blimped in any way, so Des, if they didn't film on the balcony and they filmed indoors they had a sort of, I think Des Bartlett and the camera was in another room and there was a glass through the door just to stop all the noise and all that sort of thing. But Armand had invented his own Pilotone system and they used a portable EMI reel-to-reel recorder, which was the sort of chunky, about eighteen inches long, chunky dark green quarter inch recorder, and he added another head which I don't understand the system too well, but which recorded the make and break signal, there was a make and break switch in the camera and this recorded on to the tape. The head was mounted upside down so it recorded on the bottom half of the recording, and so forth. Then we read that when it came to us and we transferred it on to 16mm using an absolutely terrible, a 16mm fully coat magnetic recorder, whose name completely escapes me and yet it was ingrained on our memories for years. And this was a variable speed 16mm recorder, you had to keep it in speed and the way to keep it up to speeds, for example, if you ran a projector and you

pointed the light at this 16mm fully coated sprocketed magnetic recorder. If the recorder was running at the same speed as the projector then the sprocket holes would appear to stand still.

Stroboscope.

That's right. And if it lost then you'd turn the wheel one way and they'd all scoot back and stand still, and if they scooted forward then you'd turn the wheel the other way and they'd scoot back again, and so forth. And so this little make and break thing on the EMI recorder, when we got it, now it ran a little bulb which came on and went off and came on and went off. So it had the same effect as the flickering of a projector and thereby we were supposed to keep this magnetic thing in synch. And it worked, it did work. It was hard work, but it worked. And so although he'd edited all the main body of the programme, then we did the head and ends and we added titles and in fact Gateway Films, who were in Palmers Green - we were in Southgate a mile and a half away - they shot title captions for us and so on. And eventually the film would be presented to the BBC, although it was shot colour the BBC would have a black and white print. So the colour went through a black and white dupe neg and then they made a print and they had an optical print, but the BBC also had a separate magnetic track as well so that if anything went wrong they – well, they would use the magnetic for the quality – if anything went wrong the theory was that they would flick a switch and they were on to the optical track. We used to dub the films up at Southgate, very tight deadlines. In fact we were dubbing next week's programme while this week's programme was being shown on the TV and we always seemed to be dubbing late at night, nobody ever worked sort of normal hours somehow. [15:07] And we were dubbing one night and we stopped at whatever time it was, the programme used to go out I think about quarter to seven, something like that, we came down about seven o'clock, we came downstairs from where we were dubbing and we had, we didn't have a television, we had a radio which used to be a radio and television, so we could get television sound but we hadn't got television picture. Anyway, we turned the sound on to the television channel and they were playing music, the BBC were playing music. I mean television used to break down every night in those days so, you know. And we thought why the music, you know? So we phoned the BBC and they said the magnetic track had broken. So we said well, all you need do is flick a switch and you're on to the optical track. Well of course they didn't know that, spent ten minutes

trying to mend this magnetic track. Anyway, so that was one of the things I remember about that. But a lot of the early programmes were solid music behind them, all chosen from the old 78 records of Boosey & Hawkes and Francis, Day and Hunter and all that sort of thing. And so we used to have to mix those down live, so you'd run the programme and you'd run this terrible 16mm sprocketed machine and you'd have a cue sheet and you'd have the commentary all lined up on a Vortexion, which is a reel-to-reel quarter inch machine, rather like a Ferrograph except that it was longer.

May I interrupt a minute?

Yes, of course.

You said that you joined this firm in Southgate sweeping the floor, now you're talking as if you actually did all these amazing – how did that happen?

Well, the one good thing about David Garner, and as we speak now he is still alive as far as I know, living in Scotland, but one good thing about him was that he was very laid back and he was a man who smoked a pipe and he wore a duffle coat because he thought that's what film people did, you know, and he was very nice and laid back, but one good thing about him was that he would teach you things and let you have a go at everything. So I mean although I swept the floor and so forth they would say, you know, within a week or so – I mean there was only, I'd better say that there was probably only four people working there, maybe four, and me, when I first started – and so within about a week or a fortnight they would say well, you know, we're going to show you how to lace a projector. Now these were 16mm projectors, it was the old Bell & Howell 601, the one in the old brown leatherette case and so forth, marvellous old thing. And they had a young lady there who would deal with the films as well, and so she said, this is the projector and you put the film in the gate there, you see, and then you go under there and over there, under there and up on to the take up… And I looked at this and I thought, well I'll never learn that, but of course, you know, you did, it's quite easy. And because they recorded their own soundtracks, which, when you look back were terrible really, absolutely dreadful, but in those days, you know, the quality of anything was pretty low. And so because they recorded, they compiled the soundtrack to the films that Armand had edited and because there was an awful lot of music choosing to be done and mixing as well, that he would just

let me try any part of it, it was very, very good and various people left too, as well, to go on to other things and so, you know, we got down to about three or four of us there and so everybody had to learn to do everything. And so the set-up was really, when you came to dub you'd got this pile of records, 78 records all in line in order that they were to be played throughout the film, you'd got quarter inch tape with his commentary in line with just little bits of coloured leader between the paragraphs where there would be a pause, and then you'd have this 16mm film, fully coated magnetic recorder at one end. [20:08] And everyone had cue sheets and it was cued off by footage so that, I have to say, I don't quite know how to describe it, but if you imagine a long wall in a room, and at one end there is a door with glass in it, the other side of that door is a projector, and that projector points to the opposite wall. Now on the wall where the door is, is a long bench where we all sat. We stared at the wall, but we didn't stare at the wall, but we stared at a very long mirror, and this mirror reflected the picture that the projector was showing on the opposite wall, so we could all see the film. Through the door from the projector came a long cable, a metal cable. Inside was another bit of metal that was linked to the inching gear of the 16mm projector. So as the projector ran, the metal inside this cable could be connected to a counter, so as every foot went by this counter went one, two, three – it was a footage counter, so that was alright. So now we've got a method of cueing off things. If you started the film at zero and you zeroed the footage counter then all the cue sheets all made sense. This was, I mean sounds primitive now, but this was strangely enough quite way ahead, I think Gateway was still going with blue lines and punched holes in the film to cue off things, you know. And so we would all sit in a line and to answer your question, Brian, earlier on, David Garner would say to me, well do you want to have a go at mixing? So I'd say yes, I love it. So they had a Vortexion mixer which had four enormous pots on it for four inputs. So you would drop the first record down and everybody started up, the projector started and the magnetic recorder started and you dropped a record at the right time, at say, 999 or something and in it came at zero and that was the title music and you faded that down and Mrs Dunn, Winnie Dunn was also there and she was a whiz on the quarter inch thing. She'd got this on pause with the commentary, you see. So at twenty-five she'd let off the first paragraph and I'd lower the music and Armand would say his bit, you see, and then she'd got a pause mark on her script, so she'd got to pause at the end of that paragraph and up comes the music again, and so forth. And so it went on all the way through. One would have records, not only music records, but primitive records of sound effects, you know, birds. It's usually birds, water and jeep were about the only

thing we had, you know. Sometimes we would have another quarter inch just for a few sound effects that Armand would actually record on location of his jeep or his Land Rover as it was later on, and so forth. And that's how it was in the early days, I would think it gradually progressed very, very slightly. [laughs]

May I ask, in this line of people sitting side by side, how many people were there?

Well, there'd be four. One swinging the discs, then as it was, say I was on the mixer, and then there would be Winnie Dunn letting off the commentary on the quarter inch, and then some poor person staring at the moving or still sprocket holes on this magnetic recorder at the other end.

Good Lord.

Yes. So you can understand why we were still dubbing probably late into the night. [laughs] And if anyone made a mistake we'd have to put money in the charity box. [laughs] But then later on we progressed to actually going out to dub and we used to go to Kay's Carlton Hill, to their recording studio there.

Charlie Parkhurst [Parkhouse] I remember worked there.

That's right. And Mrs Parkhurst [Parkhouse] used to be the neg cutter at Gateway Films. So yes, Parkhouse, yes. Charming couple and I can't remember any of the names of the lads at Kay's, but I think there was a Jimmy somebody and Alan somebody – can't remember now. They were all very, very good because we used to, we were still fairly primitive. We'd already organised our commentary on quarter inch and music if any and sound effects on another quarter inch machine, by now we've got two quarter inch machines, and we used to lug these great things up to the studio at Kay's Carlton Hill and their audio dubbing studio was on the top floor of what was something like a three-storey building and our poor driver used to have to lug these Vortexions up, which although they've got handles on and are called portable, it was a misnomer really, you know. And so the lads at Carlton Hill who, you know, obviously had got rock 'n' roll and 16mm and all this sort of thing, to see these women turn up with these quarter inch machines, you know, they laughed a bit when we started but they soon got into the swing of it. They

certainly admired the accuracy which – we could even let off car door slams and things off quarter inch and get them in synch merely by just letting them off at a certain footage time and so forth. They were quite amazed at this.

Do any of these prints still exist?

Yes.

So a student listening to your account of what happened has only got to get the print and see how effective it all was.

Yes, possibly, yes.

In comparison with today's.

Yes. I mean Armand Denis did in fact, towards the end of his life, did in fact sell all his material. He made 105 half-hour programmes for television and he did in fact sell all the material to America, which was subsequently re-edited into all sorts of odds and ends. But the BBC often want to use pieces from the archives and they have difficulty trying to find someone who now owns the copyright to clear it, really. And it's almost impossible, they've just sort of disappeared really. But some of us that worked there still have the occasional prints.

For the benefit of the students of the future, how many years was it Christine, between when you first arrived in their office to when you were turning these knobs and became the wizard of the four-man crew?

[laughs] I don't know. Not many, I wouldn't think. I wouldn't think many.

And how many years altogether were you with Armand and Michaela?

Eleven.

Eleven years.

Yes.

And why did they give up?

Well, the BBC really retired them. Put it that way. I mean Armand was, he was at least seventy-two I would think when they retired, Michaela's much younger. But things moved on and I mean they were very successful and they were very popular with audiences because they not, I mean they were really, they were really the first to bring wildlife into your home on the television, you know, each week. Them and Peter Scott, Peter Scott would but he concentrated mainly on birds and so forth, whereas they would show African animals and Armand was, I mean he was a naturalist and felt strongly about wild animals and things. They would also show tribes of Africa who still lived in tribal ways, even in those days, and that really is a great regret of mine really because although the tribes don't wish to be, perhaps at the moment, wish to remember what it was like in tribal times, and maybe they were held back by colonials and all that sort of thing, and all they wanted to do even then, Armand used to say, all they want to do is to wear a Mickey Mouse t-shirt, you know. And that of course was quite right because they wanted to modernise themselves and have what everyone else had. But in actual fact, what they had in their own tribal ways was terribly well organised and so forth. [29:51] Anyway, despite that, the film that he took of tribal life in many parts of Africa would be a marvellous record nowadays, but this presumably has now disappeared somewhere in America, but… and that's a shame.

Well, that's very interesting, lovely in fact. Now, as they used to say in those times you mention, time marches on to Armand, he's retired off and you have another job – how did all that happen?

Well, the office at Southgate for Armand of course didn't just exist whilst they made films for the BBC, he sold his films all over Europe and so we were kept busy sending out prints and so forth to Europe. But when the BBC didn't renew the contracts, then everything stopped really because it was the BBC's money that financed the whole affair. And our office was merely there for him, although he was an American citizen – despite being Belgian he was an American citizen – and he couldn't run a business in this country so

whoever ran the cutting room was the head of it, but it was only for him. He paid all the bills. And so when they retired obviously that's the death knell for the cutting room and everything and it had to be closed and you can imagine the amount of film that was there and the amount of equipment that was there had to be packed up, sold, thrown away, whatever. So there was a certain four months, six months, whatever, I don't remember, where all that had to happen. At that time we knew obviously Gateway Films and Hugh Baddeley because Hugh and David Garner were great friends and they had in fact been in the Planet Film Society together.

Interrupting you – the Planet Film Society I understand was a marvellous amateur film society. And it's still going I believe?

It is, yes.

Marvellous, you must tell us about that later on.

Yes. But anyway, so they knew each other and Gateway did work for us at Southgate and we did certain things for them from time to time. And Hugh – David Garner by now was not associated with the *On Safari* office at all, he'd moved on to something else, and so I was the head of it by now. And Hugh heard that we were closing and Hugh Baddeley's young lady that laid his soundtracks was wanting to leave. So he came up and saw me and said would I like a job. So I had in fact applied to the BBC, I did go for a BBC interview but I didn't get it, I didn't care for it much anyway, anyway I didn't get it.

You didn't have a degree!

Well, I don't know what it was. Anyway, I probably didn't know enough, I mean I'd been working quite, vaguely primitively one might say. And anyway, Hugh came up and offered me a job so I took it. But I said, well I have to close this office, I have to be working here. So we worked it out that I worked, I think his girl had left by now, I did come down and meet her once, but she'd been left. And so I came down and did two days at Gateway and three days' clearing up at Southgate and so forth, and moved on. They of course were working in the correct manner [laughs] for laying soundtracks. They had a

rock ‘n’ roll recording machine running four play off tracks of fully coated 16mm magnetic, one record track and one projector unit, all in one long machine.

So there were six channels: four recording, one projecting and one…

Four playback, one record and a projector. And they were all connected by a shaft, so they were kept in synch because they all ran off the same shaft, you might say. Which I’d never seen – well I had seen a machine like it, but I’d never worked one before – but I mean I knew the theory of the thing so I just had to sort of busk my way through. And whereas at Southgate we had used merely for… we had to do a certain amount of neg cutting, obviously just to finish off the films, we had used a wonderful Moviola four picture four-way, it was nothing more than that, it was only driven by, you know, you had rewinds and this four-way just to keep four pictures in synch really, but it was a wonderful Rolls-Royce thing. Came to Gateway and they’d got a Pic-sync, which was one up of course from there, because they showed one picture and three soundtracks… start again. It was a four-way; one read the picture and the other two were able to read the sound of the magnetic, which they’re now called Compeditors, but this was slightly more primitive. Made by Acmade, but was the sort of Ford Escort compared to the Rolls-Royce of the Moviola. The gearing of the Moviola was superb and everything.

Interrupt you. Acmade meaning, I believe, Adams, Myers, made by.

Really? I didn’t know that.

Atkins… I can’t remember it now.

Atkins made. Made by Atkins.

Yes. Two chaps from BIP.

Oh right. Well I never knew that. Anyway, so the idea is that the same as they do nowadays for film, is to lay your tracks physically on 16mm magnetic in synch with the pictures, so you have one roll of magnetic dedicated to commentary and the other, in our case, the other three rolls are dedicated to whatever else you would like, and if you want to

fade from one sound to another then you lay the first sound on track one, roll one, and you lay the second sound on roll two – all rolls were the same length and the bits in between were filled in by leader. And so that's really what I had to do for there. But I had come down occasionally when their girl was off sick to choose music for them because in those days most of their films were fully music as well, their films. I remember having to work evenings when their girl was off sick and choosing music for some charity film in India or something, I don't know. I'd only ever chosen music for elephants and giraffe and things like that and suddenly there were people all over the place.

You've described the dubbing suite, now did you ever at Gateway go out on location on one of Hugh Baddeley's, or several of Hugh Baddeley's Gateway films?

Yes, yes. Well, when I first came the sound department was organised at… the girl I replaced, what we did was the actual track laying, choosing music and track laying. There was also an engineer, who also did the mixing I might say as well, but there was an engineer who looked after this monster of a machine, which was called a Bomar – B-O-M-A-R – made in Italy by some mad inventor I think, as far as I can make out. I think he made two; we had one and Colour Film Services had the other one, they very soon ditched theirs which was very, very sensible because this thing was extremely temperamental. So at that time Gateway had this engineer. He was Polish and quite a character. But he would do all the sort of mechanical things of recording, you know, if you wanted fifty foot of birdsong, Gateway had a large quarter inch tape effects library of various things they'd recorded on location or recorded during filming, then he would record it for you and then you could just sit at your bench and track lay, you see, and so forth. So he was a help. [39:58] Unfortunately, not long after I joined, he fell really quite badly ill and subsequently unfortunately died, so that left me really with this huge machine and the track laying and in the other room the mixing console as well, and of course where we recorded the commentary as well and so forth. So after about two or three years I suppose, I suppose I was totally in charge. But, to answer your question, he used to be the location sound recordist, but of course when he was ill or when he subsequently died, then I went out as well. Gateway had a Nagra 3 quarter inch machine with Pilotone picking up the synch from their Arriflex. They had two standard Arris and – unblimped – and an Arri BL. We also purchased a rifle mic, Sennheiser 805, which we still have. And later on we also purchased a second Nagra 3, in fact it was from Tony Dawe who was at that time the

sound recordist on *The Sweeney* and he moved up to Nagra 4 and he sold his Nagra 3, so we bought that as well, so we had a Nagra 3. I rather liked going out on location, it was rather interesting because I think in general working in the film industry is like nothing else, as you probably know Brian, because no two days are ever alike, and that's fine by me because I've got a fairly short interest span. I can be quite concentrated when I like, but generally speaking I've got a short interest span and so that's fine by me. So going out on location was another dimension as well, and also…

Can I just pause there?

[break in recording]

[46:54]
This is side two of the recording 345 of Christine Collins. You were telling us about the jobs as a recordist you had done with Hugh Baddeley.

On location, yes.

On location.

I think the first one I ever did was, he was asked to make a film about some health food elixir or health elixir and subsequently this was invented, or whatever you'd like to call it, by some health company and it was endorsed by Barbara Cartland. Now Barbara Cartland lives not far from here, Essenden, so it was arranged that they would film Barbara Cartland speaking to camera, you see. So I was to go and be the sound recordist. Well, I didn't really… I wasn't quite sure how to tackle this sort of thing and we hadn't even got the rifle mic then so one had to take the studio mic and put it on a permanent boom arm and so on, because we didn't have a neck mic or anything and I don't suppose Barbara Cartland for a moment would have had one around her evening dress at twelve o'clock in the morning. And so we all traipsed up to Essenden. Well, first of all we went actually – whether you want to know this or not – we went about a week before to speak to her and Hugh took me and I think the cameraman, he took somebody else, it must have been the cameraman, Robin Ridgeway, and we went to tea with Barbara Cartland. And she was very charming, very charming indeed and without all the make-up she looked much better

[laughs] and the tea was served by the butler and all this sort of thing. He brought in the little table with a tablecloth on it and the honey and walnut cake and, you know. And then he disappeared, you see, and no-one had poured the tea out, but me being the only 'gal' there, apart from her, then it was down to me to pour the tea. And I don't know, being dragged up in Winchmore Hill, I put the milk in first you see, and so I poured out the first cup of tea and I mean the milk hardly changed colour, I mean I thought… But of course it struck me it was either China tea or it was very high class tea, which hardly, you know. So the next cup I poured out I left the milk out and I added the milk until the tea looked a reasonable colour and then that was it, you know, I remember doing that. Anyway, I handed that round. [50:00] And she was all very glamorous and Hugh was taken aback a bit by her and she's obviously, if you know what I mean, charming to men. And at one point he went very red when she sat down next to him on the settee and he always wore a bowtie and I quite expected it to spin round, you know, it was quite funny. Anyway, we spoke about what she was going to do and she was going to talk about health and food, and he said, well do you want a form of autocue – it wasn't autocue in those days – do you want an autocue? 'Oh no, I do this talk twice a week and every time I do it differently', she said. Anyway, she did in fact back down, we decided to have a certain form of autocue, at least with headings on it for her, for the shoot later on. The autocue consisted of a large roll of paper with the words written on, you know, turned below the camera. Anyway, we all turned up there, she wanted a make-up girl as well, which she had met at the BBC, and she insisted on a light being underneath the camera pointing at her chin, or her neck, because she said when she was in America they all have that and that did away completely with all the shadow off your neck and everything. But I mean the fact that it was a little bit Hammer films was neither here or there, anyway. So the set was there, it was in her home and so forth, and she'd had loads of fresh flowers put in the room and so on, beautiful red curtains and we lit everything, she was still upstairs being made up, you know, she was up there for about an hour and a half. The make-up girl came down and said, 'I don't know why she asked for a make-up girl, she's telling me exactly what to do'. Anyway, she came down and then of course, because of this light underneath the camera she couldn't read the autocue anyway, but anyway she rambled on. She was standing there in this bright pink evening dress with an ermine stole and talking about the terrible poisons that we eat every day and we are what we eat, and all this sort of thing. And then she said, standing there in this lovely white stole, she said, 'And what can you and I, the ordinary housewife do about this?' [laughs] It was rather nice. But she was very nice and

some of the crew – it was quite a large crew – and some of the crew she invited to lunch, because we broke halfway through, and the rest of them went down the local pub, probably quite pleased. But she was the perfect hostess and it was a wonderful lunch and we all had pheasant and the butler served it and, you know, it's a marvellous experience. Anyway, so I was thankful that all the sound came out okay because she projected her voice quite well, so that was alright. But then there were lots of other occasions, they made films for the National Children's Home and so there was lots of locations for that sort of thing, and also I've been to a steel foundry doing sound on that as well. We had radio mics on that – this probably was a few years later – and a steel foundry is an absolutely dreadful place, it's, I mean it's like something out of Dickens, you know, it's very grey, it's thick with grey dust.

Christine, may I interrupt and say…

Yes. Get me back on the point, Brian.

Let's flash forward, as they say, to the time when Hugh Baddeley left or whatever, Gateway, and this must have been I suppose a sad time for you people here wondering what's going to happen, wondering about Hugh, wondering about your own job as this recordist-cum-young lady who fixes everything.

[laughs]

So please tell us.

Yes. Well, Hugh Baddeley had been quite a good boss. He was a hard businessman but he loved film, you see, he started out as an amateur, and I'm not saying it in any disparaging way, he was still an amateur, he still had the enthusiasm of an amateur and he just loved making films. And so he was a good, enthusiastic person, he wasn't just looking at the bottom line, but he was pretty hard on all the chaps that worked here. There must have been ten or twelve people employed I would think. There were at least three directors and a permanent cameraman and an assistant and so forth. But he was always a gentleman when it came to women and he would never tell you off, I mean even if you'd done something disastrous. I mean the boys would have got the lot thrown at them in a

very loud voice, but I don't think he could ever have brought himself to do that to any of the girls working here, which was, you know. So in that respect he was fair and in another respect he would, as no doubt Graham's told you and some of the other chaps would do as well, he gave them opportunities when they were quite young, threw them in at the deep end or almost, but at least he gave them opportunities. And so in that way you were thankful for him really and when we were taken over, bought out, merged, whatever you like to call it, with ESL/Imperial Tobacco, because…

Interrupting – ESL meaning, I believe, Educational Systems Learning. Am I correct?

Yes, you are right. Yes. They used to make hardware, teaching machines and things, and I think they wanted us because of Gateway educational films as opposed to Gateway industrial films, you might say, for the software, so that completed their catalogue. In other words, they could go to schools and say, you know, we've got films and we've got teaching machines. Anyway, I don't know the ins and outs of any of the business to do with it but obviously he reluctantly agreed to this merger, but having started up the company all by himself or with his friend all those years ago, it was quite obvious that he wasn't going to be able to really knuckle down because they weren't going to leave him alone and he had to keep going to board meetings. And he just couldn't take it, I don't think. So he decided to leave and set up on his own. And I suppose, I can't remember too clearly, but I suppose we all wondered what was going to happen. But because I think ESL really, they did just want the educational film library, what they got was a film library and a production company. So the first thing they did was to shoot the film library down to Bristol. Now they were stuck with this sort of racehorse that kept kind of trying to get out of the stable, you know, and they didn't know what to do with it really. We made a film for Imperial Tobacco and so forth and different parts of the Imperial Tobacco grew, who then owned people like HP Sauce and Worcestershire Sauce and all those sort of things. And so yes, I think we were sorry to lose Hugh really because he was good fun. I mean Graham ran the company fine after that, but he was a character, you know, and he loved talking and I mean those endless van and car trips to locations, if he was driving, I mean he would talk continually, even if it took you two hours to get to somewhere, he would talk continually in the car. And if you were sitting in the back he'd be turning round and talking to you whilst he's driving, in this Triumph Dolomite or whatever it was he had. It was quite off-putting, but I mean he was a wonderful raconteur. I mean

Armand Denis was a wonderful raconteur as well, so I'd had these two men who had all these wonderful stories, you know, from way, way back. [59:43] In fact he often used to speak of his time in the Planet Amateur Film Society where they used to make films and so forth, and so his connection with me was obviously with, David Garner was also a member of the Planet Film Society, and there was a strange twist insofar as I lived in a house in Winchmore Hill that used to be lived in by another member of the Planet Film Society called Franz Pichel [ph] who was their bomb expert. Whenever they made amateur films to do with blowing up things he could blow these things up, apparently quite dangerously really. So I had this kind of strange connection, you know. And so I was really sorry to see Hugh go really.

It must have been a loss. And now Graham Smart has continued with Gateway and you've continued to make films and gradually the films have petered out, as they say, and now you're in the video side of film production for whatever, and I understand that you have a facility of transferring motion picture films to video tape. Could you tell me something about that enterprising extension?

No, I mean we have a… we can do it but it's no special facility, it's merely a broadcast camera and a back projection screen and a projector really, that's… And it goes straight through the video desk and because it's viewed by the camera through a back projection screen then you have to reverse the picture on the video mixing desk, because it's back to front.

What I was actually meaning to say was I think it's very meritorious for a film production company to go into the amateur market and offer their technicalities to the increasing number of people with little video cameras to enable them to edit.

Well, it's just that it's there. I mean it's like a lot of things, Gateway's building happens to go straight on to the pavement and we happen to have a large window which is – so it looks like a shop front – and people see the word film or video outside and they come in and say, oh do you do this? And so you either say no or yes and we said yes, I suppose, the first time and did it and that was okay and then someone else came in. So it's a bit of a sideline really, you know, we only do it very, very occasionally.

It's a diversification, would you say?

Well, one could say that, yes. It's a little filler but it doesn't pay very much at all [laughs], I assure you.

Christine, here we are, you started off in whenever it was with Armand Denis, you came to Gateway when it was under Hugh, and you're still with Gateway and it's under Graham Smart. Now, this is 1994 and you started whenever it was. I understand that you, in addition to all this work, are the president of the Potters Bar Amateur Cine Club. Now I think this is marvellous that you spend your expertise helping and enjoying life with amateur filmmakers. Could you tell me something about that?

Well, yes, I mean it actually started obviously when I was with *On Safari* and David Garner, I used to do still photography as a hobby, but the more I worked in film, the more, obviously you saw moving images all the time, and so the more frustrated you got, being on holiday or whatever it might be, in the fact that you were just taking these rather boring still photographs really with no merit at all, and so at the earliest opportunity I thought I shall have to get a movie camera. And so about when I was twenty-one I suppose, I bought a standard 8 fixed focus clockwork Czechoslovakian Admira camera, and it was a jolly good little thing, it was terrific. And you could actually see the exposure in the window and move a needle to match up with another needle and then you were correctly exposed and so forth. And so I thought well, amateur cine clubs were probably quite the thing in those days and I thought I ought to join one and strangely enough I didn't want to join Planet, which was the nearest, I suppose. Because I used to take the magazines, the *ACW, Amateur Cine World*, I just looked in to see where I could join. And there was an article in there, the bottom line was membership secretary at Potters Bar, Cine Society. And I thought well, I'd been born in Potters Bar and I'd go there. So I went there. They had a very large membership, some on 16mm, some on standard 8. They had a membership which eventually got up to about ninety and they had to stop taking people in. And so I used to do amateur films, and it's much more difficult making your own films because you have to do all the jobs; you have to be a cameraman and an editor, which I used to hate editing movie film, all these horrible little bits of film all over the place and scraping your cement splicer and the cement used to get old before you'd finished your films and… But I used to do the soundtracks on quarter inch in those days which were

linked fiendishly well to a standard 8 projector, there was a special gadget that the tape wound around wheels and guides and things on the back of the projector and so three and three quarter inches per second on quarter inch tape was equal to sixteen frames a second on the projector, and so one could keep the other in synch. And so that was quite nice, and one was able to make, in those days, quite passable films. And so I enjoyed that and certain club films were made as well and so I enjoyed being able to kind of express myself in my spare time as well as doing one portion of the work during work time. And like any society, gradually you're asked to do a job and, you know, and you edit the magazine and you do programme secretary and so forth and I think I probably became chairman and then president some time or other. At the moment I am in fact chairman of Potters Bar, but we have now of course changed our name to Potters Bar Cine and Video Society because the change to video has been very, very quick in the amateur market. I also got involved, because of other members of the other members of the Potters Bar Cine Society, I got involved with the IAC, which is the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers, who among other things run a yearly international competition for the Daily Mail Award, and you get films and videos nowadays from all over the world in the competitions. And then subsequently there is a weekend held in about April at a large venue, it used to be in London, and people would come and stay for the weekend and not only were the winning films shown, but a vast majority of all those entered were shown in various side rooms and so forth. Anyway, I wasn't a member of IAC but these other friends of mine in the society were and asked me to go up and project, because they always wanted projectionists because everything was film of course, up until a few years back. And so I got involved with that and decided to become a member and they also helped, you can easily now get a licence to clear copyright for any music that you use in your films which at least makes you feel better about using music. There were various things that they do and so forth, and then about probably six years ago I was in fact made a Fellow of the Institute, so I'm now an FACI of the Institute, and I have in fact been a first and a second round judge in the international competition and last year I was a final round judge in what they now call – well last year it was called Movie '94, this year of course Movie '95, so I was a final round judge last year. But this year I wanted to put in some productions of my own and you can't be a judge and put in productions, so I'm nothing this year at all.

[1:09:53]

Now, I'm coming down Christine to my last panel of questions, which is, do you find amateur filmmakers interested in the cinema as such, do they go to see a film like whatever, and then come back to the club and discuss it, or is it on another planet, as one might use this word? Is there any connection between what they do and what we do, we being professionals?

Well, certainly, I speak from Potters Bar Society and several others that I know, the answer to that is probably no, because their productions are quite small, mostly, especially now it's video, a lot of people have turned to video, they've become increasingly one-man band efforts, which of course with video you can do. And so they seem to make documentaries or small comedies or that sort of thing. Having said that, many clubs will make club productions and very professional some of them are as well. I mean a club for example like Westcliff made, certainly made a film last year that actually didn't win the Daily Mail, but came extremely close to it, and I mean it was most professional, and I do mean professional, and it was, I don't know whether it was shot on U-matic, but it was probably shot on at least Super VHS of course, but probably something slightly higher quality than that. And it was a drama and had all the professional elements in it, even to tracking and crane shots and I mean it was very, very high class. And the trick is to have good actors in it, don't just use the people in the club, you see. And so therefore, the answer is yes and no to you. What the clubs don't do is they don't go to the cinema and then talk about the films at club meetings, that's not the sort of thing, but naturally going to the cinema will affect how they will make their productions themselves even if they don't realise it.

And, I would say, looking at the things on the television screen is even more instructive of what to do because it comes home to you. The final question, as they say, what of the future for yourself and for Gateway and for the motion picture business in general? So the final question.

Well, the answer to that is I don't know. The equipment and so forth is moving so fast that editing, I mean in our field it's virtually all video. I mean I know that certain, obviously the cinema is still film and certain television drama is film, but it's then transferred direct, I understand, to video and edited. And so all the editing is becoming computerised and the sound too, sound editing is all computerised as well and that is

obviously the way it's going to go, whether I ever get the opportunity to get involved in that sort of thing is quite another matter.

The final question – have you anything you'd like to add to what you've already said? Some little thing you've forgotten?

Well no, nothing to do with me really. The only thing is that we were talking of Armand Denis who I had worked with before and just out of interest people probably don't realise, although it's all in his book - called *On Safari*, strangely enough – which is well worth getting out of the library, I might say, if indeed it's still in the library. He invented the very knob, you know the knob on the radio that you turn up when you want it louder, or indeed the pots and you turn down when you want it quieter, he in fact invented that in about the 1920s, late twenties, thirty, in America. And he sold the rights outright for money rather than take out a copyright and patent of, which would have made him a millionaire, and he bought a movie camera and that's how he started. He was in fact a naturalist and he liked animals and wildlife and so forth, but he bought this camera – I think it was a DeVry – and he went to Bali to make a film and he made this film and I don't remember the ins and outs of it now, but he processed the film presumably himself and on the boat back to America from Bali, I suppose, the boat was flooded and anyway, the film was damaged by saltwater which he had to wash off quickly and dry, and it was dried in loops around the boat, and it dried unevenly and so there were portions of the film that were dark and portions of the film that were almost destroyed and so forth. So when he got back, he thought well, the same principle that you could increase volume and decrease volume, he must be able to increase light and decrease light through the printer. And so in fact he invented grading as well.

It's wonderful isn't it?

Yes. And he sold that as well. And he worked actually for the Eastman Kodak, Rochester company as well, they allowed him to use their science and so forth and he was working in the room next door to the people who were inventing Kodachrome, so he was all involved in that. So I just thought that was an interesting point for people that they don't really realise what his part that he's played in a lot of things that we've had touch with.

I suppose he's dead and I understand his widow is still alive and going strong?

Yes, indeed, she's eighty now and living in Nairobi but occasionally visits England, once a year anyway, and as far as I know is still very perky and so forth.

That's lovely. Well, Christine, now's the time for me to say thank you very much for telling us about your lovely life in the film business, it's gone on for quite a long time, I can't remember how many years.

I try not to.

What would amaze, literally amaze students, film people, in years to come is you've achieved all of this by learning it on the job, you haven't been to a technical school or a film school, you've learnt it all by people showing you what to do and I think I learnt this way myself. I think it's a very good example of how kindness from one to another passes on. So, thank you very much Christine, I wish you and Gateway and all your amateur cine clubs the very best of good fortune, thank you very much.

Thanks Brian very much.

[1:19:16 end of recording]

Queries
p.2 – Jackie Achelor – spelling? Cameraman with 'messages home' film unit in India
p.18 – Franz Pichel – spelling? Explosives expert for Planet Amateur Film Society