BECTU History Project
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Interviewee: Esther Harris
Interviewer: Denis Gifford
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NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side A.

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MY: Right.

Are you not announcing it, oh?

MY: I've already, already done that.

Oh you've done that?

MY: Yes.

Well, here we are at the charming and very nice, pleasant and very warm on a cold day home of Miss Esther Harris.

I'll make us some coffee in a minute.

Miss Esther Harris?

That's right.

Now is that because you were never a Mrs Harris?

I was never Mrs Harris.

Ah.

Wasn't because I wasn't asked either.

No.

I promise you that. No, I just, I think the job was very fulfilling. I had a huge family, masses of friends.

Yes.

I was never lonely, you know, and I had a very particular friend that I, I liked but not enough. I didn't want to marry anybody.

No.

And that was it.

I suspect a lot of things against it in a way because you were a very busy lady and it would have been taken out of your work? So...
.

Well, I was travelling a great deal and I, I think basically women get married because they're lonely, you know, but I wasn't lonely.

Yes.

I was earning enough money to, you know, to keep myself.

Yes.

This was the whole point, and the men who wanted me I didn't want them and it was one of those things you know. It was one of those things.

Ah. Well, let's start, yes, we'll start at the beginning if we may?

Alright.

Would you confess to your birthday please for us?

Oh God what is it? July thirty 1910, I might tell you.

Oh my.

Yes.

I thought I was getting old.

She's a very old lady I'm telling you.

MY: Good lord.

Well, you look wonderful I must confess.

MY: Older than me.

Yes.

There it is.

Of course, we see quite a lot of old people in this little hobby of ours?

Yes, I suppose you do, yes.

And you're the youngest I've ever come across.

[Laughter]

[Laughter] And you're very fit aren't you really?

Yes, thank goodness.

Yes.

Yes.

Tell us a little bit about your family? Where were you born first of all? Where was...?

Oh the East End of London.

Really?

There's no question. My mother came from, originally from Warsaw I think and there was, you know, there was the usual immigration nonsense that came up, you know, at that time.

Oh yes.

I had elder brothers who were very well placed with Odhams Press. My brother Harris, the family name is Kamlish actually.

Oh.

K-a-m-l-i-s-h.

Yes.

And we, I had a brother Harris Kamlish who was director of advertising for Odham's.

Oh yes.

And one was in the editorial. They all had very big jobs in that.

Yes.

They were very bright lads, but all of them IP, IPC.

Isn't that interesting, yes?

With Odham's Press.

Yes.

Yes.

Well, I never. Was your father Polish or...?

My father was Polish.

Yes.

Yes, they came here.

And did they come, were they married before they came?

I think they came here when they were about eighteen years of age and all the family was born here in London.

Was it some kind of refugee at those times?

Oh I think it was the usual nonsense.

Yes, yes.

That you had to emigrate wherever the hell you were you know.

MY: My parents the same.

Yes, and they came over here and that was it.

Yes.

My, my brothers had very big jobs with Odham's Press.

Yes.

They were with, you know, Harris Kamlish was director of advertising actually.

Well, that suggests that you had a good education?

Mm, a fair education. I wouldn't say it was terribly good. I went to school until I was about sixteen you know.

Yes. What was the name of the school?

I would have said it was run, I was at one of the, no perfectly ordinary schools.

Yes, local school.

Nothing very clever. And, and I went on until I was, I was about sixteen.

Yes.

But I used to go to evening classes I think until I was about twenty-five.

Oh did you?

I went to Toynbee Hall and places like that.

Yes. Any particular subjects there that you selected?

Mm, I think English more than anything.

Yes.

You know Literature.

Oh yes, English.

But, it was general, general.

What, do you remember the actual part of London because that's what we'd want to put down, yes?

Well, Sidney Street is what I seem to remember mostly and Clapton, Upper Clapton.

Oh yes.

We were near Springfeld Park for most of our lives.

Well, I never. Well, Sidney Street of course, was very famous wasn't it?

That's right, that's right, yes, yes.

Yes. And in fact the other day on television we had the Hitchcock film for the first time.

Oh really.

That he sort of re, reconstructed the Sidney Street siege for the last ten minutes.

Ah, ha, yes.

With Peter Lorre and you must have seen it, you know, but...

Yes. But for most of my time we lived in a house near Springfield Park in, in Upper Clapton. Do, do you know the area?

I don't know the area. No, I don't.

It was quite, in those days it was quite a pleasant area.

Yes, I'm sure.

So we lived there for most, most of my life that I seem to remember.

Yes. How, how big was your family actually? How many brothers?

Oh there were quite a few of us.

Were you the only girl?

Harry my, no, no, no, three girls, three boys.

Oh.

Mm, the boys worked for IPC. My brother Harry was director of advertising for Odham's Press.

Ah.

Harris Kamlish.

Yes.

[05:00]

And then there was Irving and then there was Archie. Archie, they all had, it's hilarious really. Everybody called themselves by different names because they worked at Odham's and didn't want to get confused. And so there was Harris Kamlish, who was director of advertising. Then there was Irving Harris and then there was Archie Kay who were, and in a way I said 'You sound like a family of books', [Laughter] I said 'everybody changing their name'. [Laughter]

Yes, including you.

But said no, it's a matter of confusion.

Yes.

They didn't want to get mixed up.

Yes.

So we all called themselves something else.

And that, you but you decided to early on?

I was Esther Harris because my brother was Harris Kamlish.

Yes.

Who introduced me to National Screen Service when I was sixteen years of age.

Ah.

And I, I remember at the time my brother said to me 'You're not to take any salary because you don't know anything'.

Oh.

Because they thought I'd left school too early at sixteen. I didn't, I thought it was great. [Laughter]

Well, that would have, well let's just go back to se,e were you an enthusiastic cinema goer? Did you like films before you took a job in it?

I think it was the usual thing, you went to the cinema, everybody else...

Oh yes.

There was nothing else to do, you know, you went to the cinema.

Oh no, that was the outing wasn't it?

MY: Yes.

You see come on Kate, oh my sister Kit coming in with her little… Oh you poor thing, come on darling. You're going to sit over there Kit?

MY: Yes, I'll… [Inaudible 06:20]

This is Kit who live here.

MY: Of course, yes, of course, okay, right.

Sure.

MY: I'm sorry, carry on then.

And that's alright.

Yes, we're just wondering if you had any film star favourites or films, types of films?

I, I, no, I, do you know I don't remember an awful lot. You went to the pictures because everybody else was going to the pictures, there was very little else to do, you know.

Oh yes. You haven't put your microphone on.

Oh my God.

MY: Yes.

[Laughter]

MY: Yes, I thought it was a bit faint.

Oh it was coming through was it?

MY: Oh yes.

Oh, ah we're off again then.

Right.

MY: Oh could you turn it, sorry because it's rubbing against your...

What do you want me to do here?

MY: If you...

Does that have to come up?

Yes.

MY: Yes.

I get you, I get you..

MY: Do you want me to take it off and turn it round?

You'll have to take, you'll have to take the thing off your neck again I think.

Is that on?

Oh that's alright.

MY: That's alright, yes. Okay, okay, right, yes.

[Laughter]

MY: The tape recorder actually.

[Laughter]

So...

K: Put your back up.

Oh Kate.

Yes, you were...

She's always telling we've put my back up you see.

Oh yes.

MY: Yes.

My back's put up [with?] a lot dear, don't worry about it.

So you haven't really any particular specific memories of films and such like?

You mean the things, the things I...?

Of what you saw as a child?

I, I liked?

Yes.

I used to think the Boulting brother films were rather, rather different.

Oh that was much later.

Much later.

No, I was talking about when you were a...

Oh you mean when I was young?

That might have influenced you?

I'll have a vague recall. I really don't remember much about it.

No.

It's an awful long time ago I mean.

Oh I know.

My God.

Yes.

You are taking me back a bit.

We want you to prove it. [Laughter]

But you, you just, I mean you went to the pictures and somebody else went to the pictures, you know.

Yes.

There was so little else to do. I used to read a fair amount.

Yes.

I, I, I was with a family who were terribly clever, not very much money but very clever, and nearly the whole family was either up at Oxford or Cambridge, you know.

Yes.

It was quite amazing, purely by scholarship. I thought that was amazing and I used to spend half my time up at Cambridge on weekends, you know.

Did you?

Because well, I knew them very well, I knew the lads awfully well. And I would go up there and spend a weekend, you know, as a party and I liked the people. Of course, they were the, they were right, they were my kind of people that I liked. But other than that, I used to read a great deal, used to go to the library. I used to, Wigmore Street, I used, there was a *Times* book club there, I used to live in the damned place, you know, I used to love it. I think it was part of the education, you know, in the end when I look back. Because I used to read *The Times* book write ups, you know, and I used to think that was the thing to do. And I would take everything, not understand half of it I must tell you, I used to sit a lot with the dictionary at my side and 'What the hell does that word mean'? you know.

Ah.

But it was very good, it was very good. And I, I was befriended by a family who were quite brilliant, no money but quite brilliant. And they all went to university so I used to traipse up to these places for weekends and liked the people I was mixing with you, you know, and as a youngster it was fun.

So this was actually your very first job and right at The National Screen Service?

Yes, The National Screen Service, yes. And I was told when I began by my brother Harry, who was with Odham's Press at the time, he was with originally with the paper called *The Bioscope*.

Oh yes, oh yes, I know that well.

You remember *Bioscope*? Well, Harry was one of the advertising managers.

Ah.

And I knew he had a boss called John Cayburn [ph 09:50] and I remember going up there one day, it was rather sweet to his office to tell him I'd, I'd got this job at National Screen Service who were just opening in this country. And I, I ran up and I could hardly, I could hardly talk. I was so excited about this. And I remember John Cayburn [ph 10:00] who was the owner of a paper saying to my brother 'Who is this child then'?

[10:05]

[Laughter]

And, and my brother said ‘It’s my sister’. He said ‘Why don’t you take her home’?

[Laughter]

And, you know, and this was the beginning, this is rather sweet. So that’s how it all began anyway just to, to run and tell him I’d got this job.

Yes.

Because when they asked me about salary my brother had said to me ‘You’re not to take any salary, you don’t know anything’.

Oh.

So I thought that was fair enough, I agreed that I didn’t know anything and they asked me about salary and I kept on saying ‘I don’t want any money’, and they thought I was mad.

[Laughter] Yes, of course.

And I suddenly realised they thought ‘Hello, who are we engaging, you know’.

Yes.

‘This is an idiot’. And I finally said ‘Twenty-five shillings’, because I knew my friends were taking this kind of money. And there was a terrible pause and I thought ‘My God now, I’ve overdone it’. And he said ‘I’ll give you thirty shillings’, and that’s how it all began by a, he was a man called Bill Brenner, [ph 11:10] who was an American.

Oh.

And they owned National Screen Service you see.

I was going to ask you about that because, yes.

Yes, National Screen was an American company.

Yes.

And...

MY: This was Bill?

Bill Brenner [ph 11:18].

MY: Brenner [ph 11:19].

He was the brother-in-law of a Sonny, now let me get it. Either the brother-in-law or the son-in-law of the people who owned National Screen Service in the States and he came over here to open this London office.

I see. And were there, there were other people employed senior to you I'd imagine weren't there?

Oh when I came I was, I was a kid of sixteen.

Yes, yes.

I'd just left school, and my brother was very annoyed that I left school at sixteen.

Oh I see.

But in those days leaving school at sixteen wasn't at all bad actually.

Quite, they were leaving at twelve weren't they ordinary children?

Oh for God's sake. But I, I used to go to evening classes, I used to do the things gap in the end, you know, I never stopped going to evening classes.

What was your actual position at The National Screen Service when you first started?

Oh in the end I was one of the directors.

No, when you… Oh yes, but I mean when you first joined were you just an office girl as it was?

Oh, oh absolutely.

Yes.

Oh absolutely. Everything happened by accident actually. I used to work with a man who, Leslie Everley, [ph 11:28] a lovely, lovely man I might tell you.

Oh yes, I know the name.

And I was his secretary. And he used to do these scripts, you know and he used to take me with him to do the shorthand, Letts, make notes at the studios when he was making these trailers.

Oh.

And he used to, when he would then do the script and ask my opinion, [Laughter] and I must have been incredibly naive because I used to tell him what I really thought, you know, and it was very hilarious when I look back, because as you grew older you

knew to have more sense and not to be so damned rude there. Bt I wasn't, I didn't think I was being rude.

No, no.

I, he asked me a question and I used to tell him exactly what I thought.

Of course, yes.

And, oh, but it's how it started because he got fed up with this. He was a very nice man and said 'Well, if you know so much about it [Laughter] why don't you do it'? you see. And so the next time I went to the studios with him instead of making notes I was making notes for what I wanted.

MY: Yes.

And we both wrote scripts and they took mine and not his.

Really?

And, but he, but he was a sweetheart because he didn't mind at all.

No.

And, but he, he said 'Right, let's, let's do it this, this way', and that's how it began really.

Yes.

So I used to do the scripts. I used to go and start doing these things and this is how I got in to it.

Yes.

As I say quite by accident.

I think Leslie Everley [ph 13:30] was an established script writer wasn't he of the Scenaris [ph 13:35] films?

Oh yes, he was, he was, he was an incredibly nice man and very kind to me. I must, you know, looking back he was extraordinary.

How much older than you would you say?

I was sixteen at the time and I was...

And how much older was he, was he in his middle age or...?

Oh yes, he was in his forties.

Thirty-ish or forty-ish?

Forty-ish, I would have thought so. He had a thing about me in the end, I knew that, which I couldn't cope with at all.

Oh dear.

I, ah, I couldn't, I couldn't cope with that at all. But, but he never forced it. I think he recognised it and that was that. No, no, no, he was alright. He was a very nice man. I didn't deserve him I don't think, but however there I was, there I was.

Oh well. And he was there for some time? Did, I presume not as long as you of course?

Well yes, he was, he was director of production.

Oh was he director of production?

Yes, oh yes.

Ah.

Oh Leslie Everley, [ph 14:30] oh yes, oh yes. You know oh yes, he was the chief producer there.

Yes, yes, ah.

He had been about in the film studios quite a bit before he came to National Screen.

Yes, I know.

So he knew his job, he knew his job because...

Yes, I often wonder, wondered what happened to him because he did get credits for a long time in films and then of course.

But he, but he, he came to National Screen.

Yes.

And he eventually died of course. But he would ask an opinion. As I say I was terribly naive at the time really, because as you grow older you have a little more tact. I don't think I had any, I just used to tell him what I thought. And, but, but it's how it began. He, he got rather fed up with this precocious assistant and said 'Right, go and do the damned thing if you know so much about it', you know. But, so it was quite by accident that it all began you know. So...

[15:20]

And how, what was the sort of set up in, in National Screen Service?

Well, it was an American company.

Yes.

They used to make all the trailers over in the States for most of the major companies and it similarly came back to London that way.

Yes.

And the London studios were working.

Did they have editing rooms and things like that?

Oh yes, indeed, we had cutting rooms.

Yes.

Oh absolutely. And camera rooms we used to go out on opticals. Oh yes, we, in fact we used to work for other people too.

Yes.

But we had, we had optical rooms, animators. We had negative rooms, oh the whole set up.

Oh yes.

Oh yes, everything was done at The National Screen.

What was the locality of it at that time?

Denmark Street.

Oh Denmark Street?

Yes.

That's the music street these days, or later.

That's right.

Yes.

We were there for quite a while.

Ah.

And then we moved to Broadwick Street.

Oh yes.

Where we stayed for quite a while.

All, all around the area of, the former area of Wardour Street, yes?

Yes, yes, oh yes. Well, we used to work for every single company, every single film company. We covered trailers for everybody.

Well, yes. Of course film companies couldn't really make their own trailers could they without a special department was it?

But, but it was a very specialised job.

Yes.

In actual fact, and when they did make them they were no good, quite frankly, and they would come back to National Screen Service. It was, it was another media entirely, you know, you found that you were doing things. I mean I learnt when I went there if somebody had lifted their hand or moved a foot or flickered an eyelid they were individual bits that you would take out and marry. It was like a jigsaw puzzle really. You'd learn that those little bits of action would go to illustrate bits of commentary that you were writing.

Yes.

And so you, you took tiny bits from a film of, say, ten, ran for two hours and the trailer ran for two minutes. You would take bits out of the, but totally meaningless in the picture, in the feature itself but added to the kind of aura of the trailer, you know.

Yes.

Somebody moving a foot or an eyelid or...

Yes.

Or a smile or a laugh.

Right.

You took it totally out of context.

Yes.

And put this thing together, you know. It was fascinating actually.

I'm sure it was, yes.

Yes, really.

Of course, the trailers of today I think are very crude. I don't know if you've seen them at the cinemas?

I very seldom go to the cinema.

No.

I've got a pass and I don't have to pay I might tell you, but I very rarely go, I very rarely go. There's so much on television nowadays, you know.

Of course. And they make their own trailers for themselves don't they?

And they do their own, that's right.

Yes.

I often think how badly they do them I must tell you.

Yes.

I, I think sometimes 'Oh you must be able to do better than that', it's rather funny.

Some of the best ones I've seen are on the cables like Granada?

Oh some of them are brilliant, some of them, they're not all bad by any means.

And yes, they do good ones.

But some of them I, I, I think to myself 'Oh God why on earth are you doing that'? You know, it's rather hilarious.

Well, of course, they, at the cinema I don't think they use animation at all now.

I go, I go so...

They don't superimpose lettering or anything, they just...

I go so rarely nowadays.

Chunk it altogether with a commentary, you know, probably and just a lot of explosions, whatever.

There's so much on television nowadays, you know.

Of course.

Unless, unless it's a particular film that somebody says 'Esther, you really have to go and see it', I, I practically don't. I've got a pass somewhere here, I don't know, I don't have to pay for the damned thing. I, it is rather foolish.

Ah. Well, now...

I'm getting too, much too old for it anyway.

How, what was the procedure to make a trailer? Did you actually, were you actually given a print of the film or did you work from a negative?

I used to go and, we used, National Screen used to see pictures before anyone else had a look at them, they were always in rough cut.

Yes.

I mean even if when they went in to colour I would see them in black and white.

Oh did you?

Oh yes indeed. Because you see the trailer had to go to the cinema before the...

Of course, yes.

Particularly the West End for the premieres.

Yes, they do.

And they were very keen to get the trailer because it was their main form of advertising.

Yes.

Because they were, they had a captive audience. And the trailer was terribly important, it really was. And you had to go in front of producers and publicity directors and I mean tell people who would sit round the table and you, you sat there and told them what you had to do. You know, because you were selling a picture before they had done any advertising or any publicity.

Mm, mm.

You had to be first in because the trailer had to go to the cinema early, it always had to be there. It was their main advertising media in those days. I mean nowadays you've got TV and all kinds of areas where you can advertise, but in those days the cinema was their main forum.

[20:06]

Oh yes, quite.

As in...

And people enjoyed trailers didn't they, it was part of the programme?

Oh the trailer was terribly important to them in those days it really was. The National Screen as the company used to kind of do almost everybody's trailers. But they came from the States, a lot of it, most of the American pictures the trailers just came over here.

Yes, yes.

And we would Anglicise them because...

Oh you would? I wondered about that.

Oh yes, because a lot of people wouldn't like the voi…, the American voices for, for this country and you had to start re-dubbing. And we had tremendous censorship problems of course, because every trailer had to be universal.

Ah, yes.

Had to have a U Certificate, no matter how X Certificate the film was.

Yes.

The trailer had to be U. Because you were showing it, you didn't know which kind of audience the film was going in to.

You must have sung it had to be U, it had to be U. [Laughter]

Oh we had a ball actually.

Yes.

With some of these because the censor was frightfully strict.

Yes, I know.

And the trailer had to be U Certificate and you were advertising.

You had to take all the monsters out?

Double, double As you know.

Yes.

And you, you had to sell it with an U Certificate trailer, it wasn't easy by any means. So you'd, you would kind of indicate somehow or another that I'm very sorry, I can't show you this because, you know, you would tease them.

Yes. I suppose you would superimpose words over certain scenes, that sort of thing would you?

We had, oh, it was, well, when it finally came in we did, we did commentaries of course. That was terribly important to get the right voices.

Oh yes.

When they're coming in.

Did you have, have your own favourites that you used regularly or...?

Yes, I think, I think at the time we got used to certain voices which were not frightfully English and not frightfully American.

Mm. Mm.

You, you had to have a voice as, as a kind of common denominator, you know. Because if it was too American they wouldn't understand the damned thing, you know, you, you had problems you really did. And we had tremendous censorship problems, that, that was one of the most difficult things I think because no matter what category the picture was in the trailer had to be U Certificate.

Yes.

So that the most exciting scenes you couldn't show. I mean when you look back now at what they considered X Certificate was hilarious. I mean nowadays what they get away with is extraordinary.

Oh yes.

But in those days I mean intimate kissing would be out, you know, you couldn't show it or anything like that. So it wasn't easy.

Of course, you, you began actually in the silent era didn't you with silent films?

Oh yes, I, I began in 1926 I think it was.

Yes.

Oh yes.

Have you any memories at all of working with the silent films and then changing...?

Well, I wasn't, I was just, I was just...

Oh you were...

I was a typist then.

The secretary, yes.

I wasn't doing the work at all.

No.

It was only when I got this man Leslie Everley [ph 22:50] who was a darling he really was, and he'd worked at the studio, studios and he came to National Screen. And I, I, you see he would ask my opinion and I gave it too often I think. I didn't realise I was being, I wasn't being rude I was being honest, you know, I, I could say it no other way, he was asking my opinion and I would give it him. And he got a bit fed up with this of course, and said 'Well, do the damned thing if you're so clever', you know. But that's how it began really, it's extraordinary. But fortunately it, it worked. I mean obviously there was something there that I understood and that was it.

How long would it take to make an average trailer, which only ran about two minutes didn't it?

They were very, very complicated. We, National Screen was an extraordinary company. It was an offshoot of the American company, because America, they used to cover everything in the States. But we had our own camera rooms, our own animators, our own negative rooms, we, the whole set up was there so that we could… We had our own laboratory, so that we could literally, because these things had to be turned out so fast. I mean they'd make the picture...

Ah...

And say 'Well, where's the trailer'? kind of thing.

Yes.

Because the, because technically it simply took time. You, you had to write titles. We had our own Art Department, our own camera rooms, our own negative cutting rooms, our own editing rooms, we had the whole set up. Our own laboratory, and this was how we got the things out in ahead of the picture.

Yes.

Otherwise it was impossible. But of course, it was, this was just the British offshoot. I mean in the, the American side had been doing it for an awful long time.

Oh they had been going some years?

Oh the American company was quite a big company, oh yes, this is how it started off here. But we had tremendous censorship problems, this was our biggest headache because no matter what the category of a film you could only show an U trailer, and so you really on, on some of the most exciting bits for an adult audience you could not show at all.

Yes.

But you'd have to indicate in some fashion.

[25:00]

Well, you'd have to, if you make it a bit of a mystery then people might come, more people might come than...

Well, you, you simply had to say 'I'm sorry, I can't show you this because', you know, and it sounded, it was teasing as much as anything. And, and the trailers, as I say, had to go to The Board of Film Censors.

Yes.

And they would take out the bits you want. Even, even I mean looking back it was hilarious because things they pass now I mean you wouldn't dream of in those days. Any intimate kind of kissing or even, even any normal kissing they for an U trailer my God, you mustn't show a man and woman kissing, you know. It was ridiculous.

I always remember how children would react at the Saturday morning clubs if there was a kiss, the whole audience would go 'wooh, wooh'? [Laughter]

That's right, that's right, that's exactly so.

And bring the place down.

But I mean it, what was frightfully difficult when you had pictures made for an adult audience.

Yes.

And you had to show a U trailer and you kind of said 'Well, how the hell do I sell this'? I mean, you know, and that wasn't easy.

No.

It really wasn't. And, as I say, the censor would take out anything that was vaguely, you know. So...

I was trying, I was trying to get sort of a picture of how you actually operated. They would send you a print of the film would they?

I would frequently go to the studios.

Oh you would go to the studios?

Oh yes, oh yes. Pinewood, Shepperton and everywhere.

Oh.

Oh yes. When the picture was in absolute rough cut.

Yes.

And no one was allowed to see the film outside the studios because...

Oh yes.

People would always come in, knew I was looking at these pictures ahead of them and wanted to know what they were like. And it was the one thing I would never ever do, I would never discuss anything I saw because this was giving the game away. It wasn't fair for the picture, because I was looking at these films when they were so frightfully rough cut, no dubbing, no close syncing, no anything. And through experience I, I was able to judge them in that state. But I was always being asked by every producer and director I ever met, and I used to meet all of them at that time, 'What was it like Esther? Did you see so and so'? I never ever would discuss it, I just wouldn't on principle, I thought it was wrong. And it would have been, it would have been wrong because if they had found that I was criticising or making comments I wouldn't have been allowed to see them in that state.

Yes, quite.

And yet you had to see them in rough cut.

Yes.

In order to prepare the trailer ahead of the picture you see. And for them the trailer at that time was frightfully important. I mean if, if the film was going in to the West End and there was nothing to advertise, you know. Because visually people then at that time were going to the cinema, there was no question about it, there was no television.

No, no.

In those days the cinema was the main goal of entertainment.

And it really took over from variety didn't it?

Oh yes.

From variety theatres, killed them off more or less?

So the trailer was frightfully important to everybody.

Yes, yes.

But what was awfully difficult you were selling adult entertainment but you couldn't sell it in an adult fashion.

No.

The censor wouldn't allow it. Because they never knew what kind of audience they were having to see it on the week before you see.

One of the things that used to mystify me a little bit as a young cinema goer was that there were clearly two types of trailer. There was a trailer that was nothing but words superimposed on each other and going up and down?

Well, that was probably because we were not, there was no time to do a scene trailer.

Ah.

I mean you see I was allowed to see the pictures in very rough cut but on the odd occasion when, before I'd even looked at anything or before the film was halfway through they might want some advertising done and you could only do it by titles, there was nothing else you could do. You...

And that, well, you would have animators or letterers specially...?

Oh National Screen had, was totally equipped to do everything. We had our own animators, our own art department, our own cutting rooms, our own laboratory. We had absolutely, we were totally married in to making the job and putting it out. And we were allowed in when no one else was allowed to see the picture because they needed the trailer, it was their main advertising in actual fact. But because we had frightful censorship problems, you know, if anybody was kissing too intimately, or even not so intimately, for a U trailer a man and a woman kissing my God, you know. This is very, and looking back it was a total joke of course, but in those days you simply had to be frightfully careful.

Yes.

And so to intimate an adult picture in those circumstances was frightfully difficult really. It was, it was absurd. You couldn't show anything, you were not allowed to because every single trailer had to be an U Certificate. No matter what Certificate the picture was.

[30:00]

One of the differences between the American made trailers and British made trailers I can recall was in the big productions in America like Cecil B De Mille, he would be filmed in the trailer specially addressing the audience.

Occasionally, oh yes, sometimes.

Yes. When there was a major film.

Yes, oh yes, yes.

But I don't think the British people did that much.

We did get in to that act eventually.

Did you?

Yes, yes. We were allowed, we would have special shots from the studio, the directors or producers or the star talking about it.

So would you, would you actually devise those shots or shoot them yourselves or supervise them?

I, I would, I would write the script. Well, actually I, I had a man called Leslie Everley [ph 30:45], Everley [ph 30:46].

Yes.

Who used to do them and I was his secretary.

Yes.

A terribly nice man looking back, because really the nonsense I must have put him through was disgusting. I would, I would, he would ask for an opinion and I would give it him, as I say. And he got rather tired of this one day and said 'Well, do the damned thing if you're so clever', you know. And that's how it all began in actual fact. But you, you had to write this thing.

Yes.

And then you would have these enormous meetings with the producer and the director.

Oh.

And the editor and, and then you would have all Wardour Street coming in to the act. It was their main advertising in actual fact.

Yes.

When you look back, that's...

Yes. But that, would you actually go to a meeting at the film studio or would they come to your offices?

I would go to the studios and see the film in rough cut where no one else was allowed to go in as yet.

No, I mean when you meet the film makers, you know, did they give their opinions before you did the trailer, did they say 'We want you to do...'?

No, no. What I would, what I would do, and I would insist upon this, if you were doing the trailer. I came in from the outside and so I wasn't married to the picture.

Yes.

And I'd got an entirely different outlook on, on the whole thing you see. And you got to the stage where you really knew. You really was quite, I just didn't realise looking back it, it became in-built, you knew what the public would come and see if you sold it in a certain picture. But you were very tied up because some of the most exciting scenes you couldn't show because every trailer had to be an U Certificate, because you never knew where the trailer was going in to the cinema and what the programme was. So if it was, if it was a U Certificate film, as an example, you couldn't show what would virtually be an A Certificate trailer. So every single trailer had to be U Certificate irrespective of the category of the film. And so you had to indicate in some way and tease. Say 'Sorry, can't show you this because…' you know.

Well, even today I notice that cinema trailers are censored by the film censor.

Oh yes.

Who does list all the trailers, yes.

Every trailer has to be censored by a process.

To make sure that they are a U?

We, every trailer has to be U Certificate no matter what the category of the film. That doesn't change because you don't know what audience you're getting.

No.

Where you show the trailer you see.

It's funny that there's, the television people don't show film trailers. I remember one channel did called TNT when that first started, they used to show the actual trailers, cinema trailers for the films.

I think they still do show some bits and pieces.

I think they do.

Because I, when I, I know when I look at it and I think 'What an awful way to sell that film', I would say, you know. But I think they do.

Maybe they pop up?

They do occasionally. They don't make an awful habit of it certainly.

No.

But they do somehow give you some indication of what they're going to show.

And of course, it was fascinating to see the vintage trailers that they were showing for old films you know.

Well, I can imagine it. I cater...

And I used to collect them on tape at one time but they stopped doing it unfortunately.

I would hate to look at anything I used to make and it would...

Oh you wouldn't, you'd love it.

What nowadays? You'd look at them and think 'Oh my God, how could I see that'.

Oh.

But we were so tied in with this ruddy censorship thing on our trailers. That I mean nowadays in an U trailer they allow all kinds of things, but in those days two people kissing and it was wrong, you know, ridiculous, but you had to cope with it. But it made it more exciting because you had to think of ways and means of indicating what the hell it was all about with, without being censored.

When did you...?

Every trailer had to be U Certificate, every trailer.

Oh yes. When, when did you sort of move up from being a, you know, a sort of dog's body lady, girl, towards, I mean did you have a...?

I, I think looking back I was disgraceful really. I, I, because I would, I was a terribly honest child, if anybody [Laughter] asked me a question I would tell them.

Of course.

It never occurred to me to lie about anything. And today it would probably be everybody's undoing I don't know, but in those days, you know, if I was asked an opinion I would give it, and this is how, they said 'Well, do the damned thing if you're so clever', you know. It's how it began in actual fact.

But did you, I mean did you sort of graduate through various...?

[35:00]

Oh I was, I was, I worked for the man who made trailers.

Yes.

Who was the script writer.

Yes, I know.

And he was head of production, and I was his secretary, and it developed from that.

Yes.

Nothing else. Because I used to go with him to see all these films and make notes and then he'd write the things and he'd ask for my opinion and I would give it him.

Of course.

You know, as I got older I realised that wasn't quite the thing to do. [Laughter] If you, I would be so honest about my opinions. I mean I laugh at it now but at the time it must have been terribly irritating. Or very useful of course, because if somebody asks for an opinion and you were lying about it you were no use to him either.

MY: No.

It was ridiculous. So, and he was a nice man of course, he was able to take it.

What has happened, I presume he left in due course?

He died.

Oh he died?

He died, he died.

That would be in the '30s would it or later, later than that?

Oh God later than that, yes. Well, in to the '40s I would imagine I think.

But were you still a very small operation even through the first film spree?

Well, National Screen of course, had a very large company in the States.

Yes.

They used to make trailers for everybody and when they opened up here it, you know, we, we started in a fairly small fashion I suppose and it grew. There was no question we covered the whole industry. I think the only people we didn't cover at the time was Warner Brothers, but even here Warner's would occasionally say 'Well, come on in', because we were, you developed a kind of expertise.

Yes.

You, you knew what you could do or couldn't do. And the censorship wise we had enormous problems.

Yes.

You know, you had to make this U Certificate trailer on films which were incorporated some really adult situations.

But as professionals with all those problems you would know, it would be better for you to make a trailer wouldn't it than for a company to make it who hadn't had any of those problems?

Oh there is no question about it, the companies were not able to make them, this is why they came to National Screen. It was a very specialised job there's no question about that. You, you, you know, you knew exactly what you could and couldn't do. You knew the censorship problems. And we were totally geared for it, we had our own laboratory at National Screen. And we would get trailers over from the States advertising the American pictures and they would be censored over there but they'd have to censor them over here, and frequently they would allow things in America they wouldn't allow here.

Yes.

So, and so you, you got this married trailer. And you had to cut the damned thing too and that wasn't easy at all. Censoring because they overlapped, bits overlapped and we didn't have the original materials.

Oh.

And there was a sound problem. You had, it was a frightful business really.

And of course, you would want really to put an English commentary on wouldn't you?

And, and voices.

The voice, yes.

What we eventually did was to send us the separate facilities, we would re-dub the whole thing over here.

Oh.

And we would commentate you see. But you had to learn your job because the technical bits were so frightfully difficult. You know, you would get these married prints over from the States and married negatives and the, our censor would tear it apart and bits would overlap so we had awful problems But it worked because you, even in the States they had censorship problems.

Oh yes.

But they were a little more lenient.

K: I'm making a cup of tea.

Would you like some tea?

Thank you.

Would you like some tea?

MY: Yes.

I'll get it. Excuse me. I'll get Caroline.

Oh mind your...

MY: Actually I've got a few, I've got a few minutes left on here. If we just finish....

Alright, alright. I'll get Caroline to fix it, alright.

MY: Yes. I'll let you know when we're finished.

Okay, okay.

Because he wants to turn over you see and that will give him a chance.

Right, right.

So where were we then quite? Oh we were talking about, yes we were talking about the commentaries and the re-dubbing and such like?

The commentaries used to be a tremendous problem because when we got them over here they didn't like the voice overs.

Yes.

So you had to Anglicise them. And it got to a stage when they would have to send over separate facilities from America otherwise I found it awfully difficult to re…, remove the track which was already mixed, you know. But you found that they didn't like American voices, voice overs.

Yes. Do you remember any, any one that you used, any of the actors that you might have used on voice overs specifically?

Tim Turner I used to use quite...

Tim Turner?

Tim Turner.

Oh yes, he was a regular.

Used to use Tim Turner. You, you had to look for a voice that wasn't frightfully English and wasn't frightfully American.

That's right.

And that really was not easy in to get a kind of common denominator.

They used to call it mid Atlantic didn't they?

Mid Atlantic, yes, that's right, yes, yes.

Yes.

And they would hate the American voices sometimes over here, you just had to kind of remove them.

Yes.

It was alright if they, if they gave them separate facilities and I could re-dub the whole thing, but just to put another voice over wasn't, wasn't clever at all it became frightfully difficult. But, you know, that and censorship was a frightful problem. The Americans were a little more lax than we were over here.

[40:16]

Well, they didn't have the same certificate system I don't think - the U and A and all that sort of thing.

But they were very careful in America too, you know, about U, U Certificate trailers. Because you, you would, you would put an ad up really in to a cinema that was showing a U film, film, programme.

Oh yes.

And that couldn't be allowed, so every single trailer had to be U Certificate irrespective of the category of the film you see. So the censorship problem was a hell of a thing. Because if you got a married print over here, a married negative and you were trying to cut you'd have overlaps, you, you couldn't do it very easily and that was… And America was, was particular too with censorship but, but not as mad as we were. The things that you were not allowed to do here was, was sad.

Mm…

So that was one of the great problems in the, in the censorship thing. It, it eased up a bit as, as you went on, you know, because everything eased up as you went along.

I've always found it quite extraordinary that television hasn't actually got to have its films censored, you know, they can show any film any time they want to. They don't ever show the certificate, the BBC has never shown a censor certificate in sixty years.

No, I suppose not. Anyhow.

And thousands of films, you know, but they should do and they occasionally put their own certificate.

Yes.

They say 'we advise this for older children' or something like that.

Yes.

But there's no hard and fast ruling, and it's curious to me that cinemas are still, still have that.

Oh yes, yes, it is, it is a bit unfair.

This iron censorship.

It is a bit unfair. I suppose they think that individuals have their own way of saying well, to a child 'You're not to see this programme' or whatever, and the BBC are rather careful to put very adult films on after the watershed, very adult films don't they?

No, you say that. They're not that careful.

No?

I've seen them show Frankenstein and Dracula at nine o'clock in the morning?

Yes, I know.

When all the family's at home on a weekend.

Yes, it's perfectly true.

And I mean they were once H for horrific.

Yes.

You know.

But I suppose the, the, the thing that you do, you know, you act as your own censor at home if you've got a family, although that isn't easy.

No.

You're not going to stop a child coming in and looking at mum, mum and dad is looking at it. It's not easy at all.

No.

MY: Yes, can we pause this.

Right, so it's all a little bit....

[End of Tape 1 Side A 42:24]

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side B.

MY: Tape One, Side Two, okay.

Now then, do you want us to chat again do you?

Yes, yes, we'll continue on.

Right.

You must have been there one of the longest runs of anybody in the film business to be with one company?

Well, you worked there. I suppose one did that because you worked for so many other companies.

Yes.

I mean The National Screen was there but you worked with every single facility in the, in the country, you know. So...

How many years in all were you actually there, when did you retire from?

I started at sixteen I know that.

Yes. Do you remember the year you retired?

And I told you, and I was told not to take, it was rather funny that when they were asking me about salary but I told you about that.

Oh yes.

But because my brother was at this paper called *The Bioscope*.

Yes, you said, you mentioned that.

Yes.

No, I was just wondering when you left. Do you remember retiring at a certain year?

At very, very early '60s I'd had enough, '60/61, I don't know. But then I stayed on as a consultant for four or five years.

Oh did you?

Yes.

Ah.

Yes, that's how they let me leave I think.

And what was your position when you retired, what had you attained?

Oh I was the director there. Well, I was one of the company directors.

Oh were you?

Oh yes, oh yes, when I retired.

Ah.

Oh yes, I was on the main board.

Well, I never. That was 1961 and had attained...?

When did I retire? For God's sake when did I retire, isn't that awful?

And became a consultant.

K: It was thirty-five years ago.

It was only twenty-five years ago. So what...

K: Nearly thirty years I think.

So how long would that be, twenty-five years?

1970-ish.

I, I must have been about sixty-three ish when I, I went I think. But I, I was, I was simply kept on as a consultant.

Yes.

For years on end so...

What did that entail, you were going in once a week or twice a week or not as much as that?

Oh I, I would literally go when called or...

Oh when called, yes.

When called or if, if anything had to been seen or discussed or if there was anything tricky I would, I would be there, you know, I would be there.

Who were some of the other people who came to work there during your time?

Well, Paul Kimberley was the, was its managing director.

Oh Paul Kimberley?

Paul Kimberley, OBE.

Yes.

It was rather funny. We didn't like him very much and we used to say the OBE stood for "Other Buggers' Efforts".

Oh.

MY: [Laughter]

It was really rather funny that, you know.

Was he there right from the beginning?

Oh yes, he was a very important part of that.

Because he'd been a distributor I think, he'd certainly worked with Cecil Hepworth?

That's right, that's right.

And as a, as another company sort of thing, yes.

Yes.

Distributing the films or something like that.

Well, Cecil Hepworth used to work with National Screen.

Yes, I'm, I've been looking forward to getting to, on to him.

Yes.

Because he's the great mystery man.

Yes.

He had actually retired I think and then came back in to the film business?

Do, do you know the terrible thing is I don't remember too much about him. He, I knew that he worked, that he was a rather revered person at National Screen, I think they, he'd, he had an enormous background of success in his, in his day.

Oh yes, certainly in the '20s, the '10s and the '20s.

And so when he came to National Screen it was a name we recognised. But I think he was a little out of his sphere in the trailer field, if you know what I mean, it was another era really.

Yes.

So I, I don't know that he did a great deal but he advised, you know, and...

You don't remember if he joined, whether it was before the war started or was it when the war was on and you were short of people, because he's quite an old man?

K: The war was on I think.

You, you don't know darling.

K: The war was on.

Kate darling you don't know.

K: He ran National Screen.

Kate, they're talking about Cecil Hepworth, you don't know anything about him. [Laughter]

K: No?

No, no, no.

Yes.

Forget it.

Because I wondered whether he was, you know, because you must have lost some people with the War, people being called up and such like and whether he joined then.

Do you know I honestly, I, I don't know. He was, all I know he was there and...

So he wasn't your personal choice or anything like that, somebody had...?

Oh no, no, no.

No?

No, no, oh no, he was...

Perhaps it was Paul Kimberley's idea perhaps as they were old friends?

Oh I'm pretty sure it would have been. I'm quite sure it would have been.

Interesting that.

Yes.

Because...

I, I mean I came in to it, as I say, purely by accident because I was working for this man Leslie Everley [ph 04:36] who was head of production at National Screen and, and I, I, you know, as I say, rather stupidly now looking back because I was terribly naive they'd asked for an opinion and I would give it to them as I saw it, you know.

And of course, that was when Hepworth was in fact a big film maker at that time when you joined.

Well, he, he...

In the '20s, you know, he was our, our leading producer.

Of course, of course.

Is that short?

[05:00]

I just keep, keep rubbing my shoulder, let me just...

Have you switched off?

MY: No, I'll put...

Paper called *Woman*, you know, for IPC.

Oh yes.

And Archie had quite a big job there. In fact all the lads had different names because they all worked for Odham's Press and really looking back it was hilarious. They didn't want to get mixed up, one was called Kay, one was called Harris, one was called Kamlish and it was very, very funny, but they all had very big jobs at IPC, all my brothers. They were bright lads actually. Harry was in charge of advertising at Odham's and Archie worked with a girl called Mary Grieve who was editor of *Woman*.

Yes, thank you.

And they were bright lads and they, but they all had different names because they didn't want to get mixed up or anything.

Yes.

I said 'You sound like a family of crooks'. It's terribly funny, everybody having another name, you know, but there it was. Now I was introduced to National Screen right when they began in 1926 I think it was. Thank you very much, I'm going to take another one darling, thanks awfully Caroline. Don't you want one?

Yes, thanks very much. I must try a little cake. Did you bring any sugar in?

C: Yes. Behind you.

Oh there it is, thank you.

C: Is that enough?

That's fine, thank you very much.

No, I, I remember when I, I began my, my brother Harry said I was not to take any salary, you know. 'You don't know anything, you're not to take any salary'. But it was hilarious when, you know, when, when they kind of asked what I wanted and I kept on saying 'I don't want any money', and I suddenly, they looked at me as though they were engaging an idiot, you know.

[Laughter]

So I changed my mind. I, I remember saying 'Twenty-five shillings', and this terrible silence, and I felt 'my brother's going to kill me', you know.

That was a bit ave…, quite average for a girl in those days wasn't it?

But, but they upped it and they said 'Thirty shillings'. I, I'd only asked for twenty-five. Imagine that, it was a fortune as far as I was concerned.

That's the film business you see.

My goodness gracious, that was a lot.

MY: Oh yes, it's a lot higher than the general money.

That was a lot.

MY: I started at fifteen shillings?

Well, there you are you see what I mean, that was an awful lot of money. As, as I say, I always remember when I got to my brother's office who was, who had offices in Trafalgar Square, [Laughter] and I'd run all the way down the Charing Cross Road and this man John Cayburn [ph 07:30] who was his boss said 'Who is this child, do take her home'. Hilarious when I look back. But no I, I, my, my brother said 'You're not to take any salary, you know, you don't know anything you're not to take any money'. [Laughter] So when I was offered this money my, it was a terrible lot of money in those days for a child, you know, a kid of sixteen, it was a fortune. Still, no, National Screen was a, it was a reasonable company fortunately to work for and I was

very lucky to have some very nice bosses, they were terribly nice they really were. It taught me a very valid, looking back I often say to people 'If you're totally inexperienced and you, you know, you don't know anything really…' There were two secretaries there to managing directors who were incredibly nice girls and it set an example for me, you know, how to treat other people. I realised that if you were a boss you didn't have to be horrible, you know, because so, I used to hear such frightful stories and they were so nice. Everybody was so, so polite and so, so kind and it set an example, it really does and if you...

MY: [Inaudible 08:55]

Kate do you mind. I'm...

What sort of chap was Paul Kimberley, do you remember him as a person?

Terrifying.

Was he?

He was frightening.

Oh I'd no idea.

For me he was frightening.

Really?

Oh yes, he frightened me to death. [Laughter] Oh my God Paul Kimberley was God, oh absolutely, oh yes, oh yes, a strict man really.

Did you sort of dominate over the way the trailers were being made?

Oh yes, oh well I, I mean he would try and interfere but I don't think it worked, you know.

No.

Because in the final analysis the people who mattered were the people who had to work, make the trailers for, the distributors, the producers...

Yes.

The directors, they had their own ideas, very much their own ideas. And we had these frightful censorship problems you, what you put in to a trailer. Every trailer had to be U Certificate you see no matter how, what the category of the film. And you, I mean the most, the things that you had to, were not allowed to put in I mean by today's standards was quite absurd. You couldn't...

[10:00]

Very difficult when you're dealing with an adult film isn't it?

Any kind of intimacy. Well, if you're dealing with an adult picture for an adult audience and you're supposed to do a trailer to bring them in and you had these appalling restrictions it was, it was quite absurd. And very, very difficult because only by intimation could you say well, you know, this is so and so but you couldn't show it. I mean you weren't allowed a normal embrace, they would, they would kick about a bit. It's quite extraordinary. Who was that Kate I wonder?

K: Harry Tearsdon.

Kate, don't worry about it, honestly.

And of course, in those days particularly in the '30s and '40s there were what they called women's pictures which were full of romances and big kissings and clutches and, you know.

The censor was frightful about these things, you really couldn't show. You, you had to sell an A picture with this what they called an Universal Trailer and to, you could only kind of indicate or intimate what was adult in the picture and it was rather stupid actually, but still that was the time and you had to obey it.

Have you switched back on?

MY: Yes.

Oh.

You want something do you?

No, no, I'm just wondering whether we were taping but we're not apparently.

Oh I see.

Because I thought, you know.

Oh don't worry, don't worry about it.

I think we better put it back on otherwise we'll never get...

MY: Yes, actually it is going actually.

Okay.

I'll get this out of your way perhaps. Here take it...

What happened with Paul Kimberley? Did he die or did he retire at some point while you were there?

Oh yes, Paul Kimberley was out when I was there and, and another man, Ed Smith an American came in.

Oh an American came?

Oh yes.

Oh.

It was an American administrator. A terribly nice man, terribly nice man. Lovely, lovely man Ed Smith was. Paul Kimberley was a really frightening character to me.

How extraordinary.

I think, I think also because I was very young...

Oh.

And, you know, in all fairness to him. But he was a bit autocratic and you knew he was the boss let's put it that way, you know. But not only that I think in those days when you were working you, you were much more careful and much more frightened I think. I mean as you, as you got older and people didn't care a damn what they said or what they did and, but in my time oh dear you had to be very careful. [Laughter]

Was he still there during the war, Paul Kimberley, or had h,e or was, Ed Smith was it you said, Ed?

We had another man who came over from the States, Ed Smith. Ed Smith was there during the war.

And he was there during the war?

He was an awfully nice man, terribly nice American. I liked him very much.

Now when did it, when did you start doing these actual little films that were made by NSS for The Ministry of Information during the war years, food flashes in particular?

That was a, that was another department.

Oh.

I...

But it was within your...

Oh within National Screen Service.

Within NSS?

Oh Chris Brunel used to...

Oh Christopher...

Do you remember Christopher?

Yes, I knew the name.

Chris used to take care of that side of it.

Did he, did he?

Yes.

Because that's Adrian Brunel's son?

That's right, that's right. And they were in Soho Square, they were in, in the Wardour Street area rather.

Yes.

We were out at Perivale at the studios.

Oh.

They moved us rather hilariously when I look back during the war, they thought that the bombs would fall in town rather than out of town and they fell out of town all the time. And I, I used to remember being under the table half my, my working time during the war, you know. The bombs would come and the air raid sirens would go and say 'duck', it was hilarious really looking back but at the time it was fairly serious of course. The, as though the trailers were important and I was moving around to Shepperton and Pinewood and I, I would sit and the air raid sirens would go off and I would think to myself 'I must be mad', and as though trailers are important this time of my life, you know. But it's how it worked. So we went in to an area where it was a tremendously built up area for the war effort in actual fact. We thought we were moving out of town to avoid it, it was hilarious because the air raid sirens would go and everybody would be ducking, ducking under the desk, [Laughter] it was so funny when you look back.

Well, I never.

You think what on earth, what difference would it have made if you were ducking under the desk as though it was going to hide the bomb, you know. It was so damned stupid, but however, that's what happened.

Goodness.

[15:00]

Yes, as though, I often used to think when I was walking, going over to Shepperton or Pinewood and the air raid sirens would come and I would think well, what on earth who thinks the trailer is important, what is this nonsense all about? So it was a job.

So you, you were never actually involved in the Ministry films, you know, which were things about the all ration, your new ration book and...?

No, because that was what we called the Documentary Department.

Oh.

And I didn't deal with documentaries. Oh, and occasionally I would be called in to give an opinion or say what I thought. But I mean physically Chris would have been, that would have been his department.

Oh I see.

That would have been Chris in Wardour Street.

Oh they were still in Wardour, they remained in Wardour Street?

Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

I see. Because they also did...

No, they were in the Soho Square area.

Yes.

[Phone rings] I don't know what is this all about. Do you mind if I just see what's happening out there?

No.

[Pause]

Because we, the, the, The Film Institute and The War Museum have quite a lot of the little wartime thirty seconds, one minute films.

We used to do an awful lot of this at National Screen.

Yes, one a week, yes.

Yes, oh yes. Because we had the whole technical set up. There were the negative rooms, cutting rooms, camera rooms, our own laboratory, you see we were able to do the whole thing very quickly.

You must have had a little bit of a, some sort of a studio set up to be able to, you know, because...

Well, we didn't do any physical, not to my knowledge, any physical camera work with personnel, you know, we didn't do that. But the laboratory was there simply to finish the job very quickly, and we had our own optical printers and our own animators so we were able to do absolutely everything within National Screen. But live shooting very rarely, that was very rare, that would be done at the studios, there's no doubt about that. But we had our own cutting rooms. There was a hell of a staff there was no doubt about that, and an enormous amount of know how of course, you know, because we were covering everybody's films.

Yes.

Everybody's. There was, I think Warner's were about the one, the one company who…

I think MGM made their own as well at one time.

MGM also tried, but I, I found it used to come back to us, you know, an awful lot, because censorship and the distribution. So we were involved in everybody's pictures really. Basically we covered the, we really covered the industry. I mean I think I, I did everybody's trailers except Warner's, and even that occasionally would come our way.

Oh yes. Well, they made some British films didn't they?

Oh yes. So we, we worked closely at, as I say, we would, we would see rough cuts at the studio without any of us thinking, without any dubbing or anything we were allowed to go in and see these things. Because we had to make selections of material, there was no doubt about that. And it became very difficult actually because if they were cutting the picture at the same time as I wanted material...

Oh yes.

That was an impossible situation. I mean the cutters would go mad and, you know, tell me to go to blazes because they were cutting the picture for God's sake and, and the premiere was, had already been arranged somewhere, and here was I wanting and everybody else worrying me for the trailer of course. It was their, their most exciting piece of advertising there's no doubt about that, the trailer was frightfully important. But the censorship problems were impossible they really were, they were absurd looking back, but it was as a sign of the times and this is how we worked, you know.

Well, they still try to make all the films with the U, with the U trailer if they can.

Oh still had to make it do but they're not nearly so tight-lipped about it, you know.

No, probably not.

I mean they've grown up a little bit. I, in my time anybody kissing, I, even not frightfully intimately they would look at twice for a U trailer, my God.

Yes.

You know, mad, absolutely mad, but this was what it was all about.

Did you have to, with the American movies particularly they always seemed to be very good on their phraseology that was in lettering on the screen.

Yes.

Do you have, have to do that as well as the scripting of the, of the commentary?

We had our own total set up. We had a very big and very bright art department because we used to do other people's main titles for them.

Oh did you?

Oh yes, oh yes.

Oh did you?

We would get orders from the Italian Osha [ph 19:30] and it was a very big, very capable art department. And we had our own camera rooms so we'd do our own photographing, our own opticals, our own negative cutting rooms. Oh we, we, we were completely set up. We were, within our own sphere, able to carry out any, anything, literally anything.

And even in, if it was a Technicolor film would you be able to make the colour?

Ah, oh yes, we'd make the trailer. Oh sure, oh yes, but we, but it was another laboratory procedure. We'd have to have the colour done at Technicolor, you know, things like that. We were able to cope with black and white but colour had to be done at Technicolor.

[20:12]

Oh I see.

Oh yes. We had to go, but we would do the whole thing in black and white cutting you see and then we would have a copy cut. But we had our own negative rooms. The censorship was our greatest problem.

Yes.

That was a frightful problem but...

MY: Did you do titling for other people's films, their titles or did they do their own?

Oh main titles?

MY: Yes.

It was a very big part of National Screen Service. Oh yes, they would ask us to do the main titles. Oh yes, we had, that, that was a very big part of our business really. Because we had everything there to kind of do the job properly. It was, it was a, when I, when I look back technically at National Screen it was a very capable company.

Yes.

There's no doubt about that.

Yes, yes.

They really did a very good job and serviced the whole industry, but, as I say, censorship became a frightful problem.

Yes.

Then you got an American trailer which was already married with titles superimposed, commentary overlaid and the censor would say 'Out, out'. As far as he was concerned he couldn't care less.

Yes.

And that, that would decimate the trailer sometimes, it really would.

It would, yes, it must do?

Really would.

Cause nasty jump cuts.

So that was a frightful problem. That was one of the main problems that I seem to remember, you know, having to play the...

You mentioned animation, did you know any of the animators by name, do you recall any of the...?

When I say animation we had our own camera room and our own Art Department and we would do our own animation for titles too.

Yes.

On the trailer.

Yes.

But not necessarily for the film, that was...

No, no.

The feature things used to go to the big laboratories like Denham, you know, and places like that, mostly Denham.

And I wondered if you remembered any of the artists who did, who worked on the animation as required?

In my department, in my, in my company?

In NSS, yes.

What, on the trailers do you mean?

Mm.

Oh yes, George White was in charge, a fellow called George White was in charge of our Art Department.

Oh yes. No, I don't know him.

Oh George was a very bright lad. We had a very big Art Department but just doing our own trailer work but we were also given some main titles, we used to do main titles for features.

Yes.

And George would, George as an art, as head of Art Department would be very instrumental in that.

Oh.

And we had our own camera rooms, our own optical printers.

Yes.

Our own negative cutters, our own laboratory. In order that we could service the industry very fast because the trailer had to be ready ahead of a film.

Yes.

And in those days my God it would be a disaster if the trailer wasn't ready, you know, they couldn't live, but it was one of their main advertising media things, you know, it really was frightfully important. But we had terrible censorship problems, as I say, because of the things they wouldn't allow was a joke. And if you got a married print over from the States whatever you were cutting was overlapping.

Yes.

It was a, it was a shocking business, it really was. It was frightfully difficult. That's why I think it's because I remember it so vividly because I, I had to do an awful lot of the cutting in that state.

They never had any kind of Oscar or anything for the best trailer of the year did they, did you ever get an award?

I don't, I don't remember that.

For that sort of thing?

I don't know, I don't remember.

I can't remember anything like that?

I don't think so.

Because they have Oscars for almost everything now don't they?

I...

Hundreds of the awards, dozens and dozens of awards?

Well, because what was difficult with the trailer. I, I remember Charlie Shear [ph 23:50] one day, you know, bless his heart, who wasn't an easy man by any means but I found him very pleasant. People like Michael Winner that I worked very closely with.

Oh yes.

[Laughter] But they would argue about scenes they'd fallen in love with.

Oh yes.

And for me as, as the trailer maker I found quite absurd you see. And so I would argue like mad, and I remember one of them saying to me once 'Esther this is my film you know', because I didn't want anything he was giving me. I said 'I know but it's my trailer you know'.

Oh.

But I think they got used to me because I think when they found that probably what I was doing worked for them because we had to be so careful about putting in bits to indicate an adult picture and yet you couldn't show anything adult so it really wasn't easy because the best scenes that you wanted to show you were simply not allowed. I mean it's no use, the trailer had to be U Certificate and that was it. No matter if the film was a triple X the trailer had to be U because you were showing it to a mixed audience, you never knew who was going to be in the cinema at the time you see.

[25:00]

No, no, no.

So the trailer had to be U and that really was very, it was one of the most difficult things to get across. If you were doing a very adult picture, you know, how the hell, because even if you said anything that was, you know, slightly provocative you wouldn't be allowed to say it even let alone show it.

I imagine some of the war films were very tricky weren't they?

There again if it was, if anything was very blood thirsty you, you couldn't show it, it was no use. So somehow you had to indicate that there was more to it than there was in the trailer, you know.

Yes. And what about Hammer films, did you do the trailers for them?

Oh we did all the Hammer films, oh yes, indeed.

They must have been iffy?

Michael, Michael Carreras and I, we were great friends.

Yes.

Oh yes. Jimmy Cerreras, Michael Cerreras, I don't know, there were so many of the Cerreras there. They were nice people though, the Cerreras were awfully nice.

Oh yes. Well, how on earth, I mean it's such a problem isn't it, how do you make a trailer for a horror film without being horrific?

It, it's rather by, sometimes by not showing it you can be more horrific than if you show it, you know.

Yes, [Laughter] yes.

You say 'I'm sorry, can't show you this because', you know, the idea. So, and the trailer was so important to them, my God if it wasn't ready.

Yes.

The fuss was unbelievable.

They'd often change a title though wouldn't they, the Hammer were famous for that?

Oh that was frightfully difficult. It was, it was difficult doing the, it was the trailers that came from the States that used to cause such a problem because they were, they were allowed a little more laxity than we were. And when they came over here and you'd get a married print and you're supposed to cut the damn thing, well of course, you were overlapping all kinds of bits and pieces. It wasn't easy by any means. I think the trailer, I think the trailer company did a very good job when I look back because...

No, but you wouldn't have enjoyed, I don't think you would have enjoyed it if, had it been easy would you?

Oh I suppose so, I suppose so, I do.

I mean you enjoy the problem and solving the problem really don't you and making it?

I think what was pleasing in the end is that you worked for people like the Boulting brothers who certainly had a bit of a reputation in the industry and they were wonderful to me.

Were they?

I must say, yes. I, I think they saved my bacon on many an occasion.

Oh.

Because the fact that I was able to work for the Boulting brothers gave other producers a kind of feeling that if they could do so we can too, you know.

Yes.

So it gave me an in that I might not have had otherwise, particularly in those days for this silly little woman to come along and tell us how to sell a picture was a bit much, looking back I can understand their irritation. But when they realised that I presumably knew my job they would listen. Because we had, as I say, the censorship problems was a terrible, was a terrible thing really.

You must have done the Carry On films too I suppose?

Oh we did everything at National Screen Service.

Yes, of course, yes.

It was incredible.

But that's a problem because they were such naughty jokes all the time?

That's right. Oh I mean when I, when I look back the things you were not allowed to show. I mean nowadays they couldn't care less but in those days if you wanted an U Certificate trailer you, you had to indicate in some fashion that there was more to it than this, you know. It wasn't easy, I must say it wasn't easy. But they did their job presumably or they or we wouldn't have been allowed to continue making them, that's all I can say about it. But, as I say, the Boulting brothers were a great help, because I think, I think people must have felt that if they can let her do it we can too, you know.

[Laughter]

This idea. It was very good. They were very sweet. I hear people talk about Michael Winner an awful lot, you know, and he wasn't easy, but if you were able to work for Michael you were able to work for most people I think in the industry.

Well, he was one man who did want to make films his way didn't he all the time?

But he made box office pictures.

Quite.

No matter what they say about him.

Quite, yes.

You see, he did make box office pictures.

He was pretty efficient too wasn't he, quite a quick working man, I mean always on schedule?

Oh yes, he was alright. He said to me one day he said 'What did you say'? 'Oh yes', because everybody, you, you get on. Well, Michael wasn't easy, he said to me one day 'You, you're a bloody nuisance as well you know', he said 'but you've got style'. [Laughter] But he wasn't as bad as people made out.

Of course.

Either, you know, people talk about Michael Winner as though some kind of monster and it isn't true, it isn't.

No.

I think beneath all that attitude he's quite a reasonable fellow. But you, you had to work. I mean there were people you worked with who were frightening. I mean I, initially I found the Boulting brothers totally frightening.

Really?

Oh yes, I think the whole industry was afraid, afraid of the Boulting brothers.

Really, oh dear.

Oh yes. No, there was a kind of arrogance about them.

Oh yes.

But I don't think they realised it but they maybe what they were. But of course, they were incredibly nice blokes behind all that guile, you know. And, and I found in the end they were terribly kind to me and I, I as I say, it gave me a kind of entree I think with other producers that if she can make a trailer for them then don't let's worry about it. Because it was very difficult in my day when this silly little girl, you know,

was coming to tell them how to sell a picture. Looking back it must have looked like impudence, you know.

[30:30]

Oh yes.

But they got used to the idea because I would finally give them something that was selling. And we were not only that. I think I got to know the things that the censor would allow and that was frightfully important when you were trying to sell a picture that was, that had some...

Did you ever have sort of face to face discussions with the censor himself?

Oh we became great mates.

Ah.

Oh yes, we were great mates, there's no doubt about that, they were very good. But every single trailer that came from America had to go to the censor, it had to get an U Certificate. And when you got a married negative and you're trying to cut the damned thing and when you, you're overlapping that wasn't clever at all. We, the censor problem was a problem there's no question, but the censors were very, they were aware of the problem, but nevertheless they had to do a job and if the trailer had to be an U Certificate and that was it. But when you, when you look back the things that were not allowed that nowadays, by today's standards, are hilarious.

But of course, the censors in the early days, and in the '30s particularly, weren't, had no industry background, knew nothing about film making or anything like that.

There was John Trevelyan I got to know.

Oh John Trevelyan was it?

Very well. Do you remember John Trevelyan?

Yes. Well, he'd been a playwright hadn't he, he was a clever man.

John Trevelyan, but they were very strict, my God they were strict, you know. But when you, when you look back at the things that you were allowed to put in and not allowed to put in...

Yes.

Childish things. But there, you know, you work for certain periods, you grow up a little bit each, each time so...

Well, Trevelyan was the first British censor to emerge as a public personality, you know, he went on to television.

Yes, yes.

H*e went on the radio, you know, and he made his opinions heard.*

I, I knew John very well.

Yes.

We used to go out and have lunch together. Yes we, I got to know the censors very well because we had so much to do with them. He was an awfully nice man, I found him extremely nice.

Mm, I'm sure.

But it, it wasn't, it wasn't, making trailers was not, has never been an easy job.

No.

You have to please so many people. The producer has an idea, the publicity people have an idea, then the writers come in to it and then you would have this meeting of, of Wardour Street and the studios and everybody had to be clever of course, you see.

MY: OTs?

So everyone was a genius. So they would say something and they're protective for trailer making like mad. I mean you were going to be, it was going to be a disaster if I took it out or I left it in, you know, and you would have to please everybody around this little table. But in the end I think they recognised that National Screen were trailer makers and knew their job. And they would listen, I must say they would listen, you know, you'd say 'Well now this isn't going to work' or 'we put that in' or 'keep it out'. And, as I say, the censorship problem was a frightful problem there's no doubt. Because making an U trailer and frequently when the trailer came over from the States and they would allow a little bit more than they would allow here and you had to cut married prints, you know, it was ridiculous. So it wasn't, National Screen didn't have an easy job and I think they did a very good job quite frankly.

Oh yes.

They, they really did.

Of course, sometimes, I'm just wondering about this, whether you were able to sort of create your own what shall we say phraseology, you know, for the work?

Oh yes. Oh I ...

Or whether you had to follow something from the studios?

No. I, I would, I would, I would irrespective I would sit down and, and type a script. And then that script, we'd have a meeting with the producers, the directors, Wardour Street and everybody had to be clever round that ruddy table, I used to want to kill

them. But, [Laughter] because they would say something that was going to kill the whole job, you know, I thought 'Oh my God don't say that', you know. But still they were doing their job in all fairness to them. They had, they had a publicity thing, they knew what they were doing as well. So you have to live with that.

But of course, they had their own, they would have their own publicity men?

Oh yes, oh yes.

Doing the press advertising and that kind of thing?

Frequently you would have to follow the pattern of their publicity.

Yes.

I mean if they were going to stress the thing in a certain fashion they would want you to do it in the trailer. But often they would pinch ideas that I had already written in the trailer for their publicity.

Oh.

There's no doubt about that. They would incorporate that in their advertising jargon, you know. Oh yes, well that was fair enough.

Oh yes.

Because it was the whole set up that was right on.

Of course, that famous, particularly the Americans were famous with their phrases like the only one that comes to mind it would be Jane Russell, 'Mean, moody, magnificent' so that had to be in the trailer.

[35:06]

I know.

Because it was everywhere.

But it was unfair in the end because trailers got a kind of reputation for this kind of thing, and it wasn't true, you know, because some of the, the American trailers that came over were quite brilliant I, I used to make and we didn't do this nonsense, the adjectives went out of the window an awful long time ago but they would still associate trailers with adjectives, you know, as though you were going to send the most wonderful business. And you didn't, you just didn't, you grew up like the rest of us, you know. So, but, but it still had if they thought they were being clever on television and they would talk about trailer and they would come out with this total nonsense. But still, listen you had to please, in the making of trailers you had to please an awful lot of people. There was the publicity people at the studio that had ideas and there were the publicity people in Wardour Street that had ideas, and then there was the director and the producer and, and the managing director for the, at the renters.

And it was, it was having to please everybody and still put out a trailer that was going to please the public.

Yes, yes.

That was difficult, that was very difficult. And the censor of course, because every trailer had to be a U. So, and the trailers that came from the States, as I say, were a little more lax frequently than they were allowed here and you would have these married prints that you had to cut and it, and it wasn't easy. National Screen was, and they were, you know, I think, nobody ever thought they had to pay us, that was another joke.

Did they?

Nobody ever thought they had to pay National Screen Service, and we had an enormous staff, enormous overheads.

Yes.

You know, and everybody, you know, and I, I used to get so angry about this.

Good heavens.

I used to think 'We're making these damned trailers for nothing practically'. Because we had the distribution you see, that was frightfully important to us to have the distribution for the trailer. So that it was hanging, they held it over our heads, so if you don't do this we'll take it away.

Really?

Oh yes. So when you, when you made the trailer you couldn't, you know, you, the prices we used to charge when I look back were stupid. But the distribution was important to us as a company you see so we played ball and this was it.

Well, you had the virtual monopoly didn't you on trailer making?

Oh yes, but, but they did a damned good job National Screen, as I say, for not a great deal of money. We were always being cut back on something or another by these renters who were charging the most appalling prices all over the place. But however we couldn't live without them and that was it. And they really couldn't live without us too because I used to find it was a very specialised job, the trailer makers.

Of course, it was, yes.

They would occasionally kind of be properly clever, you know, and say We're going to make our own trailer'. It was a disaster in most cases, they really didn't know what the hell they were selling to the public. So from that point of view I think...

I suppose that would be mostly the, would it be mostly the sort of B picture companies that would make their own because they couldn't afford to have the trailer made or...?

They, well, no, the prices National Screen were charging nearly anybody could afford.

Oh.

I mean because we were not charging them a great deal of money because we had the distribution and that was important to us. This is where the company ran on distribution of trailers for all these companies, we were servicing the industry that way. So we had to be very careful when we were doing the production, you couldn't charge a great deal of money. Oh, you wouldn't have been paid, they wouldn't have paid you anyway, it was a joke. If we wanted the distribution and we, and we wanted the production of the trailer as well, you know, you charged reasonable prices.

Right.

MY: Yes, we've got a little left if you...

You have what?

MY: We've just got a little left on this tape..

I see.

So if you want to wind up, yes?

Yes, by all means, please wind it up, I'll be delighted. [Laughter]

I'm going to wind up. [Laughter] When did NSS go, go out of business? They're not, don't exist now do they as a company I don't think?

Oh yes.

Oh do they?

No, no, it's another name now, they were taken over.

Ah, oh they were taken over?

Yes. Now who by? Somebody on TV, the TV characters have taken over.

Oh yes, possibly.

What's the name of the characters who run TV nowadays?

Oh don't ask me that.

Mostly the...

MY: Granada?

Well, those sort of people do you mean?

Not Granada, no.

No.

There is a particular who've taken...

Carlton?

Carlton.

MY: Carlton.

Yes.

Carlton now own National Screen Service.

They've got it, oh they own everybody.

They bought The National Screen Service.

Yes, did they really?

Yes, yes.

Yes.

Yes.

But that was long after you'd gone anyway wasn't it?

Oh God, yes.

It didn't affect you?

Oh yes.

No.

Oh yes, a long tine ago. That's fairly recently actually Carlton took it over. They bought over National Screen a few years back.

I was just wondering, I don't know if we've got time, it maybe a no answer to this. But I've got a feeling that you may have, the company NSS may have made some sort of short documentaries or sort of done sponsored documentaries?

Yes, we did. That was Chris Brunel.

Yes.

In the Wardour Street area.

[40:00]

Oh he did those?

He made, we made some documentaries.

Yes.

Yes.

I think they were sort of sponsored shorts were or were they advertising shorts, something like that?

I think they, they, they all, they all had a kind of persona perhaps.

Yes, I think you used to do things like, oh, appeals?

That's right, that's right, it was this kind of thing.

Yes.

But basically...

You used to pass a tin round in the audience to put pennies in?

We had our, we had our own Art Department, our own camera rooms. We were totally geared, our own laboratory to turn over the stuff very, very fast. Except where, where Technicolor then came in to the picture.

Yes.

We or Denham, we had to work with colour labs of course.

Yes.

Because we, but we had our own black and white department.

That held true right the way through did it?

Absolutely. Because we, I, I could get a rough cut of anything I was doing.

Yes.

Very quickly out of a morrie [ph 41:00] It was frightfully useful from a time point of view as far as I was concerned but they used to print out old trailers.

Right.

And oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

Oh you print them through?

Oh yes.

How are we doing? We got, we're just about...

MY: Yes, we've just come to the very end now so...

Oh so we can say thank you and goodnight [Laughter] to all our listeners.

MY: Yes.

[End of Tape 1 Side B 41:30]

Transcript Queries – Esther Harris

Page/Time		Query
Tape 1 Side A		
7	06:20	Yes I'll… [Inaudible]
11	09:50	John 'Cayburn'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Boss at NSS
11	10:00	John 'Cayburn'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Boss at NSS
11	11:10	Bill 'Brenner'? Spelling/Doubtful Word - American employee of NSS
12	11:18	'Bill 'Brenner'? Spelling/Doubtful Word - American employee of NSS
12	11:19	'Brenner'? Spelling/Doubtful Word - American employee of NSS
12	11:28	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
13	13:30	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
13	13:35	Scenaris'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Film Company
14	14:30	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
21	22:50	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
25	30:45	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
25	30:46	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
Tape 1 Side 2		
38	04:46	Leslie 'Everley'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Employee at NSS
39	07:30	John 'Cayburn'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Boss at NSS
40	08:55	MY – Inaudible question/comment.
46	19:30	'Italian osha'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Uncertain context
49	23:50	Charlie 'Shear'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Colleague at NSS
59	41:00	'morrie'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Uncertain context