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Interviewee: Phyllis Dalton
Interviewer: Rodney Giesler
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This is an interview with Phyllis Dalton, the costume designer, recorded by Rodney Giesler on the eleventh of February 2000 for the BECTU oral history archive in whom copyright of this recording is vested. The file number for this recording is 467.

Phyllis, can I start by asking you, when were you born?

When?

When, yes.

Sixteenth of October 1925, in Chiswick actually. My parents lived somewhere near.

What did your parents do?

My father worked for GWR in the great days of GWR. [laughter]

God's Wonderful Railway.

Absolutely, yes, yes.

And can you tell me a bit about your childhood and how you came to be interested in the kind of…

Well, it was… we certainly weren't well off with somebody working on the railway, and my mother worked in the local bank during the war, and I have a brother who's eight years younger than me, and I went to the local council school, then I went to… I did go to a private school for a bit in Uxbridge, because I failed the Eleven Plus, I was one of those, so she sent me to a private school in Uxbridge for a couple of years. And from there I went to Ealing Art College, which was a technical college then. I expect they call themselves a university now.

What specifically did you study there, was it costume design?

Yes, yes. But there weren't the chances that people have now, there weren't really the specific courses then, I mean this was wartime. It was just something that I knew I wanted to do, I always had.

You were interested in clothes as a child?

I was a child that was always drawing clothes and always… I remember my aunts being very amused because I was always telling them what to wear, I mean really quite young, like eight or nine.

And you could tell styles of clothing and date them could you, fairly early on?

Probably, yes. Yes, because I was also intensely interested in the history as well, so yes, I think I probably could.

Clothing was part of the historical story and the way people dressed and everything.

Yes, very much. I think the sort of social side of history was what I was interested in. What people… how they dressed and what they used and how they lived more than the dates probably. That was always there. And then from art school I went to… one of the mistresses at Ealing found me a job in a workroom which was in Soho at the time, a lady called Matilda Etches. She had quite a small workroom, but she was making clothes for people like Margot Fonteyn and Pamela May and Mary Ellis and…

These were everyday clothes or more for their professional…

Some everyday but more theatre clothes, yes. She did ballet, she did all sorts of things. So I stayed there as a sort of humble workroom attendant for – assistant – for I suppose about a year.

Cutting and sewing and so on?

Yes, doing a bit of everything. I mean I think I was quite lucky really. And also being wartime materials were so short and she was always short of money, but not very practical. So she'd send us in a taxi to the other side of London [laughter], you know, to

buy up old sheets and things like that. And it was quite fun making do in those days. There was the most wonderful shop in Dean Street called Mrs Beck, that was all buttons, anyone if it was there now they'd go mad for them, but they were all the sort of decorative things you could use for all sorts of purposes. And then…

How did you get by when you made something for Margot Fonteyn? I mean presumably it wasn't an old bed sheet that you made up into a…

No, I mean there were materials, there were materials and coupons and things and, oh yes, one of the main things there, while I was there we made things for Olivier's *Henry V*. Ivy St Helier's and, oh, what's her name? Oh… this is what's going to happen, getting actresses' names.

The Queen, Renee Asherson?

Renee Asherson, that's right. [telephone ringing] Yes, we made their costumes. So that was quite fun.

Elaborate ones, the medieval headdresses and everything.

[both speaking together]

Absolutely, yes. And I remember the weight of it, because one of the dresses was made of Moygashel linen, I don't know if you know what it is, but it's jolly heavy. All that yardage, I think she could hardly stand up in it. And I remember during that time was my first visit to a film studio ever and I think we went to Denholm one day and I thought the wardrobe mistress was terribly hard-hearted because she wouldn't change somebody's shoes. I sort of learnt later you've got to be a bit tough sometimes.

Now you were only with these two actresses?

For *Henry V*, yes, yes.

Because the thing, when one talks about the costume designer, certainly as a mere male, one tends to think of it in terms of dresses and female clothing, but of course as a costume designer you'd be…

I've always done it all, yes.

All those uniforms, the whole lot?

Absolutely. Yes, I think we're rather different from the American style anyway, because I think over there sometimes a big designer like Edith Head was would probably only do the principals, or just the women, the ones that really showed. And I think it showed on the screen, there are gaps. You know, there's too much difference between how the stars look and how the rest do.

You often saw it on the credits: Miss So-and-So's costumes by So-and-So, didn't you?

Yeah, absolutely. Yes.

Anyhow, your first brush with the film industry, going to Denholm, what did that do to you?

Well, I thought it was lovely. And one used to see Maggie Furse, who was working with Roger Furse on *Henry V*, used to come in, obviously, and I had no idea in those days that I could be doing that job one day, I hadn't got that far really. Just knew I liked clothes.

So how long was it before you actually got into the film industry?

Well, then the next bit was I had a friend in the workroom who was southern Irish and Rachel said one day, 'Let's join the Wrens'. And I said, 'Oh, okay', you know, like one does, thinking it won't happen. But it did, we both joined up and we never saw each other the whole couple of years we were in the Wrens [laughter] because she became a hall porter at Yeovilton and I went to Bletchley, which you know about, it's all been on the box lately.

The coding…

The coding place, yes. And lived at places like Woburn Abbey and things like that. So I had a couple of years in the Wrens. Now while I was in the Wrens - this is where, I don't know, I think everyone needs the luck or some turn of destiny or something – while I was in the Wrens my aunt, who was my godmother, sent me a copy of *Vogue* and there was a *Vogue* competition in it, sort of fashion journalism. I think they still do it sometimes. And if you won you didn't get much money, I think it was six months' job on *Vogue* and things like that. Anyway, I did it, my aunt said you've got to do this, I'll type it for you, but you've got to do it, so I did it. And I sent it in and I didn't get a prize but I came eleventh or twelfth or something like that and they sent you a slip of paper to say oh, we think you'd be alright in a fashion career. So I went then to see the then editress of *Vogue*, a lady called Audrey Withers, and she must have been a very clever lady actually, because I didn't even know the sort of job that I did henceforth even really existed and she said, well I can't help you now, but when you're demobbed, let me know. And she gave me an introduction to Elizabeth Haffenden at the old Shepherd's Bush Studios. So I went to see her when I was demobbed. And she didn't need an assistant then but Yvonne Caffin did and so I was taken on by Yvonne and started at the old Gainsborough Studios at Islington. The Huggett films.

This was Yvonne too was it?

Yvonne Caffin.

Caffin.

She did an awful lot, yes.

Because Holiday Camp *had already been made?*

They'd already made that, yes, yes. I can't remember them all. There was, while I was at Islington these were all that I was assistant on, there was *Dear Murderer*, I think that was Eric Portman, *When the Bough Breaks*, which was a [incomp – 09:56], *The Blind Goddess*, *It's Not Cricket*, *Quartet*, and three Huggett films, and something called *Made in*

Heaven. And then of course, after a couple of years there all the studios - because that was in '46, I started there – then all the studios started closing down didn't they? There were a few years that every time you got your foot in somewhere the studio closed.

[10:22]
Tell me, as an assistant, what was your job? I mean you didn't do any designing then did you?

No, not really. I mean, you know, you might have helped out. I think I did the odd sketch for Pat Roc, but those sort of things are mainly shopping, really. I mean they still call you a designer, but there is a lot of… although some of it…

When you say shopping, you go out and buy them? Off the peg, so to speak?

Yes, yes, a lot of it's off the peg. I mean I always reckoned the designing job is, it is partly doing a sketch and having things made specially, but after that sometimes it's adapting things, a lot of it is just shopping, getting the appropriate things, you know. Dyeing and adapting and…

Of the films we've mentioned, I mean of course the Huggett films were very contemporary to the time they were made.

They were.

I suppose Dear Murderer *was as well.*

Yes.

But Quartet *of course, you had some 1920s stuff.*

That's right.

There were four stories in that, Gigolo and Gigolette…

I think it was.

You know, this high diving act, which was in…

That's right.

…Monte Carlo in the 1920s wasn't it?

Yes.

That was a lovely film, you know, the short story.

Do you know, I hardly remember that one now. [laughter]

But again, apart from that you were still contemporary designing weren't you?

Yes, yes I was.

No big costume productions?

Yes, no big costumes, no. And the first one I did on my own, eventually, I don't know how I got it because after all, not many people knew me then. Getting started is terribly difficult I think. And I feel sorry for the kids now because in my day when I started at Gainsborough there was Yvonne Caffin, there was me, there was a wardrobe mistress and there were probably at least two, if not three, wardrobe assistants, so it gave me a chance to learn quite a lot, you know, and I had a job. But now those sort of films there'd probably be a wardrobe mistress who'd probably do the shopping herself and maybe one assistant, you know. And there's not the opportunity for people to learn, to come in gradually, you know, while they can't do much harm.

Were you salaried at that time?

Yes, yes.

So there was a certain continuity of work that you managed.

Twelve pounds a week I think to begin with.

[laughter] But… and one's looking at all the dimensions of the costume department, there's the design and the making and then the wardrobe presumably also it's the maintenance?

Absolutely.

For every take the costume often has to be re-pressed or something like that does it?

Well, yes. There's also the thing, you know, your heart sinks when you read the script and there's rain. You think, how many costumes are we going to need for this, you know, because you can't take it away and dry it and have them all waiting round the set, waiting. You know, I mean there are things like when I did *Princess Bride*, the girl starts off with, it's a red dress she had, it's just one on the screen, but she actually had twelve. And it's a hideous expense, but it's necessary.

Of course the other thing is when you get a fight scene and clothes are torn.

It's the same, yeah.

And, you know, someone's knocked down into a puddle.

Yeah, it's worse when it happens by accident. You have nothing. No, it's… And the other thing, perhaps you're in a country and it's very hot and sweaty so you're going to need more changes of shirts for the chaps probably and things like that. I think it's a sort of catering job really.

A catering job?

Yeah. Not always knowing how many people are coming to the party. [laughter]

The other thing is, is the specification of the clothing. I mean presumably these clothes that have been worn for a very short period of time, it's not as if someone's going to wear the clothes for a year, so therefore is the quality, the robustness of the costume, is it not as much as it would be if someone was wearing it in the street every day?

Oh, it is. It is, because when you think sometimes, specially in a long sequence that might go on for several – intermittently I suppose – but for weeks, perhaps, and somebody's perhaps going to be wearing that dress from half past eight in the morning till six or seven at night and it's got to be kept looking the same as it started – this is the smart ones. No, there are no real shortcuts in… And also, inferior material doesn't photograph as well, doesn't hang as well. You know, people often say for period things, oh, can't you use nylon, can't you use this or that. Well, it probably doesn't hang right, you probably can't dye it, won't take the dye, and you know, you might as well use the real thing. And I'm in a way quite glad that I've stopped now because I think the cost of materials now is just so horrendous.

In what way?

Well, when you think of maybe a medieval frock taking about fifteen yards of material and that might be – I'm being modest – thirty pounds a metre, a yard. That's before you even have any making costs or anything like that.

Probably not as expensive as the person who's going to wear it.

No.

[laughter] Tell me, moving from the Gainsborough ones, I mean did you move into any costume dramas at that time?

Not immediately, no. I went on to do a film called *Your Witness*, that was the first, the very first one I did on my own, in '49, that was Ray Milland and the ladies at Twickenham. Not Twickenham. Yes, Twickenham.

That was a court drama was it?

Yes, it was. *The Dark Man*. Yes, it was a long time till I really got into costume ones, there were several others in between.

You weren't involved in any of these dreadful Gainsborough costume things, like The Man in Grey*?*

No, none of those. They were amazing. No, because they had… there were several other designers there, there was Joan Ellacott and Liz Haffenden of course, and Julie Harris, who were there, sort of dug in at Gainsborough Shepherd's Bush, which is where they made those. Ours was a very modest little set-up in Islington really. No, I'm just realising, the first one, I worked on *Christmas Carol* as an assistant for a short time. First one I really did more or less, period film my own, was *Decameron Nights* which was made in Spain in the early fifties, which was a bit of a nightmare.

I don't remember that one. Who was…

It wasn't very good. Joan Fontaine was in it and Louis… I've forgotten his name – French actor.

Louis Jourdan?

Yes, it was, that's right. And it was my first location and it was pretty awful. The art director had a lot to say – Tom Morahan. And they left me in Madrid coping, no Spanish, Spanish costumier who are not used to doing things for films at all.

So all the costumes were actually made out in Spain?

Yeah, they were.

You had to take them out.

Yeah, they were. But I was very inexperienced, I mean it really was awful. [laughter] One of those nightmare films.

Going back to what you were saying about worrying about rain and so on, I mean I presume that you and the continuity girl had a very important working relationship, you know, particularly as you always do, you shoot out of sequence. You know, suddenly you've got a change from a brand new costume to a tarnished one.

Exactly.

That must be an absolute nightmare.

Well, she really has the final say about things in that, you know, if it is wrong she's there to say so. But it was always my pride, I felt the wardrobe should never be in that position. You should get the costume on the set, the right one in the right condition as it was before, you know, you shouldn't have the continuity girl telling you what's…

Did you go as far as say, labelling each costume according to its scene number, where…

Oh yes, yes you would, inside somewhere, yes.

So you could immediately put your hands on it…

Could get quite complicated.

…if the director suddenly said, right we're going back to scene, whatever it was.

Yes. Yes, and the other thing that's so awful is that often you do the ragged bit at the beginning – talk about being out of sequence – and it's got to be pristine by the last week of shooting. So there's no possibility of using one costume and working through. And then the other thing that suddenly hits you is you've asked and asked before you've gone into production and before you've ordered things, are you going to use doubles, is there going to be a stunt person, you know, all those things, because that all means extra costumes. Sometimes they say no, no, don't worry, and then the day before shooting they'll probably say, oh yeah, we want a double for this, so some great huge stuntman is going to do a stunt for some small actress, you know. And you've got to turn to and do

something about it. But you sort of get used to that and sort of have something up your sleeve if you've got any sense.

[20:30]
When you're designing – I'm going back to what I said – you know, one tends to think in terms of women's dresses, but male costumes as well. I mean you presumably have made a study say, of military uniforms, for instance and male clothing, male styles and so on, and made men's suits, I suppose.

Yes, yes.

Fitting and so on. Can you remember an instance where you had to clothe an army or something like that?

Ooh, several armies. What sort of army do you want? Scottish one or a Muslim one or a Russian one? [laughter]

Well, take them all in turn. [laughter] I suppose we're getting to Zhivago *at one time aren't we?*

I did *Rob Roy*, the one that Richard Todd did. That was quite… I don't think that was a terribly vast army we had up there, but it was an army.

You're talking about several hundred costumes for this?

Yes, yes.

And how big is your staff to handle that quantity of costumes?

Well, what you usually do, you've probably got a basic staff of three or four people and then you have extra daily staff in if you've got a really big crowd that's got to be got on the set by half past eight or so.

And do you also from time to time go to people like Berman's and so on to hire in…

Oh absolutely, yes. This is all part of the, what I call the steps to designing really, you know, deciding what you're going to have specially made and you do pretty sketches for.

This is all pre-production?

Yes. Yeah, hopefully, if you've got time. It overlaps somewhat. You never have all the costumes for absolutely everything all ready by the first day of shooting. You're probably just working a week or two ahead, which can lead you into trouble on location, because if you're on location you're depending on the weather an awful lot and if you've got your army lined up for an exterior and the weather's terrible and they suddenly decide they're going to do some interiors, you never know quite which one they're going to jump. So it's all, you know, a bit hazardous sometimes.

But again, if you've got your costumes all well labelled you know where you can put your hands on them and so on.

Yes, yes. But things like armies, people like Berman's, and of course there used to be, in my day, there used to be not only Berman's and Nathan's, but there was one called Samuel's as well, which was a very old-fashioned one. They had a place in the city and then they were in Wardour Street. You used to get a lot of policemen's uniforms from them. And Nathan's of course was, I think must have been about the oldest established costumiers, they went back to the 18th century, used to do things for Queen Victoria's fancy dress parties and they had letters from Dickens and all sorts of exciting things. And then of course there's Angel's who have taken over Berman's now, they call themselves Berman's and Angel's.

[break in recording]

You were talking about Angel's and…

About costumiers, yes. You're probably… I mean perhaps I can talk a bit about *Henry V* and Agincourt? Because that army, we didn't have a lot of money on that film at all. You find things at places like Berman's and Nathan's, er, Berman's and Angel's, that you

yourself have been using over the years, you know, things you had made for other films in there, they've got things that are suitable – tin hats and things like that. And you can sort of pull it together, you can have things refurbished and dyed and…

Which Henry V *are we talking about now?*

Branagh's.

Oh, Branagh's, yes.

Because I kind of worked on both.

Yes, very contrasting films weren't they?

Utterly. I loved working with the Branagh one, that was wonderful, marvellous experience. Really was. Lovely cast and he was I think at his best because it was the first film he'd done.

Perhaps we could come back to that.

Sure.

Get back into the Spanish job. You were working on that film in Spain.

Decameron Nights. Yes, stories of the *Decameron*. Which was a disaster area. So after that I expect I was out of work. Then I did a short time on a Disney film, *The Sword and the Rose* at Pinewood, they had an American designer and the union put me in to stand by, so I don't think I did anything much there. Then I did one of the very few stage shows that I've had anything to do with, *Paint Your Wagon*, that Motley did the designs for, because I wasn't designing it, I was helping…

Who was the designer?

It was, you know the three sisters that called themselves Motley?

Oh yes.

There was Percy Harris – who's a lady, her name's Margaret really – Sophie Harris, who's her sister, and Elizabeth Montgomery who worked in the States. And they went back to the years before the war making stage costumes for Gielgud and those sort of things. Anyway, I think Elizabeth Montgomery designed *Pal Joey* in America and then when Jack Hylton brought it over here, the other half of Motley got it. But I think it was still using her designs, so it wasn't original designing at all, it was just getting it done. Then I was very lucky, I had a job at Pinewood on *One Good Turn* which was – oh what's his name, the comedian?

Norman Wisdom.

Norman Wisdom, yeah.

And Jerry Desmonde.

That's right. And then there was a film called *Passage Home*. That was, wait a minute, I've got another list.

Right.

Passage Home. Yeah, oh Peter Finch. That's who I was trying to think of. And Diane Cilento. Then I worked on *Anastasia*. No, wait a minute…

That was Bergman?

Yes. But I didn't design it, that was René Hubert, I was his assistant. And then there was a film called *Zarak* for Warwick, which was another… that was my other rock bottom disaster film, made in Spanish Morocco in the winter.

I reviewed it for Films and Filming*, I remember.*

Really, did you? [laughter] It was pretty awful.

I couldn't be very polite about it, I remember.

North West frontier in Morocco, absolutely ghastly. All the horses got foot rot – John was on that as well – and they weren't terribly bothered about authenticity. And we never knew [telephone ringing] how many crowd was needed for the next day, so used to have to be waiting for the call sheet to come out in the evening, then go down to the souk and get more and more jellabas and things for them to wear, as the souk was shutting up, you know.

And the prices went up?

Yeah, exactly. I never took any money with me. I used to sort of walk back with a whole line of little boys behind me with sacks over their shoulders and then go and queue up at the accountants' office to get them paid. That was a pretty nightmare thing. And I got held up, we had to come back to England because there was shooting to do in England, and I remember being, the plane had to land at Gibraltar because the weather was bad, and I was stuck there with Finlay Currie for about three days. And he loved it, he sat there with his wee dram. And then John joined us, he was on the way and he got stuck there. So we were a bit late getting back to England. And after that?

After that?

After that was, oh I did – it was before that actually – I worked on *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, the Hitchcock one. But that was in three parts because they made some in the States and some in Morocco and I just did the English bit, but Doris Day and James Stewart brought their own, they had their clothes from, probably Edith Head did them or somebody like that.

So you did the rest of the cast?

Yes.

Yes, I'd forgotten they remade that. I saw the original.

Was that made at Gainsborough?

Yeah, I think it must have been.

I think it was those early days there wasn't it?

It reminded me of a Morecambe and Wise play. [laughter] It was so bad, and yet Hitchcock made his name on that one, I mean it's one of his…

He was an amazing man.

Yes. Did you have much to do with him personally?

[29:53]
Only, well talking clothes, you know, when he'd describe the character. And he was so deadpan, he'd be telling you terrible things about these people in the script and you weren't awfully sure whether to believe him or not, whether he was serious or not. He was good fun actually, he was alright. And shooting…

He was in control of things really wasn't he?

Utterly. And shooting at the Albert Hall was a bit of a lark too because of the distances, you know, round and round if you'd forgotten something, it was an absolute nightmare. Then there was *Island in the Sun*. Oh, *Anastasia* I told you about, yeah? *Island in the Sun*, that also, that was again Joan Fontaine, Harry Belfonte, yeah.

Can you remember who directed that?

Robert Rossen. Yeah.

And that was shot in Grenada was it?

Grenada and Barbados, yes. That was, they had a costume designer called David Ffolkes who did the people coming from America, again, because there was James Mason, Joan Fontaine, Dorothy Dandridge, Joan Collins, Diana Wynyard, and I did the people coming from England like Diana Wynyard and Basil Sydney and John Justin and James Mason, I think I did. Not many of the women. Then there was *Carve Her Name with Pride,* did that.

That was Virginia McKenna wasn't it?

Yes. About Violette Szabo.

They showed clips of that the other night on…

I know.

You saw it, did you?

I saw it, yes, yes. She didn't look much like Violette Szabo, Virginia, but never mind.

Paul Schofield was in it wasn't he?

Yes, he was.

I thought I saw him in the background.

Yes, he was.

It's a huge contrasting in periods and so on and subject matter that you've covered isn't it?

Yes, yes.

And with these jobs, I mean by this time presumably you were a freelancer, you were moving from job…

Yes, I was.

You had an agent by that time?

I had an agent, but I don't think I ever had a terribly good agent. I don't want to be unkind about her, but I could have done with a better agent earlier. I eventually, much, much later went to London Management and it was terrific from then on. But for a long time it was quite a struggle really, because I wasn't very well known and I hated ringing people up, I just couldn't. I'd say, oh they're just going to lunch now, it's teatime, they'll be going home soon, I'll do it tomorrow. You know, not good at that. Anyway, then there was *Our Man in Havana* which was the first film with Carol Reed. And I adored Carol Reed, he was… so many young people now you mention Carol Reed – oh, who's he? Yeah. People are so soon forgotten. He was a much more human person than David, really. I think basically a much nicer person.

He had more rapport with his artists, presumably? With his actors?

Yes, he did, yes he did.

Because he came from the theatre originally didn't he?

Yes. I'm not saying I didn't like David, I loved working with David Lean, but I never thought that David was basically a very nice person. Charm, yes, amazing charm. And of course, most directors are fairly ruthless, they have to be, I mean to have the blinkers on and get what you want out of all those actors and a whole crew. It's not the easiest job. But Carol, you could talk to him and he was just lovely to work with, and funny. Yeah, I think more sense of humour.

And that was, Our Man in Havana*, was the first Carol Reed film you worked on?*

Yes, it was. And John was on that too. Then there was *The World of Suzie Wong*. That was a difficult one, we had a change of directors halfway through, change of Suzie as well, because we started with one actress then went on to another… that was in Hong Kong.

Had you got far with the first actress before you had to change?

Not very far, no. We'd got a lot of costumes made.

There wasn't a big insurance pay-out or anything?

I don't know. I wasn't bothering about that then. [laughter] Might have been on the director, that changed. What I hate with some of these films, that's why I was saying going back to your small budget film, that people are nice if you honestly haven't got much money, but it's films like *Suzie Wong* that you've got a director that thinks, oh, the costume designer's here, she's shopping every day, she can find the pearls and the jewels and the material for my wife, my mistress, my whatever, and the times sometimes that so many… especially with American films, that you've got half a dozen executive directors, executive producers of varying titles, you know, and all that money is being spent on Concordes to bring them in, and yet your budget is being pared. And I didn't mind what I spent as long as it was showing on the screen. I don't think I had a reputation as being wildly extravagant, but I did try and make whatever I did get used on the screen.

When you come in on a major film, I mean I've gone through this with John Box a lot about where the designer starts designing the film, and from his point of view of course the whole thing goes down to the design department and all the other branches come in. But your work, do you get ideas early on when you read the script and feed them back to the director, or what? Or are decisions handed down to you as to what costumes have got to be designed and what area…

It's a mixture really. It depends who you're working with. I mean when it was John and David Lean, John sometimes had ideas, not necessarily precisely for a costume, but you know, we did have a good collaboration; he'd tell me what he was thinking of for a set, which would spark me off, so that I wasn't going to do a red and white striped dress against his red and white striped wallpaper or, you know, whatever, that sort of thing. David was more difficult in that some directors do know exactly what they want. David often didn't know really, so those were fairly extravagant films I did with him, so the only answer there is to have three things for him to choose from, you know. And he was also

very, you know, you can get a bit pedantic doing a period film [telephone ringing], saying we've got to do this because that's the correct period, and David would say well, you know, eff the period, I don't want that. And it would make you think a bit further.

Of course there is the expressive dimension. John was telling me the famous story about the red dress that Julie Christie wouldn't wear, where you step outside logic in a way and you look at the emotional significance of that red dress and how Julie Christie accepted it once the path was explained to her, that she was meant to feel like a whore dressed in it.

Exactly.

So presumably there are other examples where you step outside the conventional…

Yes, well I'd sort of almost forgotten that one because originally it was a black dress, it was a black velvet dress and I'd said that Steiger, or the part Steiger played, may have given her the dress but what he didn't give her was any jewellery to go with it, and I thought that would make it look a bit odd. But I don't think David ever knew what I was talking about, so perhaps I wasn't right. But that scene where Geraldine Chaplin arrives on the train, which most people remember, and she's in pink fluffy marabou, I originally did a much more sophisticated design because I thought she'd been at finishing school in Paris. She had lovely big black sort of fluffy hat and very tight, very, very pale pearl grey outfit. But David was… and I was being too practical in that when David said he wanted her white or pink or something, I said she can't sit in the train all that time, and you know, that was me being boring, really. And in the end, you know, obviously you give in and I did the pink outfit and he loved it. And being Geraldine she didn't get dirty. If Julie had been wearing it she'd have been filthy. [laughter] She was just a bit, a little bit more careless with her clothes.

[laughter] How fascinating. Anyhow, going back to Island in the Sun*, we were last talking about.*

Yeah, I think… oh, Carol Reed we were on, and then *Suzie Wong*. Then there was a very small film that I shouldn't think ever saw the light of day, called, I think… what it ended up as. It started as *Fury at Smugglers' Bay*, then it said it was *The Wreckers In Fury at*

Smugglers' Creek. Doesn't matter anyway, it wasn't… it was, it says here late 19th century, I thought it was 18th century actually. It was Peter Cushing and John Fraser and sort of a smugglers…

[40:19]
Was it a Disney thing or…

No, it was… John Gilling, Mijo Productions, distributed by Embassy Pictures. Anyway. Then there was a film called *Man Detained*, really forgotten what that was about. Then came *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962, which took me more than two years.

We'll have to talk about it, I'm sure there's a lot to say.

Well, one of the things was we did actually dress absolutely every last single person you see on that screen, and lots of people think the Arabs all wore their own clothes, but that was another case of being ten identical outfits for everybody, for all the Arabs, all in Lawrence's gang anyway.

Now, you were out in Jordan, the Jordanian desert, with your costume department. Can you tell me how you worked?

Yes, we were based, our main base was at Aqaba. We used some of the old tin huts that the army had left there, and then we had very good… we always had, John Box always had extremely good production… what would you call it?

Workshops?

Yes, workshops and construction managers. It was another Scot who was on that. So our wardrobe always…

Wasn't Gus on that?

Yeah, it was Gus, yeah. And so – I think he was on that, he must have been – and so he always had pretty well set up places. We had a big wooden hut there and tents and then

what used to happen was, that's where I prepared and got everything together, and I used to go off, I mean some of the costumes were being made in London, I'd go off to Damascus for a day's shopping sometimes, I had Peter O'Toole's silk shirts with embroidered fronts all made there. And that was another worry because it's very difficult to get Arabs to do anything exactly the same, so if you want six long shirts with beautiful embroidery on the front and you say to them do six the same, you'd better have twelve and maybe you'll have five that match, you know, a bit like that. A bit heart-breaking sometimes. And then I had to come back to London because some of Alec Guinness's stuff was being made here and some of it in Damascus. Then all the army stuff… I can't think where it was made. The research for the Turkish army was quite difficult because there was nothing in any of the museums here. I think there may have been one hat. But because we had Anthony Nutting on the film he gave me special letters and I got to Istanbul and got – they were absolutely wonderful, they were very co-operative – gave me loads and loads of photographs all sent to Jordan in the diplomatic bag. Because the trouble with uniforms, even if you see a photograph, you don't always know what the back's like, and the Turkish uniforms were quite different.

And they knew that they were all going to be blown up and shot and everything?

Yes, yes. They didn't seem to mind.

[pause in recording]

So the Turkish army uniforms you did. Presumably the Arab costumes and so on, they had to be researched as well did they?

They did, but David and/or John had already got those marvellous illustrations from the original *Seven Pillars*, the Eric… I've forgotten his other name now. They did some wonderful pastel drawings of all the main Lawrence characters, Arab characters, and they were a wonderful sort of place to start from. And then the Imperial War Museum had loads and loads of photographers, there's loads of reference, what they were like.

Because you had to have tribal differences I suppose in the costumes?

I did make a distinct one, yes I did, then I used to get very upset because by the time the dust came up you couldn't tell any difference at all. But it was there, it's in there, yes I did do. The only thing I really consciously cheated on was, oh, Auda's costume, the blue, I made that one up because I just thought it looked so wonderful against the desert. But all the other colours were authentic. But David had, you know, he loved sort of see-through things, he loved Peter to have sort of floaty abayas that you could see through. But going right back to the beginning of *Lawrence*, it started in, I think John Box had gone off on a recce and while he was away they wanted to test some people and they tested Albert Finney, as you know, and so they needed someone to scramble him into a costume. I think the wardrobe master that they would have chosen to do that was away or something, so the production manager, John Palmer, knew me so he got me in and I did it. And then I did the Peter O'Toole test. But at that point I remember John Box saying, we're not having any women out there, not in the desert, you know. [laughter] It was all a bit like that. And in the end of course there were several of us.

But none in the cast were there?

Just those few nurses. And I reckon that's why it doesn't date.

Really?

Mm. Because it's usually the women's hair that sort of gives it away, even old Julie Christie in *Zhivago*, you know, with her little bits of traily bits down the side, it's terribly sixties.

Really? I would have thought you would have eliminated those.

There's always something, especially with the hairdressers. It just gives it away. I think we've got better, but there's always something about period costume. It must be something so instinctive, because after all over the years all the people designing period costume think they're doing it absolutely authentically, but there's always a little ghost in there that's contemporary, I reckon.

[50:22]

That's very true of modern television productions that are set in the forties.

Isn't it just?

They never get – the blokes in particular – they never get the haircuts right.

No, exactly.

Or the faces.

No.

And the women, I mean they can do whatever they like to the women's hair and the…

They don't get the hats on properly for a start.

They don't have them tilted forward or anything like they used to.

No. And I always get annoyed whenever a Wren's costume comes up, because I remember suffering with those stiff collars like mad, and they never do it now.

But I'm interested to know how you work together with hairdressing and with make-up, for instance, because that's all part of costume isn't it?

With tact and diplomacy.

[laughter]

Can be quite tricky, because that's where the sort of demarcation lines come a little bit, because although you may plan a hat and get it made, it's the hairdresser's job to actually put it on the person and if they've done a lovely hairstyle that that hat doesn't really sit very well on, which happens constantly, as you've obviously noticed, can be quite tricky. So you need to be friends with the hairdresser.

And what about the make-up side, because I know that's related to the cameraman as well, the lighting.

Yes, well luckily it doesn't affect the costume quite so much, although you might say, well that's a bit much, or not enough, or whatever.

And the artists are made up after they've put their costumes on presumably, are they?

Not if we can help it, no. No, because apart from the fact just sitting in them that early in the morning, having their coffee and everything. I mean some of them you do have to nanny quite a lot, you know, give them an overall to put on when it's lunchtime if it's a costume they really can't get out of it.

Well, some costumes are very difficult to sit down and relax in…

Yeah, they are.

I'm thinking about crinolines and…

Absolutely, yes.

Do you have to have special seating for them?

I think the Americans always did, but not particularly. I think you have to watch it a bit where there's… what's worse than that is at least a main actor or actress is going to be provided with a chair on the set so at least they've got something to sit on. The worst is when you've got a crowd of extras in period costume and no-one has thought of even a bench to sit on and they're all lying about on the grass and you and your staff have probably spent hours ironing all those things, and they've probably rolled them up and… Specially if they've got damp as well, doesn't help.

And grass stained.

Mm. Brings out the harridan in you. [laughter] You can get really very angry. And that's also one of the things when you've got a good wardrobe supervisor who will say, well what's happening to the crowd, what's their facilities, you know, where are they going to put… on location this is mainly, I mean the studio you've probably got facilities, but on location sometimes it's quite a struggle that they've got an adequate area to hang their own clothes up safely and change and, you know, and that we can get our costumes in. And not too far away from you either. Because there's always a few battles, again on location, because the wardrobe bus has been left too far away [laughter], you know, you've got to walk and hump all those clothes. I will say, diplomacy is a great part of the job, I'm afraid.

What other things, from Lawrence*, can you – you went to Seville as well, presumably?*

Yes, we did. And Morocco and Almeria. Yes, I was really with it an awful long time. No, we used to, the wardrobe department used to, I mean we prepared everything, got everything to Aqaba but then they'd go off to the desert and set up a huge tent there, you know, with all the facilities, and then when the unit went off to Beirut with sort of three days off, I think it used to happen about every three weeks, we would be moving over to another location, so I never had any of those breaks, and setting up somewhere else. I don't remember John Apperson, the wardrobe master, particularly having water there, but when I was working years later in the Libyan desert, they had a wonderful Scottish wardrobe supervisor and she had a washing machine and everything going in the middle of the desert. How she managed it, I still don't know, but you know, there are some people that would be great as matrons in the First World War I think, you know, they're that organised.

Looking at the more lurid side of it, I mean you mentioned Branagh's Henry V *and that extraordinary tracking shot at the end of the battle where he's carrying…*

Oh I know, that music.

With the music. And the dead and dying all around, I mean that must have been an absolute marathon design job. And likewise the battle in Lawrence *that was shot in Morocco.*

That was even more so, I mean I'm sure John has mentioned Eddie Fowlie. Well, Eddie would certainly make light of that, I mean he just was going round with buckets of blood, you know. And sometimes when I look back I feel quite ashamed, because one would help lay out some of those poor women and made it look realistic and adjusted the clothes and Eddie would cover with the blood. And you sort of did it all because filming with David Lean was a matter of life and death. And sometimes when I look back I think, oh, did I really do that, you know.

There is this great thing about directing. I mean I remember a short film made by John Schlesinger, about Waterloo Station, called Terminus*, where a little child is suddenly lost, he's lost his mother, and his face gradually crumbles. And I could never do what John Schlesinger did, he told that child that he'd never see his mummy and daddy again and he burst into tears.*

That's a director, isn't it?

Yes. He got it on camera.

Yeah, that was a director.

And I'm afraid I'd opt out of that scene. It's a point beyond which I couldn't go as a director.

No, I know, I agree.

Fine if the kid's yelling anyway, turn the camera on him.

But a small child. Do it to a grown up actor maybe, but…

Oh yes, that's part of the method.

But to a small child, how awful. Anything to get what you want.

Exactly, yes.

No, well David certainly did it. I mean he pushed Peter O'Toole off into the middle of sort of milling Arab crowds on camels sometimes that really was not safe. Absolutely was not. But he was quite ruthless. And the bit that makes me always cringe actually on *Zhivago*, because it is terribly important, you do have a responsibility in wardrobe, that people's clothes are safe, you know, that you don't give them anything that can trip them up or shoes that… And I don't know whether you remember, but it's when the train is full of refugees and there's an old Russian lady running along beside – I think she had a baby in her arms that was dead – and she finally gets on and she screams, she was nearly under that train, because I think her shoes were flapping a bit, you know. And I've always, whenever I see that, my tummy turns over a bit because she could have been under that train and I feel it was our fault, we hadn't made sure that she was properly dressed really.

So Lawrence *took quite a long time out of your life? Taught you a lot, presumably?*

Taught me [laughter], it taught me what I could do, actually, because it was one of those things, I'd seen the play, *Ross*, some months before it was in production, and I didn't really know anything about Lawrence of Arabia before that. And I saw that and then I heard they were making a film and thought, mm love to do that, but I don't suppose I will, I didn't think for a minute I would. But what I've always said about David, if you were able to stick with him, God help you if you didn't get on, it was just better to go, I think he drew out of people what they didn't know they had to give. I mean you had to give seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day practically. But yes, one learnt an awful lot and it was worth it. I think he taught me an awful lot.

So you went on to Zhivago *after that, oh, well not immediately afterwards did you?*

In between I did a stint on *Becket*. Maggie Furse was the designer on it, but because John Bryan was production designer, he had quite a say in the costumes and she did some and I did all the bad soldiers and barons and things. Quite liked doing those, I quite like medieval clothes.

That was Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton wasn't it?

Yeah, yeah. Then there was *Lord Jim*, which we did in Cambodia, with Richard Brooks directing. That was not bad costume-wise, but it wasn't a very good film, I'm afraid. It was odd actually, because Peter O'Toole was in that and I always felt that when I read the book of *Lord Jim*, the description of Jim was Peter, but I always wished he'd done it before Lawrence really, he was just so right. Then after that was *Dr Zhivago*.

[1:00:40]
And that was another marathon wasn't it?

That was another marathon. Mainly in Madrid. I didn't…

That was more the challenge in a way wasn't it, I mean the variety of costume there was much more of a challenge?

It was even more of a challenge, I mean *Lawrence* was bad enough because obviously there were people still alive that would have known what all those *Lawrence* characters looked like. And we did have a few arguments because the Arabs didn't want to go barefoot. I think it even got to the King and he told them, you know, it's what's in your hearts and don't worry about it. They wanted to wear their rubber tyre sandals, you know. And of course all the pictures, all the reference, they are barefoot in the sand. Anyway, I think we sort of won. And then some of the long-sleeved shirts with long bits which looked wonderful, when you're riding a camel, I think some of them wanted to cut them off because they said they were old-fashioned, they were what their dads wore, so they didn't want to. But, you know, you get over it. But no, *Dr Zhivago* was a challenge because again, you know, you think there are an awful lot of people around that know what those people look like. But we did have quite good reference, we had a couple of Russian people.

What, advisers?

Yes.

White Russians, so-called were they?

Yes, the Mollos. You must know Andrew Mollo?

I know Andrew Mollo, yes.

Yes, his father helped us quite a lot. Because they had so many photographs and quite good at saying, well that's right or it isn't. Andrew was very young then, obviously, young and ambitious.

Could you remember other instances on Zhivago*?*

Yes, we lost Geraldine's ball dress at London Airport, about two days before we were going to shoot on it. Because what had happened was, I'd had it partly fitted in London and then brought it to Spain to the costumiers there to have it embroidered because it would be so much cheaper to have it embroidered in Spain than in London. And then it had been sent back to London to finish and they'd sent it out in a box with a pair of trousers for Rod Steiger, and it all went missing about two days before, it was awful. But anyway, as the costumiers in Madrid knew what it was like, they just did me another one, very, very quickly, like overnight, like an all-night job. But I think that was one of the worst things that's ever happened, you don't expect this.

Then you had the whole of the Russian army to plan didn't you I suppose?

Yes. And that was pretty tedious because we started shooting *Zhivago* on, I think it was something like the twenty-eighth of December, it was immediately after Christmas, and of course we went on through the winter, the spring, the summer and we were still there, still on that Moscow street in the snow. And in the winter they all had piles of clothes on and were pretty cold, then as the summer came they still had to wear all those clothes, however hot it was. And… and that was… what was I getting to? [pause]

The thing I remember about the Russian army and against what I was saying…

Oh, that's right, yeah.

…about that on television is, they looked as if they lived at that time, they looked half-starved…

I was very…

…very sallow faced.

I was very proud of some of those army people. If you've got a good army you can be quite proud of it, because you don't need many prototypes and then you've got a whole lot. But then you've got to treat each one individually, they're all characters.

They were all Spanish extras presumably?

Yes, they were. Spanish army.

Spanish army?

Yes. Oh yeah.

Maybe they were half starved?

No, no, you've reminded me actually, they were absolute devils. What I was about to say that I forgot just now was what used to happen was, I don't know whether you know but I expect John's told you, we were shooting up in Soria where the snow palace was, supposed to be snowing up there and it never was snowing up there, or Eddie Fowlie'ld ring up when we were shooting in Madrid one day and say, it's snowing in Soria, so the word would go out, drop everything, come up to Soria. And I know one day we'd just got all that large army, probably about 500 of them, dressed and the message came to get up to Soria double quick. So we had to undress them all, hang it all up, rush up there. Of course when you got there it had stopped snowing so, came out with the white plastic. But I do remember now, I'd forgotten for a bit, that that army spent all their time pulling off their epaulettes and insignia, I mean just for fun, not for any good reason, so it was a bit trying. But, they probably weren't being paid anything. I expect the officers got

something out of it, or the government, but the men probably didn't, so in a way you could hardly blame them. It was just a lark to them.

Yes, horrendous. It reminds me of a supertanker, you know. I remember if I was on a documentary crew with six or eight people and you suddenly want to change location, you jump in the unit minibus and you're there, but imagine a huge feature crew like that having to change location.

And it happened all the time. I mean ask the catering people about that, because they'd be getting ready for the hot lunch that every British crew always wants, ready for one o'clock or something, and David would still be trying to make up his mind where he was going to be shooting that afternoon. And suddenly we'd all have to up sticks, all go off, catering van and everything, all chasing off and not knowing where you were going to settle. I mean they did miracles really. They always came up with the goods somehow, but it wasn't ideal.

So how big was your establishment on Zhivago*? I mean your costume department?*

Difficult to remember the exact numbers now, but I could have had as many as fifteen or twenty even, because I had Betty the Scottish girl and I had an assistant that helped me with shopping and stuff and spoke Spanish, and then there was a sort of… oh, we had an Italian wardrobe master as well. A lot of temperaments in that wardrobe. And then we had probably ten or twelve others at least, and probably a few more people when there were really big crowds. And an awful lot of work to do pre-production, breaking down all those clothes. I mean I used to make the men wear those sort of skin [?] coats while they were polishing boots or doing any jobs in the wardrobe so that you got all the right… you can't guess where creases come, well you can, but you know, it's not as satisfactory as wearing them in.

And they had to be made to look lived in?

Absolutely, absolutely. That's one of the greatest arts, I think, making costumes look so real that nobody really notices them, you just accept that they're right. I always reckon anyone can do the fancy dress costumes, that's easy, but make an army look realistic,

realising that you've got all… I mean with the British army for instance, First World War, getting all the particulars, but then you've got to think, well, where are they wearing these costumes, it's not in England, they haven't had that law out yet – I'm not explaining very well.

Which law was that?

Well, things like the insignia changed, you know.

From the sleeve to the shoulder?

From the sleeve to the shoulder, things like that. And you think well, that wouldn't have happened immediately the day after that came out, a lot of people in the Middle East probably. Little things like that.

Can we just move on from Zhivago *a bit and talk about your other films, maybe come back to it, the big film, if you think of anything else.*

Yes. Well, then there was *Oliver!* with Carol, again, and John Box of course. That one was quite a tough one because although we made it all at Shepperton, it was like doing films in one, because we had all the sort of dramatic stuff on the stages and then anything that the dancers were doing was on probably the outdoor set, or something else. So there was an awful lot of, wardrobe here, stage there, the outdoor stage there, walking up and down all day.

[1:10:12]
Did you have a mobile, a truck in which you could hang costumes to get them moved around easily?

Well, we probably would have pushed the old hanging rail along, you know, but not much more than that really.

And that was sort of Victorian ragamuffin design?

Yes, well what I did actually with the boys on *Oliver!* was to take them all to Berman's first when they were first cast, and I found out most of them were much older than they looked – but anyway, that's neither here nor there really – I took them and then dressed them up in sort of whatever I could find in Berman's sort of old clothes, and then because they were going to need duplicates, because we knew we were shooting a long time and things like that, then I had them made to look roughly like… And anyway, dressing them up roughly like that first and showing Carol, at least then we knew that's what he wanted and I could work on that. It was a lovely film to do, that.

And what followed that?

After that was something called *Fragment of Fear*, that was a modern one with Gayle Hunnicutt and David Hemmings. Then I did *The Hireling*, for which I got a BAFTA award, that was twenties. The book isn't twenties, I think the book's forties, but I think they were right to make that twenties, I think that worked. That was the first one I did with Ben Arbeid as producer. And after that I did *The Message*, the film about Mohammed.

Oh really? Yes, that was the one that was backed by the Libyans wasn't it? No?

I don't know where he got the money actually, but it could have been because…

Is it the one you shot in Libya?

Yes, we did, yes. But we started off in Morocco and we built the Kaaba there, but then Morocco fell out with the King of Saudi Arabia who was very anti them building the Kaaba there, so the Moroccans got a bit petrified of having us there, so they chucked us out. And then Gaddafi, I suppose to probably cock a snook, he said oh, you know, you can come here. So that was a different sort of desert.

I would have thought you couldn't have built the Kaaba.

We did.

You know, it's the one and only place where…

Absolutely, we did. We never showed Mohammed which, you know, at least that was tactful.

[laughter]

It was always from the camera's point of view, from the camel. But that was yet another funny army, because… and that must have been one of the biggest armies actually. The same Scottish Betty that I had on that, she was absolutely wonderful with them, but they'd been asked to turn up in something white that we could then help them with and some of them would turn up in their wife's white nightdress, things like that.

It may have been widely shown, but I suppose in the Muslim world it would be not shown, but I don't think it ever got released…

I don't know how much of success or not it was really. His idea was that it would be shown in the Muslim world and we did two versions. I remember, you can imagine, every single scene was…

Who directed it? An Arab or…

Moustapha Akkad, who was a Syrian, born in Syria, but he'd studied, he'd majored at the University of California of course and had always wanted to make it, you know, it was his thing in life that he'd always wanted to do it. And I suppose in a way it was quite educational, even for me, I didn't know anything really about the Muslim religion. I found it very difficult reading the script because I'd never heard of one of those people before, so it was very difficult to identify them. And that did go on a bit too long really.

Were there many other British…

We had Anthony Quinn in that. He had quite good casts, but…

Any Brits on the unit, apart from you?

Oh yes, it was a British unit.

Was it?

Yes, it was. Yes, Jack Hildyard was photographing it. Who was the art director? Can't remember. Oh, American art director, Tambi Larsen, and Maurice Fowler. It's a pity it wasn't more of a success. But I gather that when it was shown and when it was an audience that understood what it was about, you know, they were all jumping up and down and quite excited by it, so I don't think it did any harm. There were bomb threats, you know, at the premiere and things like that. There would be. [laughter]

[laughter]

I think I'm going to go and make some tea, would you like that?

[break in recording]

…going through them one by one.

That's fine, yes.

Is it tedious?

Not a bit, no, because it plots your career and also probably stirs up memories as well, which is useful.

Yes, it does actually. I haven't done this for a long time.

We were talking about The Message*, the film on Mohammed.*

Yeah, which took forever and we had – I'm probably repeating myself there – I think we've done *The Message*, haven't we? Then there was *Voyage of the Damned*, which was

about the Jewish people leaving Germany. I don't know whether you've ever read the book? The book, I think it was a very good book because I felt when I'd read it that there was an absolutely dark cloud over me, it was that awful, it was about people leaving Germany and no-one would take them in just before the war and they…

It was set before the war was it?

Just before, in '39. And they were sent on a ship to Havana and the cynical Germans knew they wouldn't be able to land there, they weren't allowed to land and I think they went to America and even England wouldn't have them. And in the end I think a few did land up in England but some landed up in Holland and were still taken to concentration camps. It was awful, but the film was not made with sensitivity. It was a director called Stuart Rosenberg who I think should have known better. But it was interesting to do costume-wise - although Faye Dunaway had to have sort of fancy thirties outfits - doing the refugees.

What was interesting for you?

The documentary side I think. Because I think that's what I prefer doing, is making people look like they really were, and if it's that sort of time you ought to be able to do it. I'm not quite so interested in… I don't think I could ever do a stage revue or something like that, that's a totally different sort of designing. But building people's clothes up that, you know, look real, that look as if they've lived in them and tells a story in fact, that's fascinating.

Do any of the actors ever tell you how the clothes they've been wearing affect their performance or anything like that?

I think you know if somebody's happy in them and sometimes you do get a rather nice payback, you know, like Emma Thompson in *Henry V* said, you know, I never knew I could look so lovely, or something like that, you know, which is quite rewarding.

But that's interesting, you've clothed both Queens.

Yes, yes. Then you get somebody like Brian Blessed taking the mickey out of everyone, teasing everyone and telling them they look awful. Anyway, after *Voyage of the Damned* there was *Greek Tycoon*, but again, some of the principals, the Jacqueline Bisset stuff was made by Halston in America, but I did ninety per cent of it. Then there was *The Water Babies* which were made up in Ilkley, which was one of those nice experiences, you know, small film, not much money, but lovely. But that was ruined because we did the on the ground *Water Babies* stuff in Ilkley, but they used Polish cartoons for all the underwater stuff, which I thought was awful. I think they were the wrong people to do it. I don't think they had the sensitivity to do our *Water Babies*. But the rest of it was fun and Lionel Jeffries was lovely to work with. So that was quite nice. Then I did *Eagle's Wing* in Mexico, that was about North American Indians.

I remember that, yes. Martin Sheen wasn't it?

Mm. Yeah, Anthony Harvey directed it. And that was an absolute challenge, perhaps more than any, because I'd never been one to watch cowboy and Indian sort of films, I'm still thinking of Indians with a thing round and a feather up the back. But that was very nice because I met Sam Waterston in New York and we went to the Museum of the North American Indian and got quite a lot of stuff made up there. And then some stuff made in Mexico, and I love Mexico, so that was quite a good experience. Then there was *The Spaceman and King Arthur*, made at Alnwick.

[1:20:13]
Terribly contrasting work you've had haven't you?

[laughter] Sublime to the ridiculous and back again! Then there was *The Awakening* that Mike Newell did, which was Egypt, with Charlton Heston striding around in shorts.

Ancient Egypt?

No. Well, modern archaeologists, you know, being haunted. That wasn't very good. Then there was *The Mirror Crack'd*, the Agatha Christie, and then *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which was done at Pinewood for television with Anthony Hopkins. And that was interesting because they made him… this is where I didn't have any particular influence,

you know, it's the make-up and the hair, they gave him a red wig and too much make-up, and yet I think if the director had seen him at his fittings, he didn't need any props, he didn't need funny make-up, funny hair, club foot, he could do it all, you know, which a really good actor can do. Then there was *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, also for – Anthony Andrews one – for television. And I got an Emmy award for that. And then I did *Private Function*, the pig film.

Oh, the pig film, Maggie Smith.

Again in Ilkley. It was lovely being up there because I…

That was a lovely film.

It was. And we had so many laughs on it, it was so funny. I mean we were shooting in this small house and this bloody pig, you know, [laughter] all over the place.

I think the pig handler should have got an Oscar or something.

Oh, absolutely, yes. The sad thing about that, when I read the script, I didn't really believe they were going to actually eat it in the end.

Did they eat the artist?

No. I mean I don't know, maybe eaten by the… Or maybe he's kept in a special cage with a notice over. But Michael Palin was so nice on that, he's just a nice real person. Then we did *Kim* on location in India, Peter O'Toole again. And then another movie that just died somewhere, I don't know where, called *Arthur the King* that we made in Dubrovnik mostly, with Clive Donner again. Nice cast: Candice Bergen, Edward Woodward, Malcolm McDowell. But that was a case of too many… there must have been about eight producers on that and it just got nowhere. Then there was *The Last Days of Patton* with George C Scott. It's funny…

That wasn't Patton itself was it?

No, it was *The Last Days of*… how he was killed, how he died. It's funny, although I've always quite liked doing uniforms, I was never very interested in those German last war uniforms, found those a bit boring really. And then there was one of those mini-series, called *Strong Medicine*, which I shouldn't think anyone's ever remembered, but it had Patrick Duffy in it that was, you know. Then I did *The Princess Bride*. Rob Reiner directed that, and I got an award for that.

What was that about, do you remember it?

The Princess Bride? It became a cult book at some American universities I think. Trying to think who wrote it actually, because it doesn't say. He's quite a well-known writer and I've forgotten his name for the moment. Perhaps that's one of those things I'll jot down when I remember. It's a silly story, it's a fairy story about a sort of 15th century – at least it's 13th century, but as it didn't matter I made it 15th century, to look at – about the story of a poor peasant girl and a chap and she goes through the most terrible adventures till they meet up in a sea with serpents and all sorts, hence the twelve dresses and all sorts of absolutely dreadful adventures. I thought, when I read the script, what a load of rubbish. But then, Rob Reiner directing and he was horrified when he saw some of the chaps were going to wear tights, because he's got this thing that some men have that, you know, if you wear tights you're… not altogether together. Anyway, so that was alright. And then I did a thing called *Stealing Heaven*, which was about Heloise and Abelard. Another one for Clive Donner, that was. That was sort of medieval again. I was getting rather used to the medieval things by now. Then there was a TV thing called *Magic Moments* that nobody ever heard of. It was modern and about a magician. Then came *Henry V*. So… and that was exciting because it was… oh dear, what's his name? [pause]

Sorry, who are you thinking of?

I'm thinking of the producer on it. I know him so well.

Stephen Woolley was it or…?

No.

Anyhow…

Bruce Sharman. Do you know Bruce?

Know the name, yes.

Terribly nice person, very genuine, theatre background. No, he knew me because I'd worked with him before on *Water Babies* and Mexico. And I think when Kenneth was looking for somebody to design it, Bruce was very keen that I should do it, which was nice of him, and by then I was keen too. But I thought well, Kenneth was so young and it was his first picture, I'm either going to be an old fuddy-duddy that's done too much medieval stuff so he won't want me, or maybe because I have done lots of medieval stuff perhaps he'll… Anyway, he said I could do it, so that was great. And that was a lovely working partnership, it really was, he was marvellous to work with.

Work with Branagh, mm.

We went through, sort of met, having, you know, said I was doing it and we met at his flat where he lived then and we just sat down with the script and went through every page and he told me exactly what he wanted to do. There aren't many directors that can do that. I mean I'm not saying he said exactly what the costumes had to be like, because he probably didn't know, but…

Can I just put a new tape in because I want to go into some detail here.
[1:27:26 - end of tape]

[00:00:11]
This is Phyllis Dalton, reel two.

… with something that impressed me, because you and I have memories of Olivier's Henry V*, it was all beautiful blue Technicolor and all the knights wearing their regalia, whatever it was.*

Doesn't it look theatrical now?

Very theatrical. Branagh's Henry V *there was a fire, there was a lot of mud and they were wearing these sort of leather jerkins and things. Now, when you went to see him in his flat and he started talking about the script, this presumably was the impression he got across to you?*

That's exactly what he wanted. Yes, it was. He wanted to make it look as it was, as far as one possibly could. And then when you start reading about what they did put up with, I don't think we went far enough, probably. But we were very constricted, I mean that battlefield there with the reservoir on one side and houses on the other, I mean there's not much space.

Where was that?

Shepperton, on the lot. And there's hardly any space there. When the French come up on the sort of side of the reservoir, popping up from nowhere. I mean some of it wasn't terribly logical, I mean the French had armour and things on and our lot didn't, and Kenneth wouldn't wear a helmet, you know. He was probably right. But I loved the music so much, I think Patrick Doyle is very clever, I think his music for that and his music for *Much Ado* was absolutely lovely. I mean hearing that *Non Nobis* thing, after the battle, I think it was a Saturday morning as far as I remember, standing out there and watching, and I hadn't heard that music before.

You shot it to playback did you?

Yes.

That long tracking shot?

Yes.

You actually had the music?

Yeah, we did. And it really made your blood run cold, it was so effective.

How many times did they take that, because it was the most elaborate…

Several times. Can't remember exactly how many, but certainly more than once.

Yes. It's almost on a par with the opening of Force of Evil [Touch of Evil?], *the Orson Welles' picture.*

Yes.

And Branagh struck me as having tremendous control over that picture when you think how inexperienced he was, I mean did he have directorial backing?

No, he had, again another name… the old boy, who I think had been his tutor at RADA at some point. [Hugh Cruttwell] It'll come.

What, an actor?

I don't know whether he'd ever been an actor.

But he had a part in the film did he?

No, he was adviser on the text and advised Branagh, you know, because after all if you're directing and acting, if you've got any humility at all, I think you need somebody to tell you if you're going wrong. And he had him on every film I was on after that as well. He's married to Geraldine McEwan.

Oh yes, it'll come. I'll look it up.

Terribly sweet man. And I think he loved it because he was retired, you know, and rather a nice job. So he did have that, but otherwise it was him. And of course he had Bruce Sharman to produce it who's extremely competent, and also had more than one foot in the theatre world, because when Ken started that he was working every… he'd been working every day at the Phoenix Theatre, they'd got Renaissance Theatre things going, I think he

had four plays going. So right up until the day we shot he was in the theatre every night. I don't know how he did it.

Extraordinary, yeah. So he took you through the script page by page?

Absolutely. So then I went away, made my lists, as you do, endless lists, and costume breakdowns and plots and things, and then… Actually, I suppose it's a bit like painting a picture in a way, because I think the first thing you do after that is maybe go to the costumiers or get your assistant to help sorting out crowd stuff, because that's quite time consuming. Somebody's got to find enough clothes for however many, two or 300 crowd, whatever it is, and get it lined up, and footwear and headwear and God knows what. And then in between all that you do the sketches. I got very lazy about doing sketches, I think the one I did the most sketches on was actually *Lawrence*, because at the beginning of that we had John Bryan as production designer, before John took over, and he wanted a lot of sketches. But as you work more with people they know that you're going to give them more or less what they want so you can get away with fewer sketches.

Don't you have to put pen to paper or something, you know, before your cutters and sewers and so on can…

To a certain extent, but it can be a scribble on a small bit of paper. Doesn't always have to be a big elaborate drawing. And if they understand you, you can explain.

And then they've all got to be made at the right size for the actors.

Absolutely, yes. The worst bit is in the fitting room, you can see it's going wrong. When it's not the way you fondly imagined it was going to be. Or you've got an actor or actress, through no fault of his or her own, just is very hard to make look right. We had that a bit with Tom Courtenay on *Dr Zhivago*. He was quite a struggle. Maybe I wasn't sure what David wanted particularly, but I know we had quite a struggle to try and make him look right.

It looked alright in the end, but I mean…

Yes, I think it did.

…how did it start, what was wrong with it?

I can't remember now, I just remember there was trouble. And I've got a photograph of Tom and me and John Box and David Lean all looking terribly sort of like this at him. [laughter] It may have been that the Mollos had come along with another of their fancy ideas, because they did have some ideas that were a bit over the top, [laughter] that I just didn't feel were quite right, so I wouldn't do them.

Presumably, going back to Henry V*, one perhaps harps a bit too much on the battle scene, but it was so spectacular, again, that was presumably a costume designer's nightmare with all that mud and…*

Absolutely.

…slush and…

And stuntmen. I mean stuntmen are always trouble.

[laughter]

Oh, awful.

In what way?

Well, they don't wear their clothes very well. I mean if they're supposed to be wearing something lovely and flowing they want it tied up so that it doesn't come off, quite rightly, you know, but they just look like big stuntmen. You know, they don't always look right. And they don't care.

And Branagh was carrying a human being on that long tracking shot wasn't he?

Yes, he was, yes.

…the strain. Because the ground was very uneven.

Oh, awful. Yes, it was, it was absolutely awful. And the whole of our corridor with the offices and the wardrobe was thick with mud. We had to get extra welly… that's right, we got loads of cheap welly boots in. That was a thing going back to *Zhivago*, was one of the challenges, because you know that Russians wear felt boots, and I didn't know what a felt boot was like, I mean I read about them but you don't know what it's like, but I knew we were going to be in the wet and the mud and God knows what, so we had them all made up over wellington boots, over rubber boots. We got somebody to do a sort of prototype that looked convincing and it worked a treat.

Did you go on to doing Much Ado About Nothing *after* Henry V*?*

No, I did *Dead Again* in Los Angeles. It's the only film I've actually made in America, and that was Kenneth again. And that got a bit ruined because it was a difficult script to follow because – did you see it by any chance?

No.

It has flashbacks to the forties, which is chiefly I think what he wanted me for, because I mean he was jolly lucky to get away with it, he must have been really flavour of the month, because he insisted on bringing out his costume designer, his art director, Geraldine McEwan's husband, Pat Doyle – about half a dozen of us - to work on a film which is a very American subject. He couldn't really say well, I must have them because it's English and I want their flavour, it was American and he got away with it. But because of the flashbacks I don't think anyone could really understand it, so in the end, although it had all been done in colour originally, they then made the flashbacks into black and white, which ruined all my lovely forties costumes. At least they weren't shown in colour anyway.

Did you find it different working in Hollywood compared to an English set-up?

[09:50]

I found it easier actually.

Really?

In some ways. I think I was terribly lucky, because it could have gone one way or the other because, you know, they could have resented me. But I had a very, very nice wardrobe team that when I got there they'd got a big… they knew the English drink tea, there was a big basket of all the horrible sort of herbal drinks, you know, but sweet, and they couldn't have been more helpful. And shopping for sort of modern clothes there is so much easier because the big stores like Neiman Marcus and Sachs and things have a department that caters for people dressing for films. You leave your handbag up there and they give you a big badge and you can go all over the store and just pick out what you want and bring it back and either take it on approval or bring your artiste in and fit them there and then, which, you know, when you think of the struggling round London used to be, trying to find stuff. No, in many ways it was quite good.

Because I think British technicians are held in very high esteem in America aren't they?

I think they're the best, having worked with quite a lot of Americans. I'm certainly not anti-Americans, but I do think our technicians are the best. They're disciplined, and they're very enterprising. I mean I think the Americans for a long time, they always had the back-up of the front office and all of that, I think our lot are wonderful on locations. I mean I'm constantly amazed at how organised they are.

Resourceful.

Resourceful, that's the word. Yeah, absolutely.

If I can just divert there, we were filming in a huge aluminium smelting plant in Norway and the cameraman I had who'd done a lot of work on commercials and so on, he didn't have to do this, but he started off with a beautiful shot of the sucker thing going into the molten metal. Now molten aluminium doesn't give much reflection back, and so I wanted a close-up of the operator and he said wouldn't it be nice if we can just get the reflection of the metal on his face. I said, well it doesn't give any. He said I'll just put a cup [?] in

there and I'll get the spark to put a spoon in front of it and wave it about. And the clients who were watching were so impressed, and of course I was impressed when I saw the rushes, and this is what I'm talking about, resourcefulness. He didn't have to do it.

No, and he didn't have to suggest, even if he'd thought about it, but he knew it was good. It's enthusiasm isn't it, too? Yeah.

And they are. I mean I've found this time and time again, and I'm sure you can quote it.

I couldn't agree more. I mean, and going back to Eddie Fowlie, who is a total character, but my God did he work for David, I mean talk about being David's man, I mean he would have done anything for him, you know. If you were shooting here and David said to Eddie, I want two elephants in half an hour's time, he'd say, 'Yeah guv', you know, he'd be off and somehow he'd find them. I mean however extreme the command, it's just amazing.

No, it's very interesting, you know. And going back to your American experience…

I didn't really want to go because I felt it had got… it was too late by then. I'd never had a great ambition to work over there and I was a little apprehensive, but it worked and I'm glad I went. I didn't think some of their crew were… the camera crew and the assistants weren't all that efficient actually. An awful lot of chattering went on, you know. Not like the quiet sets that David Lean had. Then there was *Much Ado* and that was the last one. Oh, *Henry V*, of course I got an Academy award for. Then there was *Much Ado*.

Now Much Ado*, after the mud of Agincourt, the beautiful sunshine of Tuscany was it?*

Yeah.

Absolutely magic.

But that again was very much what Ken wanted to do. Those girls' costumes; he wanted them pale, he wanted them to look as if they worked, he wanted them earthy, he didn't want jewellery, and he didn't want corsets, he wanted their bosoms nearly hanging out but

no corsets, which is quite a problem to do, you know, when you haven't got any construction. No, he had quite an input.

All the costumes were nice, and as I say, they lived in them.

Yes, they did.

You know, it wasn't a sort of…

They were washing costumes. They were washed most days. I did a lot of ironing myself then.

What other memories do you have of Much Ado*?*

Hot. Very hot, we were there in August, so it was. But it was such a beautiful place, I mean it was such a lovely house, old house, and legend had it that Leonardo da Vinci painted there, but I don't know, I mean nobody really knows I suppose. But it was the sort of house that could have been, because the rooms where the girls were all dashing about and getting washed and dressed looked as if they hadn't been touched since the Middle Ages, just amazing. But by then Kenneth was changing a bit. Very much an actor's director and quite good with people like the art director and me, but not terribly interested in the people working with us, which can be a bit sad sometimes for them. I mean everybody likes to be acknowledged. But I think he was getting a little big by then. But a very hard worker, I mean he slugged it out there in the sun.

Was that the last film you worked on? Mm.

1993. Yes, because by then… because we hadn't been married all that long, married about six years, but we'd known each other for eighteen years before that and we'd moved to Guernsey because Chris had a job there for a little bit, in 1990.

Was he in the film business as well?

No, not at all, he's basically an accountant but, you know, he does other things now. But we'd moved to Guernsey and I came straight back from *Dead Again* to live in Guernsey, which seemed a bit odd. But we loved it, we went for three years originally and we stayed for nearly six.

Maybe you earnt so much that you needed to avoid the tax or…

No, there was a slight tax thing with Chris, but… Because he helped start *The Independent*, he was the chap that helped…

The newspaper?

Yeah.

Oh really?

Helped raise the money for it. He's quite good at getting banks to cough up. [laughter] He's got one of those faces I think. And then all that summer I was away and it just seemed unfair to him, and I thought well, I've had the best of it. I'm seventy-four now, so getting on a bit. And doing films isn't the same as it was.

How different was for instance working on Much Ado *compared to going way back, not to the heights, but earlier films?*

Well, I think what's different between now and then is that you can make people look real and people accept it. There can be creases and all sorts of things, if that's the way that person looked, whereas when I started women were wearing stockings, they were worried terribly about suspender bumps showing through and knicker edges showing through. It was all much phonier I think in many ways. You know, the stars were dressed always terribly smartly, and more formal, I suppose.

Isn't that to do with the whole technique of making films now? I mean the special effects are so much more impressive.

Oh, incredible.

The sound. With beautiful emulsions, the film emulsions that can produce the colours now. I mean I remember shooting Eastman Color, say twenty years ago, and the cameraman would say on a dull day, 'You can't do it Guv'nor'.

Quite.

And I'd shoot it anyway, and he was right. Whereas the recent emulsions, you shoot on a cloudy day, and it's beautiful. Blues and greys and everything. So that's helped I think a lot.

Oh, it has. And certainly they do shoot now whereas in the old days they wouldn't have done. And the other thing was, when I started there was always somebody from Kodak around wasn't there, to tell you what you could do with your colours. That was a job that sort of wore itself out.

And always a Technicolor man around, he took us out to lunch, which I liked.

Oh, that was alright.

[laughter]

We had Joan Bridges, she was somebody that always came round.

Do you find you still think and see in a professional world, I mean when you're out on the street and you see people walking about in their clothes and so on, does something in your professional background give you added interest in looking at the way people dress and walk and move and so on?

Yes, it does. Yes. Yes, definitely. You think, you know, that person, those shoes aren't English, so she's probably German or something. You know, it's all sorts of little things. Yes, because I think you start off as a people watcher, you don't switch that off. But I'm quite glad I don't have to do anything about it now. [laughter] I've got out of the habit.

I'm often composing shots still, but as you say, I'm glad I don't have to shoot it.

Yes, but it's nice to be able to.

And I can see exactly how I'd shoot it and so on, and of course my sons both have video cameras and of course with the grandchildren and so on, they say 'Grandpa, get a shot of this'.

Oh, that must be wonderful for them.

It's a major production, I'll tell you. And then my son says, 'Dad, you needn't have shot quite so much, we only wanted about five seconds', you know.

You've gone too far.

And I've done a sequence, tracking the Father Christmas shot.

Never mind, they'll be grateful eventually.

Oh yeah, of course they will. But they're very impressed by my camera operating.

How old are your grandsons?

Well, I've got three grandsons going from one month to five and a granddaughter of seven, so it's a good old spread.

That's wonderful. They are fun.

But no, I think it's fascinating. You're the first costume designer I've spoken to and it's opened up…

Really?

…a whole horizon here and it's marvellous. Have you got anything else you want to add as a sort of retrospective view of your life in movies?

[20:57]
I'll probably think of all sorts of things after. I think… I think when I saw the director's cut of *Lawrence*, you know, it came out, I think was it after thirty years or something, I sat there and I couldn't believe we'd actually done it. Because it was a slog at the time and it is a wonderful film, you know, one has to be fairly proud of it really, but I can't believe that one did it, having come from nothing much. Where did it come from?

I think director's signatures are much more difficult to find now in films.

Oh do you?

Well, when I got interested in movies very early on, decided to come into it, I could always tell a Lewis Milestone film, a Kurosawa film, a Lean film.

Yes, I'm sure. Certainly a Hitchcock.

A Reed film. A Hitchcock. Because there were certain styles and certain little clues and little visual metaphors that go in. I find it very difficult to identify today's directors, if I came into a film, didn't know who'd made it.

There wouldn't be anything to…

Nothing to tell me. But there was always a giveaway in a Lewis Milestone film, or a Lean.

Yes, it's true. Oh Lean, you could almost laugh at some of Lean's symbolic shots. I mean there were always the leaves at the window, you know, outside, because he started *Zhivago* with that. Same as *Oliver Twist*.

And the thorns. With Oliver's mother coming to the workhouse.

Absolutely.

In her birth pain.

That's right, yes. But it didn't matter because that was him, absolutely classic.

And yet Branagh exhibited a certain amount of cinematic style. At the opening of Henry V, Oh! For a Muse of Fire.

Yes.

And then when he goes to 'a kingdom for a stage', on come the studio lights. I thought, hello, we're in for something here.

That was very clever I thought, with Derek Jacobi. That was another thing that was difficult to get right – Derek Jacobi's overcoat. [laughter] Getting just the right one. I must have brought a dozen down from Berman's, you know, it wasn't worth… we weren't going to have anything made for that, you know, but it just had to be the right thing. But Jacobi's such a lovely actor and nice person.

Lovely voice.

A lovely voice. And it was a very clever way of doing it. And yet, the original *Henry V*, I don't say it was something similar, but it was also a contrivance wasn't it?

A totally different style. I mean Leslie Banks as Chorus, totally different to Jacobi. But the music, Walton's music…

Oh, that was wonderful.

…made it very heraldic right from the word go and it was a heraldic film.

And they had all those horses in Ireland. We didn't have anything like that number of horses. We really were terribly hard pushed.

Well, I think I've run out of questions for this.

Oh great.

Thank you very much for the interview.

Well, if I think of anything really important I'll give you a ring.

Okay. I'm normally passing on the 303. [laughter]

You can always pop in with your machine!

Thank you. Thank you very much again.

Oh, it's a pleasure.

[24:19 – end of recording]