

# Fred Tomlin (boom operator) 1908 - ?

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:45 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** Fred Tomlin was born in 1908 in Hoxton, London, just around the corner from what became the Gainsborough Film Studios (Islington) in Poole Street. He first visited the studio as a child during the filming of *Woman to Woman* (1923). He entered the film industry as an electrician, working in a variety of studios including Wembley, Cricklewood and Islington. At Shepherd's Bush studio he got his first experience as a boom operator, on *I Was A Spy* (1933). Tomlin claims that from that point until his retirement he was never out of work, but also that he was never under permanent contract to any studio, working instead on a freelance basis. During the 1930s he worked largely for Gaumont and Gainsborough on films such as *The Constant Nymph* (1933), *Jew Suss* (1934), *My Old Dutch* (1934), and on the Will Hay comedies, including *Oh, Mr Porter* (1937) and *Windbag the Sailor* (1936). During the war, Tomlin served in the army, and on his return continued to work as a boom operator on films and television (often alongside Leslie Hammond) until the mid 1970s. His credits include several films for Joseph Losey (on *Boom* (1968) and *Secret Ceremony* (1968)) and *The Sea Gull* (1968) for Sidney Lumet, as well as TV series such as *Robin Hood* and *The Buccaneers* and a documentary made in Cuba for Granada TV. **SUMMARY:** In this interview from 1990, Tomlin talks to Bob Allen about his career, concentrating mainly on the pre-war period. He tells some very entertaining and illuminating stories, particularly about working for Basil Dean on *The Constant Nymph*, with Will Hay on *Windbag the Sailor* and for Paul Stein on *Poison Pen* (1940). He discusses various technological issues affecting the boom operator, particularly difficulties to do with movement during the mid 1930s. Tomlin was active as a Union Shop Steward, and he remembers details of the early relationship between ETU and NATKE, as well as of working practices and disputes over overtime. Tomlin has vivid memories of various colleagues in the industry, including Paul Stein, Conrad Veidt, Will Hay, Basil Dean, Bob (Hugh) Attwooll, Ted Black, Bill Slater, H.C. 'Pip' Pearson and Leslie Hammond. A natural raconteur, Tomlin's interview is spiced with several amusing anecdotes, as well as being rich in informative detail. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

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Interviewer: Bob Allen

Interviewee: Fred Tomlin

Tape 1, Side 1

**Bob Allen:** This is an interview with Fred Tomlin, boom operator, and the date is the 29th November 1990, so we'll roll from there. Well first of all I'll ask where were you born, Fred?

**Fred Tomlin:** I was born in 1908.

**Bob Allen:** And where was that?

**Fred Tomlin:** And that was in a district called Hoxton in Shoreditch, North London, N1 it was. And I lived round there I suppose until almost the time I got married. But the interesting thing was that we lived just around the corner - in a road called Bridport Place - just around the corner from a street called Poole Street, and down there used to be a great big place with a huge brick chimney on the top. It was a power station and we used to go round there as kids and look through the matted glass and we could see all this blue flame and things like that. Then after a time it closed down and then it was taken over by a motion picture company - I'm not at all sure whether it was Paramount or something like that. And they used to make silent films round there, and occasionally they would enlist some local people for crowd scenes, everybody would be in it from round about you see, and there would be comings and goings of these people going into this studio.

Well my mother - we had a shop and she used to - it was a cook shop, she used to do dinners and things like that. And she used to get people round, the workers in the studio round there for their meals, like the 'chippies', the electricians and people like that. And I remember once going into this place, and I suppose I'd have been about ten or eleven years old, to take some tea round to some of the electricians, so I was allowed inside the place by the commissionaire. And I went into this studio and of course I was over-awed by it, lights and everything like this you see. And there was the director - of course it was a silent film, obviously - there was the director showing a man how to make love to a woman, and her name was, I'll always remember it, Betty Compson. And I think this picture was called Woman to Woman, I'm not sure but I think that was the name of the film. And of course I saw this, but then this went on for years, and it was the time of the depression, round about that time when there was lots of unemployment, and I was employed at various jobs. And then my mother asked the chief electrician round there, she said, "Any chance of getting our Fred a job?" So he said, "Well I'll see what I can do."

And then, sure enough, he sent round a message one day, would I go over to Wembley film studios? Told me the address - they want somebody over there for a couple of nights I think it was as an electrician. So I went over there and I did these couple of nights, and then I came back and I said, "Thanks very much," I went round and saw him. And then he gave me a couple of days work and then somebody else put me onto a studio over at Cricklewood - Stoll's at Cricklewood, and I worked over there as an electrician. And this gradually went on and I got several jobs back in Islington Studio, it used to be called that but it was never in Islington, it was in Shoreditch in actual fact. And then I got married, and then my luck turned then, because I got a job over at Stoll's until they closed down as a matter of fact. They was knocking out these things every seven days, these pot-boilers, these 'B' movies to make up the programme. And then I got back round to Islington and they more-or-less put us on the electrical staff, so that was good, that was. Because we only lived just round the corner anyway. So I was there for quite a bit, and then one day the chief electrician called me off the spot rail and he said, "Would you be interested in a job on the sound?" So I said, "Well, what...?" He said, "I've had a phone call from Shepherd's Bush" - which of course was our parent company - "and they want a boom operator." So I said, "Well I don't know anything about it." So he said, "Well they'll soon teach you over

there, would you be interested?" So I said, "Well yes I would." So he said, "well you go over and see."

So I went over and I saw George Gunn, he was in charge of the...he later became in charge of Technicolor. George Gunn, and Bill Salter was with him, and it was Bill Salter who was asking for a "rough and ready boom operator." Rough and ready in so far that our one over at Islington was Charlie Wheeler. And Charlie Wheeler was one of a loud voice. And he'd get quite, "Quiet!" He'd be bawling, "quiet on the set," and this, that and the other, he was quite a loud-mouth! And that's what they wanted over - this is what Bill Salter wanted over at Shepherd's Bush. Didn't want any of these educated young boys who were coming into the business, he wanted somebody rough-like who could say, "Quiet!" and things like that, you see! So I got the job, they said, "Don't go back to Islington, you're here."

So I went over there and of course I was absolutely lost in this place, I didn't know anybody and I felt quite a stranger and things like this, you see. And Bill Salter he said, "As soon as we get a picture then we'll get..." Well anyway at last we got a picture, and it was a big picture, it was called I Was a Spy. It was directed by Victor Saville and had Conrad Veidt, Madeleine Carroll, people like that in it. And what's that fellow with one leg, the actor? [NB Herbert Marshall] Well anyway... and enormous crowd scenes, we had to go down to the exteriors, they built a great big set, a Belgian town, they built a set out at Welwyn, at the back of the studio there. And we used to go down there by train, with all these extras, all the troops and God knows what. But anyway, we worked on this film and of course it was a terrible film to work on because Victor Saville, the director, was a bit of a martinet and nobody knew anything bar him. So a new boy was you know... And then of course there were these enormous great booms that they had, enormous great things, and the microphones weighed a ton on the end of them. And you had to be... Well anyway we got by with Bill Salter going out onto the set, which he liked - Bill Salter. He'd hold his hand up and say, "Put the microphone there." And I used to put the mike there, and that was it, you know I used to have to 'favour' it and things like that you see, and we got by. And after a while he said to me, "Look, I don't think I need to do that any more, you know about where the microphone..." and so I learnt by being on the job and having to do it, that was all there was to it you see. And we went down there and then I got on very well with Bill Salter.

Then the next picture we did was a thing called um - we went to Austria on location with it - The Constant Nymph. We went to Austria...now that was another irascible sort of director called Basil Dean, he directed this. We went out to Austria and we did all these scenes out there, and then as it came to an end - the location work that was, we had to then come back to do the studio work. He phoned Michael Balcon, back at the studio, Basil Dean did, and said, "Could I borrow the sound crew to go further over into the Tyrol?" He had a second unit working there from Ealing Studio, they'd been doing some exterior stuff and background stuff for a picture called Autumn Crocus! And Michael Balcon agreed, so that we went over there with a sound truck to this other part of - and we did some 'band' effects, all sorts of things like that you see, there was no dialogue. And who was directing it was a bloke called Carol Reed, and when it came to the end of it I went up to him and I said, "Have you got any English money?" So he said, "Oh yes, why?" So I said, "Well would you change the Austrian money that I've got for some English money?" And he said, "Well, I don't..." I said, "For Christ's sake you want some Austrian money, you're going to be here for a while!"

So he reluctantly agreed and he gave me some English money, I don't know how much it was. And then we went back to England, and this comes right up to today because only yesterday I was reading an obituary notice of a woman called Dodie Smith, and she wrote the story of Autumn Crocus of which this picture they were making over there you see. And Basil Dean said, "You travel with the luggage down to the station!" Because we had to come by train, there was no such thing as aeroplanes in those days. And we got on this train and he said, "You're in second class," and he, Bill Salter and Dodie Smith the authoress, they were in first class. But as it turns out [chuckles] they were with him because the first class was full, they couldn't get a sleeper, but the second class, I got a sleeper in the second class! But anyway they came along and said, "Have you got any English money?" And I had this few bob that I'd got off of this Carol Reed. And I said "Yeah." They borrowed three and sixpence. Well of course you see I was earning four pounds, fifteen shillings a week, so three and sixpence was quite a substantial amount of money. And I said, "Well, I'll lend it to you" And sure enough, she said - this lady who died, this Dodie Smith - she said, "Give me your address and I'll send it to you," which she eventually did, with two sixpence's and postage stamps to the value of the two and sixpence and I thought, "Well how mean can you get!" [Laughing] But anyway that's beside the point.

But coming back then we were back in the studio and then I think we did a picture called My Old Dutch which involved going over to Islington Studios and doing some work. And we were there for a bit and then we went back to - er that was it, we went back to The Bush and then I was loaned out back to Gainsborough because they were onto a picture called um... I don't know, Evelyn Laye was in it anyway, it was a costume thing. And I was quite happy over there because as I say I was quite near home, so it was easier. But anyway after a bit there was a phone call from - at Shepherd's Bush that I'd got to go back right away because Bill Salter wanted me on his next picture. It was another great big epic called Jew Suss - it also had Conrad Veidt in it. Now this had an American director, a funny little man called Lothar Mendes, and he had made - I knew because I was a great cinema fan as well, apart from anything else - he had made a film called, with Charles Laughton, on one of Forester's books... Payment Deferred. He directed that, it was a wonderful film, I liked that. And he was only a little man this Lothar Mendes, and we worked on this great big epic for oh - I think nearly six months it took. And anyway you see the thing was in those days that you worked on until you did the day's work, which might well be eleven o'clock at night.

But there on this one we used to finish at about five o'clock in the afternoon. Until one day the director was called up into Michael Balcon's office and he came down and said, "Well I have to tell you that we are not going to finish at five o'clock any more, we've got to carry on working." And Conrad Veidt said to him "Were did you...?" He said, "Mr Balcon's told me." So he said, "Well Mr Balcon hasn't told me so we'll still finish at five o'clock," and we did, so that was that! So we still knocked off just the same as we ever did! [Chuckles] But anyway this was the film that was going to make - keep Shepherd's Bush going. Because you see they had long come to the conclusion that they had got to get into the American market to keep going and this was the film that was going to do it, but I don't think it did, I don't think it did very well. It was practically almost the finish of Shepherd's Bush at that time. But before they closed it down for a while in those times - I think it was about 1936, I'm not familiar with the date - Bill Salter and I had been shunted over to [Islington]. Because we'd made a good impression with the producer over there who was in charge called Ted Black. He asked if we could go over there and work for

him. So we went over to Islington, Bill Salter and I, and picked up the rest of the crew there, who happened to be, there was Les Hammond, he was one of their people, there as a sound camera operator. And there was er - oh I can't remember the mixers' names now, but one left and he went off to - Slim Hand, that was it, Slim Hand. He went off to Ealing because Michael Balcon had taken over Ealing Studio at that time, and he went over there as an assistant director, or producer, I don't know what he was but anyway he left and so there was a vacancy for a mixer. So Bill Salter went over there and got the job, and we were quite happy.

Now then, we then started all that comedy series, we started doing the first of the Will Hay films, we did Oh, Mr. Porter! and Boys Will Be Boys, Good Morning, Boys. And then Bill Salter - I don't know what happened to Bill Salter, I don't know whether he went back to Shepherd's Bush or something, I don't know, but I got on with a mixer called George Burgess. And then we did another Will Hay film called Windbag the Sailor. But of course all the time we were working on these things we had to hump all this heavy equipment about, big booms and God knows what. We used to dismantle them and take them onto - well the stagehands did - used to take them to pieces and put them in a van. We always worked the booms, no such thing as a pole because the mikes were too heavy. And um when we got down to the - on the Oh, Mr. Porter! we all went and stayed at a place called Alton and the railway line they used ran from - it was a bit of disused line, running from Alton to Basingstoke. And they got an old train, an old engine, on the Southern Railways over there somehow or other and that was the engine that they used for Will Hay on this film. And of course it was a terrible thing really because every time they wanted to change around, the train had to also tow along with it flat trucks carrying the sound van, lighting generator and all that - everything had to be on this train you see. And if you swapped round, you wanted to go in the other direction or do something like that you all had to take the whole thing back to Basingstoke and re-marshall it, get it all... So it was... And they said, "Well look, when we go down there we can't loose any time at all, so what we're going to do we're going to build a studio as well, so that if there's any bad weather we can continue shooting inside this makeshift studio." So they erected a thing with tubular scaffolding and tarpaulin, this great big thing, and fixed it up, it was supposed to be the office of a railway station, an old fashioned thing, a ticket office or something. So anyway we had bad weather, so, "Everybody back into the studio!" So of course we went in there and we couldn't shoot because it was pouring with rain on this tarpaulin and that was it, you couldn't [hear]... it was not good. You see, in those days everything had to be used, there was no such thing as post-synching, they'd never heard of post-synching, they never did it! So everything had to be used. And so this was a complete washout, this studio - they didn't want to use it on a fine day, it was only for use if it rained, so that was the washout anyway. But that was the thing.

And then another thing too, what I was going to say, that when we were in Austria on The Constant Nymph, we had a lot of problems there, because we took these heavy microphones with us - well we had an [Eyemo?]. And we had to do a long tracking shot I remember, with a horse and a cart and a young couple sitting on the back, facing backwards, and they had a conversation as they went along you see. And they fixed up a camera, and there was no provision for the sound at all. And Bill Salter said, "I think all we can do, you'll have to walk alongside just out of camera range and hold a mike." And they were these great big heavy mikes with an amplifier on them and God knows what! And the cable was as thick as your thumb! So we looped out miles, of course we had Austrian boys helping us and things like that. We had loads and loads of cable

run-outs so they could just pull it along easily. We took it all off the drum, had it all coiled up and fixed up the extra, and then off we went anyway, so here we go you see - do a rehearsal.

So off went this horse and cart, followed by the camera cart, with me on the side with a microphone, walking. So we're going along and all at once we come to a ditch and I suddenly walked down like that you see [laughs] and come up the other side, and of course we missed all that dialogue because that didn't work at all, I was miles away from them! So anyway the director joined us, Basil Dean, as I say he was a funny old card. He said, "Well look let's pack up! Now then the sound crew get organised and get this fixed so that we can do this shot tomorrow morning!" We said, "All right then." So on the camera car they fixed up a thing with a great big lump of four by two, all lashed up, you see! [chuckles] It'd got to be a substantial thing to hold this bloomin' heavy mike you see, that was the thing. And we put the mike on the end of it and we tried it and it sort of worked, except that the weight of the mike, there was still whippiness even in the four by two, it was doing it. But anyway, we did the job, we got that you see, and pulling this cable and all this sort of thing, so it was quite a job to do all these sort of things. Then down at - when I was working with George Burgess - did you hear of George Burgess, did you know George Burgess?

**Bob Allen:** I know the name, I didn't know him personally.

**Fred Tomlin:** We were working on Windbag the Sailor, it was all working on a sort of tramp steamer.

**Bob Allen:** I saw the picture.

**Fred Tomlin:** You saw the picture?

**Bob Allen:** Ah hmm.

**Fred Tomlin:** And there's the bridge and things like that. The ship was in two halves, there was a back end and a fore end - I'm sorry I'm not a ship man, so I don't know what they were called - with the bridge section, so that every time you went from one to the other you had to cart everything up these steps onto the bridge and down steps the other side, to work the other side. We had to dismantle this blooming boom all the time, you know? And then they did a scene where Will Hay is cast adrift by the villains on board, they were doing a Captain Bligh thing. And he was cast adrift on a raft with the fat boy and old Moore Marriott. And he had to do that scene, "I'll have you hung for yard arm," all this business and things like that you see. And we did the sound by having him tethered on this raft to the ship so that he couldn't move very far. We had the boom hanging over the side of the ship with the microphone, and I had to fix the mike on, and of course this bloomin' raft was going up and down like this and I thought, "In a minute I'll drop this bloomin' thing into the..."

**Bob Allen:** This was in the actual sea then was it?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, this is when I was fixing it up you see.

**Bob Allen:** Yes sorry, but the scene was shot in the studio or...

**Fred Tomlin:** No, no, in the sea!

**Bob Allen:** In the actual ocean?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah down at Falmouth, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Yeah, yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** And that's why the raft was going up and down, not in synch with the ship, so that the boom was going like this and I was trying to fix the mike into it, but anyway we did do it, so that worked out all right you know. But as I say it was all hard work and heavy humping and things like that you see. And um, then that carried on at Islington, we did - oh, several pictures there, I can't remember what they all were. And then in the meantime because I'd been in the electrician, I used to belong to the ETU. Now then I'd belonged to it all the time, I used to play my subs and things like that, and of course there were a lot of ETU members in the studio as well, the electricians and things like that. And then they had a sort of recruiting drive and they got a lot of the sound people into the ETU, some didn't join but some did. And then there was a thing between the ETU and NATKE, the two unions - that the ETU wanted to have all ETU members as projectionists throughout the country. It was easy enough to organise, if they could have got them, because there were two big groups. The Elstree group had a load of cinemas, was it? And the Rank group - I don't know what they were. So they, the NATKE, they wanted their members in to run the cinemas. Now eventually the ETU said, "All right then, we're going to call a strike." So they called the projectionists out on strike, and no sooner did they walk out than the NATKE people walked in and the cinemas kept going, so the strike was blown from the start you see. Now then, they were talking about fetching out their studio workers. Anyway we went to - it was Easter, we had the Easter holiday and when we came back after Easter, after the Easter Monday, the ETU shop steward on the floor, Bob Attwooll. Now Bob Attwooll became known as Hugh Attwooll, he became a producer. Bob Attwooll was the ETU steward at that time and an official for the union, and Bob Attwooll said, "I'm sorry but I've been told by this official that we're officially on strike and we're not going in." That's all the ETU members, of course of which I was one. Now then, in the meantime the people at the studio had put one or two of the sound crew on contracts, so that sound camera operators and other people had a contract. So the union said, "Don't fetch out the contract people because the company could sue us over their contract," or something like that you see.

So the result was that people like Les Hammond and our camera operator called Ted Scaife (who became a lighting man), they stayed in work, whereas I was outside with another operator called Gordon Hay and of course the assistants and things like that. Anyway, we all got the sack, and that was that you see. Well now we're into - that was in 1938 and now things were desperate because you couldn't get - there was no work about anyway. But eventually I was saved because I had a telegram from Elstree Studio, would I report over there in the morning, and it was signed - whoever it was who signed it. So I went over and it was the shop steward, the ETU shop steward. And who had got me the job but Charlie Wheeler because he'd got the sack as well, because he was one of the ETU members but he was a Shepherd's Bush, but he came out on

strike so he got the sack as well. But he'd got a job at Elstree. He'd put my name forward and I got on a second unit of a picture called um - oh I don't know, it was some pirate thing they were making over there. And then the chief of the sound there, a man called Atkins, he said, "I've got one or two pictures coming up, I'd like to give you a job over here." So I said, "Oh!" Anyway I finished on this picture that we were working on, this pirate thing with Charles Laughton, I forget the name of it. And then I got a call from Atkins and he said, "Would you come over and do a picture?" So I got on a picture called Poison Pen and Bert Ross was the mixer. And we got on very well together on this thing. And er... we used to go and have a drink in the bar over there and Atkins was in there, he used to have a drink, and so old Bert Ross said to me one day, "Let's buy him a drink." So we called him over, we said, "Would you have a drink with us?" He said, "yeah," and so it became a nightly thing, and in the end it became a regular thing, he'd come over on the set and say, "See you tonight." "Oh yeah, that's all right, yeah." And that was it. Now he said, now the thing was this, he said, "The thing is this, you know that over here we've got a strict union thing and the rule is 'last on, first off' so I shall have to give you the - you'll be the first ones sacked all the time." He said, "Well I tell you what we're going to do. We're going to close down in August for a month," which they do every year to see how things - I don't know, they do the books or whatever it was. He said, "And what I'm going to do, I'm going to give everybody notice, all the sound crew, and when we start up, you'll be in." So that was all right! But as it turns out they did shut down in August and they never did open because the war started, so we never did come to get back in there again! But er...

**Bob Allen:** Can I just interrupt, was this still ETU or was this ACT?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, no, no, it was ETU.

**Bob Allen:** Still ETU.

**Fred Tomlin:** Still ETU yes, over at Elstree. Charlie Wheeler was an ETU man, we were all ETU. But of course there were one or two funny things happened on the films which of course are pretty safe to give an anecdote or two. When we were working on this thing called - what did I say the name of the film was?

**Bob Allen:** The Elstree one?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, the one at Elstree that I started on, anyway...

**Bob Allen:** The pirate one?

**Fred Tomlin:** No it was Cor blimey I just told you what the name of it was!

**Bob Allen:** Poison Pen?

**Fred Tomlin:** Poison Pen! That was it. We had to do a scene of a railway train pulling into a station and a girl getting out, walking down the platform and having a conversation with a man who was waiting for her. So it was all done at a little station not far from the studio called Bricket Wood. And we went down to Bricket Wood station - it was a little wayside station - with



the sound truck obviously, which had to stay on the station forecourt. But the scene was going to take place on the other platform over the other side, which meant that everything had to come over a footbridge. All the cables and everything had to come out of the sound truck, through the booking office, out onto the other platform, over the footbridge and along the platform to where we were going to work with this bloomin' train. But of course the camera and everything was driven from the sound truck, we'd got all the things there.

Now then, they hadn't hired a train, what they'd done, they'd sent the actress called Ann Todd to a station further down the line and bought a two bob ticket one way to this station [chuckles] where she was going to get out and that was it you see! Now then, we got all set up and we were all ready, there was the camera and there was me on this other platform over the other side, and I was in telephone communication with the sound truck and things like that, and Bert Ross was out there. He said, "Now look, don't let the camera mark it until I give you two rings on the telephone, because you've got to wait for the dial..." They had a big dial, and when they started up they had a big dial thing in the whatsit, the needle used to swing and swing until it reached fifty, a dead still, then you could shoot because everything was running at fifty cycles. So anyway we're waiting and at last they can hear the train hooting, so they said, "Right, roll 'em!" And we had this little American lighting man called Phil Tannura and so they said, "Roll 'em," and the camera started turning and then it stopped, you see. I didn't get two buzzes, but the lighting man said, "They're rolling!"

So I said, "No hold it a minute!" Because the thing had stopped anyway and I hadn't got the two buzzes. The train came in, the girl stepped out, walks along the platform, played her scene. And they had this German director called Paul Stein, and the train pulled out and they said, "That's it!" So they said, "Well it was no good!" So he said, "What do you mean it was no good?" this German director said. They said, "The camera wasn't running!" "What? Why?" They said, "Well there's something..." And he looked at me and he said, "You done it! I heard you say, 'Hold it a minute!' Who are you to say, 'Hold it a minute?'"

So I couldn't explain anything to him, so he stalked down the platform, he walks up the stairs onto the middle of this footbridge and he looked back and he pointed at me and he said, "You bastard!" [Chuckles] He called me all the names under the sun you see, and of course it was nothing to do with me! What had happened was that they went to run and they'd blown a fuse in the sound truck. So the whole thing started, the two cameras, the sound camera and the picture camera, and the fuse had blown and the thing had stopped, that's all there was to that you see. But he wouldn't have it. So he said, "I'm going to phone up the producer in the studio" the head of the studio. So he phoned up, and they said said, "Well wait down there and do it again, send her back and take another train, try again."

So they told Ann Todd, who was quite an actress in her time. She said, "Oh I'm not going to hang about here all the time. You tell them I'm not going to do it!" And there was quite a kerfuffle, but in the end she did do it and it worked you see, and that was that, so we done that.

But another thing too, on the same picture, when I started there Atkins said - I told you that he'd said last one in was the first one out. He said, "Although you're starting on the film, you're on a week's notice anyway, and that'll have to carry on through the film until - then if anybody has to

go, if one of the other pictures come to an end, that boom swinger will have to take over here and you'll have to go." So I accepted that you see. So we did the first week and on the Friday a little pageboy came down and gave me a note and in the note it said you were engaged for a further week. And so this went on, every Friday the boy would come down with the note, and of course in the end all the unit got to - they'd say, "Oh here he comes Fred, Friday!" - the paper would come around! And Paul Stein, this director said, "What is going on? What is all this laughter for?" And they told him that I was continually under notice, and getting notices you see. Mind you this was before the train incident because that came at the end of the picture! [Chuckles] And as it turns out the door opened, the studio door, and Mr Atkins came in. And Paul Stein roared out, "Atkins! Come over here!" So Mr Atkins came over and he said, "What do you mean, sacking this man every week? How can he do his job properly if he's permanently under notice?" He gave him a right old rollicking.

So he said, "Oh well I tell you what, Mr Stein, I promise that he'll be on until the end of the picture." So he said, "Okay then" so that was that, that settled that you see. But the aftermath to all this, after this train incident was, the war was going, you see the war had started. I was in the army, and when I came back after the war I went over to Shepherd's Bush and saw Charlie Wheeler, because they'd started up again, or they'd been doing a few pictures there during the war as well, I believe. And he said, "Well there's no work here, Fred, because what's been happening is that boom swingers have been taken on and then..." It was the reserved occupation, they would go and be called up for the army or whatever it was, then another one, he would be called - He said, "We've got all these blokes who have to have their job back when..." he said, "I tell you what, why don't you go over to Riverside Studios where George Burgess is now in charge of the sound over there? You go there now."

So I went over and saw George Burgess and sure enough he said - I was in uniform - he said, "Cor dear me, when are you getting de-mobbed?" So I said, "In a couple of week's time." He said, "Well when you do, you come and start here, I'll give you a job." So I went over to Riverside Studio and I stayed there for quite a long time, did quite a lot of pictures over there. And the people who owned it, they owned about three studios, they owned Twickenham Studio and a studio down at Southall called Southall Studio. So I worked there with George Burgess and I think the mixer I worked with was called Pip Pearson, did you ever know of Pip Pearson?

**Bob Allen:** I know the name, hmm.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well Pip Pearson. And we carried on there for a while and then eventually they er - oh things happened. Talkies - the television, ITV was coming into it, so Southall Studio was taken over by Pearl and Dean, the - you know you used to see the adverts on. And they wanted a sound crew and I went over there on the sound crew with Baron Mason, got a job over there. Oh! I know what I was going to say, this bloke Paul Stein, this is the anecdote, yes, after this train incident. Now years had gone by, there'd been the war and we were back - and we're working now in the studio. And all at once, round the corner of a flat, came a face, and it was Paul Stein. I said, "Hello Mr Stein." So he said, "Hello." So I said, "You don't remember me..." He said, "I do!" So I said, "No you don't because if you would, you remember down at Bricket Wood station when we had all that thing when the camera stopped, and you said it was my fault." He looked at me and he said, "And so it was!" He stuck a finger under my nose after all these years!

[Laughing] But of course he was pulling my leg at that time, but he said, "And so it was," you see! But that was one of the funny incidents, of course there was lots of 'em. And we didn't last long over at Pearl and Dean because they didn't have many live action adverts with dialogue, so in the end we got the sack from there and I went back to Twickenham Studio, and I worked there for a lot of pictures until it packed up. Then Les Hammond got in touch with me and I went off with him on A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to The Forum and a whole string of films with Les.

**Bob Allen:** What date would that be then?

**Fred Tomlin:** Um - Ah! now you're asking me. I suppose we're in the sixties now.

**Bob Allen:** Yes it would be A Funny Thing Happened....

**Fred Tomlin:** I should think so yes. And we did quite a lot of films, we did a couple of films with Joseph Losey and then we went over to Stockholm with one of Sidney Lumet's pictures, doing a Chekhov thing called The Sea Gull. We did a lot of pictures and they were good, good pictures we worked on. And then we fell a bit slack and then I got in with - who I met over at Elstree - a youngster called Dave Bowen. And he said he was starting a series and would I like to go on it, so I worked with him right up to the time that I eventually retired when I was sixty-seven.

**Bob Allen:** That was the um...er...

**Fred Tomlin:** Space 1999...

**Bob Allen:** Yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** That was the thing we did, yes. Before that we'd done another little six week job over in the South of France, called The Zoo Gang where they were separate little episodes you know, and things like that. But of course in the meantime I'd worked on quite a lot of stuff, a lot of television series. Oh I worked over at Walton-on-Thames with Pip Pearson, I did a lot of the Robin Hood things, they went on for years those things over there. And then I did another thing called The Buccaneers with Robert Shaw and that was at Twickenham Studios, lots and lots of series I worked on - I worked all the time. But the interesting thing was that from the time that I started in 1932, that was when I went over to Shepherd's Bush, just after I got married, 1932 - apart from the war years when I didn't do anything at all - up to the time that I retired at sixty-seven I was never once on the payroll of any of the big studios. Either Shepperton, Pinewood, Elstree or any of them, MGM. I'd work in the studios but taken in with other people, but all those years I was never, ever on the payroll of the big studios and yet I was working all the time.

**Bob Allen:** Not on the permanent staff?

**Fred Tomlin:** Never on the permanent staff.

**Bob Allen:** So you were an original freelancer?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes, yes and so it went on, it was good.

**Bob Allen:** So when did ACTT or ACT start?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes now then, yes now we come to ACT. Now then, when I started over at Riverside Studio the shop steward there came up to me and he said, "You know that we're all ACT members here." So I said, "What's that then?" So he told me all about the ACTT. So he said "Would you consider joining us?" So I said, "Well I belong to the ETU." So anyway we went into it and as it turns out, it was quite simple, I got onto - or through him I think it was, got onto the ACT and then we did a transfer, I transferred into the ACT. And of course Charlie Wheeler - I think he was back at Shepherd's Bush then, I don't know. But of course he was in the ACT - he also was an ETU man and he'd got into...

**Bob Allen:** He was a...

**Fred Tomlin:** ...ETU man and he'd gone into the ACT. And so...and of course he was one of the...

**Bob Allen:** Leading lights...

**Fred Tomlin:** ...leading lights in the ACT. And then eventually I became the shop steward over at Twickenham. I was there for quite a while and I was the shop steward there. Of course everybody then was ETU [sic]. But of course the other thing was that the electricians, they were all NATKE blokes you see, because NATKE had taken over, at the time of the strikes ETU had been ousted by Tom O'Brien, I think his name was...

**Bob Allen:** Yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** ...the NATKE man, and they were - I don't think knew what they were, anyway, but that was it, so that was that. And as I say, ACT, that's what I was and that's - I was the shop steward there for quite a while. Then I used to be the sort of ACT spokesman on the pictures when I worked with Les Hammond. Because they were all freelance jobs and all the boys would get together and say, "Look, would you speak for us?" And also the electricians and the NATKE people would ask me too and say, "Look if you're going to speak for the ACT - any arrangements that you make, would you include us in it?" I used to be the spokesman for the unit in actual fact. And I found that it wasn't an arduous job at all because it was always give and take. They'd call me in and say, "We want to work this that and the other" and I'd say, "Yes well we'll have to have something for it," and we'd come to some arrangement and I'd fix some monetary bill or something. And I'd say, "Well that's okay," and I'd go back and tell the boys and they'd say, "Oh that's good, that's a good arrangement, we're satisfied with that" and things like that. So you know you could be a steward and sort of please everybody without being truculent and hard-headed about anything at all, fairly easy really.

**Bob Allen:** So you didn't meet up with any nasty situations by being the - well you were actually the unit steward really more than just for ACT?

**Fred Tomlin:** Well that's right that's what it turned out, yes. No, no, we never had any - I don't remember any problems at all.

**Bob Allen:** No, good. You never ever felt any victimisation personally at all by doing that?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, none whatsoever, no. They'd call me into - you know, they'd call me into the office and have a chat. But of course you see life's full of incidents which I haven't related, you could go on telling of little things. Such as we were working on a series at Twickenham, I forget the producer's name, but he came into the studio and he went up to the assistant director and he said - oh he gave him a right rollicking about something or other, I don't know what it was. And this assistant looked at him for a bit and eventually he swore at him. I don't know whether you want me to swear on your...

**Bob Allen:** That's all right, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** He looked at the bloke, he said, "Bollocks to you!" to this producer you see. And so the producer said, "You're sacked!" "Oh" he said, "well that's it then," you see. So the picture stopped. So anyway, the next thing I was called into the office you see, as the unit steward, and the production manager said, "What are we going to do about this?" I said, "Well I tell you what, you're not going to sack old Bob, we're not going to have that old Bob sacked over that you know. Because," I said, "the producer, he was most offensive." He said, "But you can't have anybody saying 'bollocks to you...'" So I said, "You can - he's done it!" And it was a laugh really. But anyway it all smoothed over, the assistant kept his job for one thing. But little things like that, but he was called in and of course it was funny really you know. But er - I don't know - there were all sorts of things, you could keep on. I know when we were working in Stockholm on The Sea Gull they had a fine idea that we were working all night and they said that they would like to call us back at two o'clock in the afternoon the next day because they wanted to do a scene to catch the light just before as it's going or something. And I said, "We're not going to do it." I said, "According to the ACT if you work all night then you have to have your twelve hour break," or whatever it was. And as it turns out we didn't do it. Les Hammond and one or two of the camera boys, we turned up at the usual time, whatever time it was, six o'clock or five o'clock in the afternoon... [Break in Recording]

**Bob Allen:** This is side two of the interview with Fred Tomlin. Right okay, now then you've got a super collection of production stills here, crews and actual shootings, so can we go straight through them and talk about them?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, the reason we got these is because in those days they used to have their own still man with his own laboratory. So they used to do the things on the job and they'd come up and say, "Do you want a photograph of yourself?" and things like that you see. But of course as soon as it became freelance the production companies fetched their own still man in and they owned all the negatives, so you never saw any of the results at all you see. So that's how we came by these.

**Bob Allen:** They usually used to come round and say, "Do you want any stills?" and so on. And the numbers of times and pictures for myself [chuckles] and I've sort of looked at the sheets and

thought, "Oh I'd like one of that," and you'd mark them up and then you'd never hear any more about it.

**Fred Tomlin:** No that's right yeah.

**Bob Allen:** This one we've got here, the production 1935, Victor Saville directing and it was - what was the title with George Arliss?

**Fred Tomlin:** The Iron Duke.

**Bob Allen:** The Iron Duke.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, he was the Duke of Wellington you see.

**Bob Allen:** You've got him and George Arliss himself right in the middle of the picture. Now on the left...

**Fred Tomlin:** Left-hand side, that's Bill Salter the mixer, and that was Curt Courant, he was a French lighting man.

**Bob Allen:** Ah ha.

**Fred Tomlin:** At that time they were always fetching in foreigners, like German make-up men, German cameramen, and in this case a French Cameraman. American directors, hoping that they would get a bit of spice into English films so they could sell them in America, that was the thing you see. And that's Robert Hamer, as I told you, he became a director, he was a clapper-loader at that time, you can see there you see. And this one is Sid Bonnett and he was the one who flew over Everest in about the early 1930's, photographing it, with that expedition that did that. Now then, Victor Saville and Curt Courant, we were doing a scene, a two-shot there you see. And I had the microphone in position between the two people and he had lit it from the spot rail, a lamp either side, down high. And of course we couldn't get in because we were getting a mike shadow on the people. So he said, "What are you going to do now then?" It's no good taking the mike up too far out of the way because - they weren't those sort of mikes anyway you see. So we came to an impasse. Now Victor Saville, he said, "Now look, I can see what the problem is, now will you please alter the lighting so that we can get the sound?" "No" he said, "I must do it like this." So he said, "Now look, I've got something to tell you. When you go to the cinema, outside the cinema there's a sign that says 'talking pictures' and the reason they put 'talking pictures' is because the talking is the new thing and it's the 'in' thing, people want to hear the talking," he said, "now if it said, 'pictures talking' then I'd say the priority was given to the picture, but it's not, it's 'talking pictures' and we want to hear it. Now alter that lighting!" So he said, "No, I can't." So he said, "In that case I'll do it for you," and he then lit the shot and we shot it. And that put pay to old Curt Courant, yeah! [Chuckling] And he was a man who was very unsympathetic to boom swingers, I can tell you that because he'd have said - in fact I do know afterwards that he went to Bill Salter and he said, "Does this man know what he's doing?" "Oh yes" he said, "because he worked with you on I was a Spy." "Oh right" he said. Then he came back and he went on to him. Otherwise, had I have been a new boy he'd have come back and said, "Get that

thing out of the way" you see, but no, he had to enquire first that I knew what I was doing and he didn't, so he did it for him. So he was quite fair that way you see.

**Bob Allen:** Yes that's a good story. I see here that Bill Salter's wearing plus fours.

**Fred Tomlin:** He always used to wear plus fours, Bill Salter yeah, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Is there anybody else in that group that became well known?

**Fred Tomlin:** Not as far as I know, I don't think, but of course on the other hand I can't remember all the names now you know. But these were camera boys I know. Oh that was young Keith Joseph, he was our assistant, and I think this boy was in the sound department somewhere. And that was the sound camera operator, who was called Reg Marguerites[?]. He was regularly at Shepherd's Bush.

**Bob Allen:** So this was at Shepherd's Bush, 1934?

**Fred Tomlin:** This was 1934 yes that's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And next we've got?

**Fred Tomlin:** Well this is the Will Hay...

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes! Windbag the Sailor?

**Fred Tomlin:** Windbag the Sailor yes.

**Bob Allen:** And this is where you were talking, this is on the ship, there's the bridge that you...

**Fred Tomlin:** With all this heavy equipment. You see the thing is that now, the light microphones, I don't think that boom swingers these days have ever seen a boom!

**Bob Allen:** No, it's very difficult to get one who can operate a boom.

**Fred Tomlin:** And um, but we had to, there was no question of a pole, these things were too heavy anyway, you couldn't do anything like it on a pole. You can imagine trying to do this, you see. So it all had to be taken on, dismantled and humped over the other side of the bridge there to the fore and aft, whichever you were going to work on you see.

**Bob Allen:** And here we have the mixer.

**Fred Tomlin:** That was the mixer, that was George Burgess at that time, yes that's right.

**Bob Allen:** And anybody else?

**Fred Tomlin:** And the director over here is Bill Beaudine.

**Bob Allen:** He was the American?

**Fred Tomlin:** He was the American director yes.

**Bob Allen:** You said that he had a good lot of Hollywood experience.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, oh yes, and he used to tell us all about the Hollywood experience as well. And this is - this boy here, that's Roy Baker who's now a director, Roy Ward-Baker.

**Bob Allen:** And what was he doing on that?

**Fred Tomlin:** He was only a - this one here?

**Bob Allen:** Yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** He was just the unit 'runner' more or less.

**Bob Allen:** Unit 'runner'.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well everybody has to start somewhere!

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** And we're way back in the early thirties there.

**Bob Allen:** Continuity...

**Fred Tomlin:** Betty Bull - Betty Bull, yes. And I can't remember this boy's name but his brother was a production - very influential. And I remember meeting him after the war and I said, "I don't like to talk to you because you're probably some director or..." So he said, "No, as a matter of fact I'm a producer." [Chuckles] Because I'd gone to an ACT meeting, they had an ACT meeting once in a big theatre, one of the West End theatres, over something or other, and I came across Roy Baker. So I said, "Hello Roy, come and sit here." He said, "Oh hello!" And I hadn't seen him since well before the war. So I said, "How are you getting on, is there any work for you?" And of course I was imagining he was still an assistant director, but he was a director, he'd directed some jolly good pictures apparently, I mean I didn't know that. But then I met up with another cameraman who was an operator and said to him, "I expect there's work..." and he was a lighting cameraman! So that when I saw him I said, "Well look I'm not going to ask you what you're doing because you probably a director or producer." He said, "Yes I am a producer," you see! [Chuckling] You have to be careful what you say to people after five years!

**Bob Allen:** That's quite right.

**Fred Tomlin:** They'd all got jobs you see.



**Bob Allen:** I note in the picture here that the microphone which you said was a crystal mike, which I don't recognise, but it hasn't got any um...

**Fred Tomlin:** It's got no wind-gag on it...

**Bob Allen:** ...windscreen.

**Fred Tomlin:** No that's right yes, but we've got it on there haven't we?

**Bob Allen:** Yes, that other picture. And now looking at other pictures, again this is the Windbag the Sailor that's the raft on which the three people were put adrift.

**Fred Tomlin:** Abandoned, Will Hay and the fat boy, um...

**Bob Allen:** Moore Marriott

**Fred Tomlin:** Young Graham Moffatt.

**Bob Allen:** And where you had the problems with the out of synch movements with the raft and the...

**Fred Tomlin:** I tried to get the raft - the microphone fixed into the boom. The boom of course, which was on the mother ship, which was just here you see. Well now then we had a problem down there because they came into the calmer water just inshore and along here was a pier. And they got this thing all ready but they could see the reflection of the pier legs into the water and they said, "Well we can't stay here because we can see where we are, we're not in the mid-ocean at all, we're more-or-less in dock." So we had to move the thing round, oh everything had to move so that they could get that round there you see. And you see these men?

**Bob Allen:** Three men.

**Fred Tomlin:** These were riggers.

**Bob Allen:** Riggers on the raft.

**Fred Tomlin:** And what they had was a great big lump of rope with what they called a 'pudding' on it. And the pudding was a great lump of lead like the shape of an inside of a steel helmet with a coupling on it to go onto tubular scaffolding. And the idea was that when they had these tubular scaffolding in the studio they'd hang these things on them to stop them tipping forward, they were counterweights you see. So they took several of these down to there. So they had one tied on a rope and the raft, so that when they got to the correct position where everything was clear for the camera they'd drop the pudding overboard and that would anchor the raft there, you see. So anyway they've got these coils and coils of rope and this big pudding there you see, and we've now moved away from where they could see the piles of the pier and they said, "That's fine." And Will Hay he always used to take charge, "Now where do you want it?" he would say. "Now come on, let's do this, that and the other." So in the end they said, "Right-oh, that's where

we want it then!" So he said, "Right" and he had this pudding and he dropped it over, but unfortunately he hadn't taken his feet out of the bloody coils of rope. So that suddenly [laughs] he's down on the raft with his crutch just here and one leg on board and the other leg, stiff over the other side, holding this bloody weight on the end of a rope! [Laughs] And he's saying, "Help! Help!" you see, and ohh...the bloody thing! And they shoved the riggers over quick to pull this bloomin' thing up, he couldn't do it himself, it was that weight. It was a wonder it didn't break his leg, you know! So there were all sorts of hazards, you get them, that's it.

**Bob Allen:** You said that when they get off the raft and ashore onto - where was it they...?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes we went, so they have to land on a sandy beach, on a desert island in actual fact. And when they wake up the first thing they see is some gorgeous damsels bathing in the nude in the sea, these black girls. And they say, "Oh this is wonderful" you see. Now we shot this scene down at er - there were several things attached to this. We went down to a place called Poldhu in Cornwall, and it was a lovely bay with a lovely circle of sand, and apparently Poldhu was where Marconi sent the first message across the Atlantic, apparently. And they said, "This is it" you see, this lovely flat, calm sea there, and they said, "Right, this is it." So now we take everything onto the beach, out of the vans, onto the beach, the lamps, everything, you see all these things. We take them onto the beach, the camera, the boom and everything, and the raft.

So they take the raft down to the water's edge, put it there you see, then they get the lamps into position, they get the camera set up and they get the boom in position and that you see, and they say "Right". But unfortunately the tide was now two yards down there. So we had to pick everything up and take it down two yards to the edge of the water again, you see! And by the time we got ready again it had gone out further! And so we finish up about a hundred yards from where we started you see. And of course then what happens, the tide turned, it started coming in! And we couldn't pick the stuff [laughs] we couldn't pick the stuff up fast enough to get it back! The electricians were trying to lift these lamps out of about two feet of water you know, it was terrible really! [Chuckling] I really don't know how we shot the scene, they did it eventually but um, it was laughable! Anyway, when they wake up on this beach they have to see these dark girls bathing in the nude. "Oh this is wonderful!" "Fancy this!" "What a place we're at!" - you see? So they've taken three coloured girls down from London, who'd been in Cornwall for several weeks, waiting for their call. They call them down on the set and they said, "Okay girls, we're going to shoot your scene now. Strip off." They said, "What?" They said, "Strip off, you've got to be in the nude." They said, "We haven't been told about stripping off!" So they said, "Well that's all you've been fetched down here for, you're supposed to be three naked girls swimming in the sea and cavorting about, so that these men see you." "Oh well we'll have to talk about this" they said. So they gathered together, they went off and had a whatsit. They came back and one said, "I will take my clothes off but I'm not going in the sea. That girl there, she will go in the sea but she's not going to take her clothes off, and that girl there, she doesn't mind what she does!" So they said, "Well that's no good, because we want you all together." "No, no" they said, "that's all we're going to do. She'll go in the sea with her clothes on, I'll have my clothes off and I'll stay on the beach, I won't go in at all, and the other girl, she'll do whatever you say." So they said, "Well that's it," so they sent them back to - we stopped, couldn't do the shot! Sent them back to London. And in the meantime they went to the local swimming club and got some girls from there, blacked 'em up - costumes as well, and they used those from a long way off, and that's the

way we did that you see! [Laughing] But why didn't they tell 'em before we came away on location that they were going to be...you know? Just holds you up for hours on end on a thing like that. What with that and the sea going in and out! [Laughs]

**Bob Allen:** The trials and tribulations, yes. Oh this one here, just to bring us up to date...

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes.

**Bob Allen:** ...that's a lovely still of the lighting set-up for a night shoot at Welwyn and it was your first job in the business wasn't it?

**Fred Tomlin:** At Gainsborough studios yes. And Anthony Asquith was directing the film, and of course it was night work because that's what all the lights were up there for, you see.

**Bob Allen:** They're arcs are they?

**Fred Tomlin:** They're all arc lamps yes, every one of them, yes.

**Bob Allen:** Yes. Those two look like inkies, they've got bulbs in...

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's right, they've got bulbs...they were five kilowatts.

**Bob Allen:** Interestingly in the still of course, all the scaffolding rig that it's up on is made from timber and not tubular, as it would be.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, it was timber in those days, that's right you see.

**Bob Allen:** And now this one here, this is a still from - a production still from All In.

**Fred Tomlin:** All In, that was about 'all in' wrestlers and things like that you see. It had Sir Ralph and this girl, her name was Gina Malo.

**Bob Allen:** She was an actress.

**Fred Tomlin:** She was an actress and she eventually married the famous billiards player Joe Davis.

**Bob Allen:** Oh really?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes.

**Bob Allen:** And who was - there's Bill Salter with the pipe.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's Bill Salter and this is um, what's the director's name? Oh...Marcel Varnel, this is Marcel Varnel the director.

**Bob Allen:** Ah hmm. And the cameraman?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's Arthur Crabtree.

**Bob Allen:** Oh gracious! It is, yes?

**Fred Tomlin:** And of course these are all ancillaries and er Phil - I forget his name, he was the camera operator, Phil [NB Possibly Tannura] - I can't think of his name. Yes, so that's the sort of set-up it was on rails and everything had to be mounted, the boom and everything on there you see.

**Bob Allen:** And was it F & E that made that boom? I can't remember now whether...

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh I don't know whether - it might well have been where that one came from. But of course this is what we called the small boom, but on the studio we had these enormous great things.

**Bob Allen:** This looks almost like it was a...it was a drum rather than - it didn't have the handle at the back here.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yes.

**Bob Allen:** So that was a special tubular thing made up for the boom?

**Fred Tomlin:** Made up for the boom that's right yes. We used to mount it in there, slot it into it, that's right, yes, that's absolutely right.

**Bob Allen:** On the track - and is the camera on that same um, on the same trolley?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, a platform with four wheels, that's all it was, yes.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, and the camera and the boom were mounted on there?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, and we all moved together, that's how we had to do it!

**Bob Allen:** Yeah. Um, next we've got...

**Fred Tomlin:** This is another early one, that's the old Gainsborough studio thing there with the er...

**Bob Allen:** This looks to me like a lesson learned from The Constant Nymph tracking shot, thing?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yes. So we mounted all this up there and...

**Bob Allen:** Camera mounted on the top of the...

**Fred Tomlin:** ...you know we said what would have to be done and that's what they had to do!

**Bob Allen:** Yes, you've got a platform on the top of a camera truck with the boom mounted on that.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, and that worked a treat.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, instead of the four by two.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right. This operator, he's called Lionel Banes, he became a lighting man.

**Bob Allen:** Oh Lionel Banes, yes now you say that I can see a young Lionel Banes there.

**Fred Tomlin:** And Leslie Rowson was the lighting man, and of course there's Bill Salter there.

**Bob Allen:** Yeah. And here we have, this is again the director that directed the, Windbag the Sailor.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right. Now this was a picture called um - you're fetching back all the old pictures I worked on - called Said O'Reilly to McNab...

**Bob Allen:** Ohh, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Will Fyffe and an American comic, I can't think of his name offhand. [NB Will Mahoney]

**Bob Allen:** Will Fyffe was O'Reilly, who was...??

**Fred Tomlin:** Now this was the old studio boom, that went way up there you see.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes. Yes that one in the picture there, on the top of the truck is getting to look more like a Mole... [NB Probably Mole-Richardson]

**Fred Tomlin:** A Mole, a Mole-top, very much like you see, yes that's right. Where the weights were on top of this one, whereas a Mole there was a weight thing underneath, with a counter-weight.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, carries it along.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And this man sitting here?

**Fred Tomlin:** He was a visitor.

**Bob Allen:** Oh he was just visiting, he wasn't in the picture?

**Fred Tomlin:** He was a bloke called Jack Doyle, he was supposed to be a heavyweight boxer, but he never came to anything I'm afraid. [Chuckles]

**Bob Allen:** One thing that you do notice in all your pictures, you've got quite a nice smile on your face.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yeah! [Laughs] Now that's the unit of Oh, Mr. Porter! in the back of the Swan Hotel where we all stayed, and this is the proprietor, there, he is the proprietor of the hotel, and that's Will Hay and Graham Moffatt. And here's young Roy Baker and there's me. I've got a jacket on for a change, instead of my sleeves rolled up! And Bill Salter and I suppose Arthur Crabtree is in it - there's Ted Scaife at the back there. Now an interesting thing about this was...

**Bob Allen:** This is when Ted Scaife was your...

**Fred Tomlin:** Sound camera operator, still, yes that's right. The interesting thing was, this was right next door, this Swan Hotel was right next door to Courage's brewery. There used to be a famous beer called Courage's Alton Ale, and we were staying in Alton, right next door to the brewery, and in fact this was their pub. And they heard that Will Hay was working there and for a publicity thing they invited Will Hay in to have a tour of the brewery. And of course they had to invite us as well, couldn't have one man, so we all trouped over there. Now the thing was that Will Hay didn't drink and the last thing that he wanted to do was to go and look around a brewery. But anyway he did, and so we all trooped into this brewery, and we looked at this and we looked at that, and of course it was beer. That was beer and this was beer and this that and the other beer. Then we went upstairs and then we came across a great big vat - big copper one with a polished iron ladder up the side of it. And the man that was showing us around he said, "There you are Mr Hay, climb up that ladder." So he looked at it, he couldn't be more bored, Will Hay. He looked at the ladder and he turned to me, he said, "Go on Tom" - they called me Tom in those days, short for Tomlin. "Tom, you climb up there!" So I climbed up and looked inside, when I came down he said, "What's in it, more beer?" [Laughs] So I said, "Yeah." He said, "Oh I thought so." [Laughs] And then we finished up downstairs with beer for everybody, and of course he wouldn't have one because he didn't drink beer! And another thing, he was the most unfunny man, Will Hay, off the set.

**Bob Allen:** Really?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh he'd never mix with anybody, I've never heard him crack a gag off set or anything like that. Oh no, no, he wasn't a comic off-stage, which some comics tend to be, you know.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** [Chuckles]

**Bob Allen:** He was an amateur astronomer too wasn't he.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh that's right, yes. But I got on all right with him because you see the thing is that the boom swingers are always near the artists, you're always round about so they get to know you, you see.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** And having worked on several pictures, of course he knew us.

**Bob Allen:** [Looking at another picture] And that's a little group of the sound crew round a sound truck which you say had a British Acoustic? [Tape distortion]

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, British Acoustic, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Bill Salter.... [tape distortion - indecipherable for a few seconds]

**Fred Tomlin:** And this is another set-up of that same thing that we've already seen on the whatsit.

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes, this is the reverse angle really I suppose isn't it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, but everybody's in it this time, the director and...

**Bob Allen:** And that picture was you said?

**Fred Tomlin:** It was called My Old Dutch.

**Bob Allen:** My Old Dutch.

**Fred Tomlin:** With old Gordon Harker, that's who was in that, yes, My Old Dutch.

**Bob Allen:** Ah yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** This was the picture that we were first leased over, Bill Salter and myself, over to Islington to do a picture over there, and that was the picture, My Old Dutch that's what it was. This was - he was called Sinclair Hill, that's the director there.

**Bob Allen:** Sinclair Hill?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes. And they even got the music man, Charles Williams. Oh...

**Bob Allen:** This is Charles Williams here is it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Charles Williams yes. Oh and that's a funny thing I can tell you, when we came back from The Constant Nymph, I must tell you this story - the man that the girl is in love with, because it's a love story...

**Bob Allen:** This is Constant Nymph?

**Fred Tomlin:** This is The Constant Nymph. He was a musician, a composer and he is composing a symphony. So we're gonna do some scenes now with Brian Aherne, that was the star of it, at the piano, writing his symphony. So we get ready for this shot you see, there's the piano, grand piano, and a sheet of manuscript on the thing you see. And we get ready to shoot and all at once the director says, "Well where's the music?" So they said, "Well it's on the piano, the manuscript." What do they call that stuff? With the lines, just the lines, the bare thing, nothing on it...

**Bob Allen:** The staves, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** So he said, "We want notes on it! The man's composing a symphony, he's sitting down at the piano composing a symphony! We want notes on that, we don't want a blank sheet of paper! Get somebody down from the music department and get some notes on that thing!" Because we had a music department at Shepherd's Bush under Louis Levy and he had Charlie Williams and one or two other composers, they used to compose and they used to conduct the orchestras for the - when we had the music session you see. Anyway they sent down a poor old chap who was more-or-less the runner, although I don't - he was a musician in his own right, but he was an unfortunate looking chap with prominent front teeth and a sort of a sheepish manner about him, you know. And he said, "What is it that you want?" The director said, "This man in this scene is supposed to be composing a symphony. There's a blank sheet - we want notes written on it!" So he said, "Well..." He said, "Write some notes, some music notes on the sheet." "Oh" he said, "now I know what to do." So he sat at the piano and he thought, and he licked his pencil and he wrote a note you see. [Chuckles] And then he thought again and licked his pencil and he wrote another note. And this went on for a while and the director said, "For God's sake man we're going to shoot, can't you write any quicker?" He said, "Anything will do, nobody can read the music anyway!" And he turned round haughtily and he said, "You'll excuse me Mr Dean, but you can't write music like you write on lavatory walls." [Laughs] It completely took the steam out of him, 'cause we were all falling about laughing, what else would you do? [Laughs] Yes, this little meek and mild man, it was the funniest thing I've ever heard I should think!

**Bob Allen:** Looking back at this still with the boom mounted on the top of a truck, and I see there's two cameras, and you say it was direct sound, you had to record in direct sound.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right.

**Bob Allen:** What about the engine noise from the car?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, no, no, they pushed it.

**Bob Allen:** They pushed it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Hmm.



**Bob Allen:** My God!

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, they pushed it.

**Bob Allen:** If you could get people to do that today it would be a miracle.

**Fred Tomlin:** Ah well there you are, well that's right. But then you can see that there were enough people around to push the damn thing!

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** No they pushed it.

**Bob Allen:** Yes. So there was just the natural clip-clopping of the... ?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yeah. So you see this one - now this is in Austria and there again you can see we've got the boom out there.

**Bob Allen:** Yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** So everywhere we went we had to take the boom.

**Bob Allen:** This is a good big group of people, what is um...?

**Fred Tomlin:** Now this was the - every year at Islington they used to have an outing and everybody went to this outing, so we'd go down to Margate or somewhere like that. I've got an idea that this time we went down to Windsor and onto a boat or something like that. But everybody turned up. And this is Maurice Ostrer, because the Ostrer brothers owned Gaumont British. This is Maurice Ostrer, this was Ted Black the studio man, and these were make-up men, oh everybody's there! Lighting men, oh there's so many. There's old Sid Wiles, he was a director once...

**Bob Allen:** Oh yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's Sid Wiles, he was a maintenance man at that time, sound maintenance man.

**Bob Allen:** Maintenance man was he then? Yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah. And this bloke was Vetchinsky...

**Bob Allen:** Yes, I think he did some Will Hay pictures too didn't he?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes.

**Bob Allen:** Later on, yeah.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, this is Vetchinsky the art director, well everybody's there from the studio, yes. And this is Bob Attwooll [NB Hugh Attwooll], he was the shop steward, ETU, and of course eventually he became a high-up producer, because he had a permanent officer over...

**Bob Allen:** An interesting progression of being 'them' and - being 'us' and becoming one of 'them' sort of thing.

**Fred Tomlin:** Quite right, quite right! He was. Now, we got a message down, Les and I, we were working over at Pinewood, and we got a message down that Bob Attwooll - Mr Attwooll would like you to come up to his office and have a drink because he hasn't seen you for years. So we went up to his office up there, and he's got this picture on the wall as it turns out!

**Bob Allen:** Really?

**Fred Tomlin:** And I said, "Hello Bob." He said, "Hello Fred" and this, that and the other. And I was the only one there calling him 'Bob', because he was 'Hugh', and they were looking at me open-mouthed, "What's he calling him Bob for?" But he was always Bob Attwooll as far as I was concerned! He was the steward, he was the one who said, "Don't go in, we're all on strike."

**Bob Allen:** And the lady here was? With the big hat?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh no, I don't know who she was...

**Bob Allen:** No...

**Fred Tomlin:** No, she was probably somebody in the office or somebody. But she's got her arm round old Fred Gunn, that's Fred Gunn, George Gunn's brother. Well everybody is all merry, I suppose we'd all had a drink or something, by the look of it, yes everybody's laughing aren't they? And there's a cameraman up there called Jack Parry, and he was killed during the war, he was doing some photography for the RAF or something, and the plane crashed and poor old Jack Parry was killed.

**Bob Allen:** Here...?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh that's a later one, this is.

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes, it looks a more modern movie...

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's down at Southall Studio, everybody...

**Bob Allen:** The original?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's an old boom with the er...

**Bob Allen:** Who's the mixer there then?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's Pip Pearson.

**Bob Allen:** That's Pip Pearson is it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's right yeah.

**Bob Allen:** I knew him by name but not by sight.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's Pip Pearson. And when I first went to Shepherd's Bush this...

**Bob Allen:** That's Gordon Hay I think isn't it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Gordon Hay, yes. When I first went to Shepherd's Bush he was the top boom swinger there.

**Bob Allen:** Who was that?

**Fred Tomlin:** This - now what he was here, no I think he was assistant director or something, I can't think of his name...

**Bob Allen:** This man here?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, what was his name? I can't think of his name now.

**Bob Allen:** Yes with his back to the camera.

**Fred Tomlin:** He was one of the boom operator over there. I can't really see...

**Bob Allen:** What was the picture? Robertson Hare, is it?

**Fred Tomlin:** I don't even know, I can't remember what it was. Yes that's Robertson Hare, that's quite right. And Gary Marsh, that big man, Gary Marsh. The director only - I can't even think who directed this film. I tell you when you've worked in so many films over the years...

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes, it's difficult to remember them doesn't it. [pause] Things Happen at Night, is it?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh that's the thing called 'The Poltergeist' yes, that's right.

**Bob Allen:** That's what it became was it, 'The Poltergeist'?

**Fred Tomlin:** That became 'The Poltergeist' yes.

**Bob Allen:** Director, Francis Searle.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh Frank Searle, yes he was probably the director on this other thing, I think that's all part and parcel of the same thing that we just looked at.

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes, here's Gordon Harker.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes. Frank Searle, this is him there, scratching his ear.

**Bob Allen:** Who's that then - is that one of the actors?

**Fred Tomlin:** That I don't know, I can't remember.

**Bob Allen:** Hmm, familiar face.

**Fred Tomlin:** I can't remember who he was.

**Bob Allen:** That clapper-loader looks like it might be Walter Lassally?

**Fred Tomlin:** And that's just who it was!

**Bob Allen:** Yes, goodness me.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's just who it was, Walter Lassally, that's how he started, over there as a clapper boy.

**Bob Allen:** He's already been recorded on the project.

**Fred Tomlin:** Has he?

**Bob Allen:** Hmm.

**Fred Tomlin:** Ah, yes. And he was a poor little bugger too. He went out - he used to go and get the tea for the camera crew, and he'd go to the canteen and he'd come back with four mugs of tea and a plate full of cakes, and they wouldn't want any! And he'd already paid for them, and he used to have to eat the lot, he used to say, "I've got to eat all these cakes again!" [Chuckles] Poor old Walter! Yes, Walter Lassally, that's just who it was, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Who was the cameraman on that?

**Fred Tomlin:** Leslie Rowson.

**Bob Allen:** Leslie Rowson - that's a name I don't know myself.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh, well now then, let's go way back. When I was an electrician I worked over at Wembley on several pictures there and we started off on a picture there with um - oh with Alexander Korda, it was called, that's right, The Wedding Rehearsal. And Leslie Rowson was the lighting man and I was the 'spark'. And after a while he had the camera crew all lined up one

day and he was giving a lecture, Alexander Korda, waving his finger at them and things like that. And then the next thing, he was off the picture and they got an American in, a young man called Phil Tannura to do the picture, poor old Leslie was off it. He was a ruthless man, Alexander Korda, you know.

**Bob Allen:** Yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's all the crew up at er whatsit - and this is all the crew up at... Oh this is...[chuckles]...

**Bob Allen:** Stan Pavey lighting it.

**Fred Tomlin:** Stan Pavey, that's right, yes.

**Bob Allen:** And Frank Launder director.

**Fred Tomlin:** The Happiest Days of your Life.

**Bob Allen:** The Happiest Days of your Life. Oh yes, goodness, oh yes! That was a super picture.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes, it's got the thing - The Happiest Days of Your Life yes, that's right.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, Margaret Rutherford and Alastair Sim.

**Fred Tomlin:** That was a good picture to work on, it was happy because he was a nice man old Frank Launder.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, that was sort of the beginnings of the - the cartoonist wasn't it, the 'St Trinians' type of...

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes.

**Bob Allen:** There's Ted Ray is it, with the master?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And who else have we got there behind the camera people? More well known - there's Gordon Hay I recognise.

**Fred Tomlin:** Is he retired, Gordon Hay?

**Bob Allen:** Yes I think so, I must get in touch with him. Who was mixer on that then?

**Fred Tomlin:** Um, oh Bill Bulkley.

**Bob Allen:** Bill Bulkley.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's another mixer I used to work with, I've done several pictures with old Bill. Is he there?

**Bob Allen:** Is that him?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's him, that's him, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Recognised by the moustache.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, Bill Bulkley. And this one, he was the operator, Monty Berman, who became the producer of all those um - a series with um...

**Bob Allen:** He was with somebody else, wasn't he?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes, Bob - Oh Christ, I can't...

**Bob Allen:** And he was - what was he on that picture there?

**Fred Tomlin:** The operator, camera operator.

**Bob Allen:** Camera operator, picture camera operator.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, yeah. In fact we were working - I was working on another picture for somebody or other - oh I think it was on one of the 'Robin Hoods' over at Whatsit, and we were working, they'd found a castle or something that we could use as a background on an exterior. And we were working over there and sure enough - oh Monty Berman and Bob Baker!

**Bob Allen:** Baker...

**Fred Tomlin:** They came walking down and they said - of course they saw me, I was an old pal of theirs, and they said, "What's this?" So I told 'em what it was. So I said, "What are you doing?" And they said, "Well we're getting a film together and we want to - we're coming down to see this castle to see if we could use that." "Oh," I said, "what you want to get into is this television series caper." "Oh," they said, "it's hard to get in, we don't know how you can go about that." But they did get in it didn't they? And they did loads and loads of those, The Saint and all those sorts of things you see, yes that's quite right yeah.

**Bob Allen:** That's the nice big stills, what else have we got?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh well only this one - the interesting thing is there's a young Geoff Unsworth who was the camera boy.

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes, that was The Constant Nymph you were saying about?

**Fred Tomlin:** That was The Constant Nymph yes.

**Bob Allen:** He was the loader was he?

**Fred Tomlin:** Clapper loader, yes, and he used to have to do a test, and the acid used to get on his arms and what with the sunburn he was almost in tears, poor old Geoff - or poor young Geoff, because he was only a boy! It was very happy that film, I must say. However - I don't know if you'd just - I know that we're always unnoticed, but there are one or two little items here. As I'm old and crotchety I just will show you these, I'm not looking for a job.

**Bob Allen:** [Reading from a letter] "Rome, 27th October 1967 from Joseph Losey. Dear Fred, As you know, sound crews have a reputation for being outside of the picture. You have never been. In spite of difficult set-ups and Douglas fiddling, I don't remember your losing your temper or failing to solve a problem. I am most happy to hear you will be on the next picture, if it is at all possible."

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, so the Douglas was Dougie Slocombe. So we was on the next picture [chuckling] and so he gave me that one!

**Bob Allen:** [Reading from a letter] "Fred Tomlin Esquire, from Joseph Losey, signed, Yours Most Sincerely, Joe. Dear Fred, Although there has been little chance to talk I am sure you are aware of my appreciation of your quiet, excellent and happy skills. The sound is marvellous and I look forward to working with you and Leslie again. Many Thanks." What picture was that?

**Fred Tomlin:** Well there were two pictures we worked on, two Elizabeth Taylor pictures. One was called Boom and the other one was called The Secret Ceremony I think it was called, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Ah yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Two pictures with Elizabeth Taylor.

**Bob Allen:** 1968.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh well that's the date then, isn't it?

**Bob Allen:** Yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, that's right.

**Bob Allen:** And the other one, the Rome one was 1967?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right. What's this one?

**Bob Allen:** Joe Losey is dead isn't he?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, poor old Joe died, yes that's right. I thought I had another one in here but it's an empty envelope isn't it, so I can't show you that. Oh that's a pity, that. That was another

thing I got from - I wonder what I've done with it? From Sidney Lumet. But all I fetched was an empty envelope, doesn't matter, just too bad.

**Bob Allen:** Oh, what was it then?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes, saying how marvellous it all was.

**Bob Allen:** Despite the fact that you hadn't turned out for his evening shot?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right.

**Bob Allen:** You were forgiven?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh he forgave us for that, yes.

**Bob Allen:** You've got three pieces here.

**Fred Tomlin:** There's another one here, what's this?

**Bob Allen:** Sidney Lumet.

**Fred Tomlin:** Ah that's it, yes.

**Bob Allen:** [Reading from a letter] From Sidney Lumet, signed by Sidney. "Dear Les and Fred, I have just finished the mix on Sea Gull in California and for both of you, your ears should be burning. We finished in three and-a-half days because the tracks were so excellent and then to save over sixty per cent of the tracks that we had looped, including Vanessa's performance. All the audio engineers there couldn't have been more complimentary, saying again and again that they were the best results they have ever had with a Stedhiacer[?] microphone." [BA stumbles over name of microphone - helped out by FT - some indecipherable dialogue between them] "But not only balance, voice quality and impedance matched perfectly, but also the direction of pick up and boom handling in general. I want you to know this and how pleased I am that what could have been a tough situation turned into a marvellous asset to a superb film. My best to you both and my thanks. As you know, we are opening this year because everyone is so excited about the picture and it should be with you early next year. Take care, see you soon, Sidney." Very nice, very nice.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes so...well he was a nice man to work with.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, though I've not had the privilege...

**Fred Tomlin:** Well you see the problem was with this Stedhiacer[?], now you see them in use all the time, in these big furry things that you see 'em hanging over Mrs Thatcher and things like that. They'd got these wonderful mikes in, they said, "Oh they pick up things a hundred yards away," and things like that you see. Well they're that long, as you know, they're about eighteen inches or so, but Les always insisted on using a boom. Now then, if you fix that thing on a boom



and you favoured it to anybody, it did about a two foot circle, whereas an ordinary microphone would do that, you see, you could favour just from one to the other. But with this thing you had to do - and of course you couldn't do that. So what I had to do was to tip it up as much as I could, but you still got a slope on it, and then just put it between the two of 'em and try and do a little twist like that you see.

**Bob Allen:** You would hold it vertical?

**Fred Tomlin:** That was the thing you see, to sort of get it almost over the top of their heads. So it was difficult to work with it, and especially when you had a wind gag on it as well, which was a bloody great big thing like a Zeppelin. But nowadays - of course they weren't very heavy at that you know - now they either pull them on the end of a pole or they just hold them there and they don't move them at all, you know, in between people. But to use it on a boom and try and swing from one to another, favour from one to another, it was a difficult job. But as I say with Sidney's we got over it, you know, he didn't think we would do it, but we did do it and that was it, yes. We got some good results on that.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes they've done well.

**Fred Tomlin:** Because it was nearly all location work.

**Bob Allen:** You don't think you're stuck to this? [?]

**Fred Tomlin:** No I don't think so, I think that's about - that's another location job down at Islington, I suppose.

**Bob Allen:** As yes, again the boom there on a wheeled vehicle.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right. Now this is another picture, I went out to Egypt on a children's thing.

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Somebody phoned me up and said, "Would you come to er..."

**Bob Allen:** CFF that was wasn't it?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, Children's Film Foundation, yes. That was interesting, they had to go to - because we worked down at Luxor and went in Tutankhamen's tomb, and we went to the pyramids, a thing that I should never have done in my lifetime if it hadn't have been for a film.

**Bob Allen:** No.

**Fred Tomlin:** And another extraordinary thing was a chap phoned up...you know Cyril Collick?

**Bob Allen:** Yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well he had a cousin, I can't think what his name was. And he phoned me one day and he said um...

**Bob Allen:** Malcolm Stewart?

**Fred Tomlin:** Malcolm Stewart! Malcolm Stewart phoned me and said "Are you doing anything?" So I said, "No, why?" So he said "Would you come to Cuba with me on Sunday?" So I said - no, this was a Sunday he rang me, "Would you come to Cuba on Thursday?" That was it, on Thursday. So I said, "Don't be silly, you're pulling my leg." "No" he said, "we've got a job out there for Granada Television." So I said, "Are you serious?" He said, "Yes." So I said, "All right then." So we had to go down to Victoria Station and get inoculated and one thing and another, and we had to go to the American Embassy to get a visa, all sorts of things had to be done on the quick, you know. And sure enough off we went to Cuba. It was a round about way because there were no direct flights from anywhere except Madrid, because they were the only ones during Castro's time, at that time, that were allowed to fly to - it was the only airline that was allowed into Cuba. And so we had to fly to Brussels first and then pick up an Iberian plane that took us to Madrid. And then at Madrid we got on this other thing that took us - it was an only four engine job you know, it took about eighteen hours to fly to Cuba.

**Bob Allen:** What was that job there, was it a feature or was it a documentary?

**Fred Tomlin:** It was a documentary thing that they showed over about three weeks called Cuba Sea...

**Bob Allen:** Oh yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** It was a thing made for Granada Television. All aspects of Cuba as it was at that time, which was a few years ago. And when we got there they said, "We don't want you to come in, there's no dialogue or anything like that, we want you to do all sorts of incidents or effects. We'll give you a list of things that we want - general." So that's what we did and when we arrived there they met us at the airport and took us to - it was a Hilton Hotel but renamed 'The Revolution' or something, looking right over the harbour. And they said to the people in the reception there, the two people talking about, they said, "They're in room..." They said, "They're not in anything of the sort, they're in separate rooms." "Oh all right." So I had a room to myself and it was overlooking the sea, it was beautiful. It was way up in the air somewhere, because it was an enormous great building, this thing. And nobody in this hotel paid, they were all guests, and there were people from all over the world. And I got in the lift one day and was talking to someone, he was an Englishman. I said, "What are you doing here?" So he said, "Well I'm an expert on pigs and they've fetched me over now to get them going on pig rearing and things like that." They had all sorts of people from Czechoslovakia about vehicles and things like that. And one day there was a great commotion outside and a loud-mouthed American got out of a car and everybody was chatting, oh he was a great hero, and I thought, "Well they don't like Americans I shouldn't think." So I said, "What's this man?" "Oh" they said, "they think the world of him because he's an expert in [stumbles over word] Hyperphonics - something?"

**Bob Allen:** Hydroponics?

**Fred Tomlin:** Hydroponics. "...He's teaching them to grow tomatoes in water" or something - hydroponics - instead of in the ground. And that was what he was doing, hydroponics, that's the first time I'd ever heard the word, and he was an expert on that sort of thing, and so he was welcome. And nobody paid anything. You went down and had your breakfast, and it was delicious. I used to have fruit cocktails. And for dinner every day I think I had lobster, in one way and another - either lobster thermidor... [chuckling]. And then one day I said to myself, "I'm going to have a change, I'm going to have chicken." So I asked for chicken and I got lobster! [Laughs] So that was all right!

**Bob Allen:** Chicken of the sea!

**Fred Tomlin:** So it was good, yes. And then came the day of the revolution, 17th June or July whatever it is, when they had this mass demonstration in one of the great big squares, when he addresses the whatsit. And we went there and it was the most marvellous thing I've ever seen. Because they're absolutely organised for it, all round the outside of the perimeter of this - where the crowds are going to be tomorrow, they've got all these portable lavatories and all connected to the main drains, what's more you know. And the first time I'd ever seen them was refrigerated lorries fetching all the food, because I didn't know what these things were stuck on the front. Long before we'd seen them over here - these refrigerated lorries fetching all the food and things like that. And when they came, when we got there the next day there were - I don't know how many people - there were hundreds of thousands, it was packed tight with people. Now they told us that we couldn't go, they said, "You won't get permission." [Break in recording]

**Bob Allen:** This is cassette number two, Fred Tomlin interview side one of cassette two. Sorry about that, we ran out, just as you were saying that they weren't going to let you come but you...

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes they said that we couldn't go to this thing you see. But anyway they relented and they gave us an invitation, in fact I've still got it at home now, I've saved it. Actually we were on the rostrum, on the podium there, with Castro, about two feet away, with all the dignitaries, in his capital, well call it what you will. And the visiting celebrity was Yuri Gagarin the first spaceman you see, and that was very interesting too to see all these mobs of people down there cheering and all that sort of thing. But of course his speeches go on so long that we had to leave half way through and give it up as a bad job because he goes on for about eight hours, poor old Castro. And what's more at every street corner there's a loudspeaker all over the town, in Havana - they were everywhere, wherever you go that speech is still coming over, nobody's going to miss it you see. But the interesting thing was that when we left there, and we went home before the camera crew, they said, "Leave those tapes with us." So he said, "No, he's not going to do that", Malcolm said. He said, "They're my tapes, I'm going to take 'em." And there was a bit of a kerfuffle.

Anyway we got to the airport and there was a bit of chin-wag going on and we were shoved into a room that had a gate across, like a Boswick[?] gate, and it was kept locked, and there were a few civilians too, and they wouldn't come near us, they all kept up the end, I take it they were Spanish, I don't know what they were. And we were there for about two hours. There was a man outside with a gun, so oh dear oh dear. And in the end they came along and they said, "Give us those tapes." And he had to give up the tapes through the gate, and then they let us on the

aeroplane. What it was, it was us that they were guarding, we were locked up until we gave up the tapes. I didn't know anything, well neither did he really! But it was all done and he had to give up the tapes and then they let us on the plane. And when we got on board, we still didn't know then that that's what it was - we got on the plane and Malcolm said to the stewardess, "What are we going to do about lunch?" She said, "Lunch?" she said, "we had lunch on the way over from Mexico." So he said, "Well when are we going to eat?" She said, "Tonight when you have dinner." So he said, "Well why is the plane so late?" She said, "The plane wasn't late, it's been standing there for two hours, we've been waiting for you!" And that's when we learned that it was for us! And all the rest of these passengers who had been locked up with us looked at us, and when we got out the other end they all came up and shook our hands. No wonder they kept away from us, they thought we were revolutionaries or something...[chuckling] one move we'd have all be shot or something, you know. So really you don't know what sort of danger you're in, do you, in these things? But we were absolutely oblivious to it, we didn't know it was anything to do with us at all. So all ended well.

**Bob Allen:** And were the tapes eventually got back?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes, they got back and...

**Bob Allen:** After they'd censored them all?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's right, they listened to them and there was nothing on there. But I wish he'd have had them because we went to one or two nightclubs and there were some lovely singers. Because I said to Malcolm, "Oh if I could have a copy of some of those," but we never did get it you know. But that was an interesting job. But coming right the way back, one or two things. This man, Ted Black, who was in charge over at Islington at that time, in the early 1930's, Ted Black here. He was a brother of George Black who used to run the Palladium. And he was a very stern man and a very unfunny man, yet he oversaw all these comedies made by Will Hay and all them people you see. But we were on location one day and it was a disused oil storage depot, so they had some big storage tanks you know. But they had the manhole covers off them, they were completely empty, and we had to do some scenes around for some farce, I forget what it was. And he came over, and when you knocked, you hit this rung, it went 'bong'. So he came by and he said to Bill Salter, "I just went by and I banged one of those drums, you get a lot of echo off it." So old Bill said, "That's right, we've all done that." So he said, "If I was you I'd do a soundtrack of that." So Bill said, "What for?" "Well," he said, "often people have to have an echo put on a soundtrack." [Laughing] But he couldn't see... [laughing] if someone thought you were putting an echo somewhere and they'd get it ready...[laughing]] but that was his way of thinking, "You get an echo on a soundtrack. Yeah, here's an echo."

And another thing, when we were dubbing one day, we used to shoot the picture at Islington, whoever shot the picture, whichever mixer it was, and there was two, there was two crews, that crew did the dubbing as well. So really the boom swinger had nothing to do but sit in the theatre all day, a very boring job. With a music session and all this sort of thing. And then the mixing, where they were putting the effects tracks all and all that sort of thing you see. So we were working on a picture there and there was a cuckoo on the track, a cuckoo calling, it was that time of the year. So Ted Black came in and he was listening to some of the stuff and he said, "Too

much cuckoo on that." So Phil sort of looked at him, he said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You've got too much cuckoo on that, do another take and take some of that cuckoo off." He said, "But that's on the original track, the dialogue track." "No," he said, "it's not." He said, "I've heard cuckoos, they only go 'cuckoo' twice and then you don't hear 'em any more!" [Chuckles] He couldn't be convinced that they was on the - we couldn't do anything about it! All the time these people were talking the cuckoo was going "Cuckoo" and that was it you see. Because as I say we always had to use all the sound, there was nothing - we had to use it you see. But that was his way of thinking, what a peculiar man. But you come across all sorts.

**Bob Allen:** Yes there are a lot in the business who have been in it a long time and yet still don't understand the technicalities.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right.

**Bob Allen:** It's still the same today, I think. Just going back, again, just to - we've done very nicely, we've got some super stories there and those old stills are absolutely super. As I say, I hope that you might give permission for the National Archive...

**Fred Tomlin:** If you want to use them you can, yes.

**Bob Allen:** ...to take copies of them they'd be most interested.

**Fred Tomlin:** Because I think these are the most interesting of how things were done in those days.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's right, yes.

**Bob Allen:** And the groups of people too of course are very interesting. Just to go right back to the beginning again - you were at school and how did you come to - did you have any electrical training at all? What was your schooling?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, just an ordinary council school, we left school at fourteen.

**Bob Allen:** And that - what did you do first when you left school?

**Fred Tomlin:** The first job I had was at a wholesale warehouse, a great big place it was, selling stuff to hairdressers and things like that, all the stuff that they have to use, including cigarettes, and I was in the cigarette department.

**Bob Allen:** I see.

**Fred Tomlin:** And I was a poor errand boy, with a sack on my back, going all around the West End, getting all cigarettes I'd never heard of for special customers and things like that, every day, and that sort of thing.

**Bob Allen:** But you'd never actually had an electrical training?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, none at all. And when they asked me to - when my mother asked Anne Sargent if she could - and I went over to - the first job I had was over at Wembley on these night shots on a picture called The Bells.

**Bob Allen:** The Bells?

**Fred Tomlin:** And that was arc lamps and you just picked it up as you went along, and that was it you see. And in fact so much so that before they asked me to go over on the sound, the electrician, the chief electrician called me off the spot rail and he said, "I want a word with you." We'd been doing a picture with Bernie Knowles, he was lighting it, and he said, "Bernie Knowles has pointed you out up the rail and he has said, 'That man is very helpful,' he said, 'he knows every move I'm going to make, every lamp I want pulling he's already standing behind it, ready to do it,' he said, so I thought I'd tell you that, because they very seldom compliment the people like that." And I suppose really that was why he asked me eventually if would I be interested in going over onto the sound department. But as I say it was only because I was intensely interested in all that sort of thing you know.

**Bob Allen:** You mentioned that one thing that you were very keen on was movie going. Was that before you got into the business?

**Fred Tomlin:** Before I got into the business, yes. Because I worked for J. Lyons & Company, they used to have their own engineering staff and I got a job with them on the engineering staff for a while. And the consequence was that I was earning good money, because I was single at the time, and at every opportunity I used to go to the West End, to the cinema. So when they fetched over The Jazz Singer which - no, The Jazz Singer wasn't the first talking one, what was the first talking one?

**Bob Allen:** Well the one that's er, Don Juan, called Don Juan.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh no, no, it was an Al Jolson thing.

**Bob Allen:** Er... The Singing Fool.

**Fred Tomlin:** Or was The Jazz Singer the first one? The film that I saw was the very...

**Bob Allen:** The Jazz Singer was first, sorry...

**Fred Tomlin:** The very first one. Well of course that wasn't an all-talking film at all...

**Bob Allen:** No.

**Fred Tomlin:** ...it was a silent film with sound bits in it.

**Bob Allen:** Supposed to be, I think - singing.

**Fred Tomlin:** But I went down, I thought, "Well I've got to see that." And it was at the Rialto Cinema in Coventry Street, round the corner from here as a matter of fact. And we're sitting in there and there's this silent film going, and then they're in a café. And suddenly you're in the café with 'em, you can hear all the sound, with the glasses and the cups and that kind of thing, and it was the most marvellous thing, to hear all this - it really was you know. And then of course he had to sing a song and I thought, "Cor, bless my soul!" Well you couldn't keep me away from the cinema, from the West End cinemas, because they used to have all the best films up there. Then of course it was The Singing Fool and whatever came afterwards. But it was really...

**Bob Allen:** Would that be before you were actually involved as an electrician?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, hmm.

**Fred Tomlin:** So yes, we were always at the cinema, always at the cinema. And as I say this thing round the corner from where we lived, that was the first studio, you know just round the corner there, the old - I think it was Paramount that took it over.

**Bob Allen:** But they were still shooting silent there when you first started, they were silent movies?

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes that's right, yes hmm.

**Bob Allen:** Good. Now then, you married somewhere around '32?

**Fred Tomlin:** 1932 I got married, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And how many children? You had er...

**Fred Tomlin:** We had - one was born a year after and then the other two were born just at the beginning of the war, three boys.

**Bob Allen:** And I know that one of them went into the movie industry.

**Fred Tomlin:** Michael yes, he is on the camera side, and the other two, my eldest boy works at [indecipherable] department in whatsit, and Derek the youngest one, he's got his own business over at Finsbury Park. He's an antique clock dealer and repairer, and he's got his own shops, his own business, he's been running now for about fifteen years. He's done very well indeed as well, yes, and he gets some lovely jobs going round repairing clocks at ambassador's houses and God knows what, and does a good business in his own shop. Because he's got all these wonderful old grandfather clocks and God knows what.

**Bob Allen:** Do you still go to movies in the cinema?

**Fred Tomlin:** No. Unfortunately I haven't been to the cinema for - because I went right off them because they got down to the barest essentials. It was just sitting in there with no carpets or anything, where it used to be a treat to go to the cinema at one time. In fact I well remember when I was unemployed in the early days, long before I was married, when I was quite young, there was a big new cinema opened up near us called 'The Carlton Cinema' in Essex Road, Islington. And it was a picture palace in the truest sense, thick deep carpets, lovely seats to sit in, and for a sixpence in the afternoon, that's what we used to pay, there were two feature films, a newsreel and an hour's stage show.

**Bob Allen:** They had a big organ in there too.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right. A big stage show, and I saw people like Sophie Tucker and all sorts of people there, for my sixpence! And of course that's all gone these days, you go into the place and there's no carpet on the floor any more and people are smoking and blowing smoke all over - oh! So I said I couldn't go. It's not an enjoyable thing to go to the cinema as far as I'm concerned. Probably in the West End it's still the same, I don't know, but I never go. Especially in view of the fact that I can see all the films that I want to see on whatsit. Because the one thing that I've always liked is a good western and I've built up a library of westerns all of whatsit I've got.

**Bob Allen:** Oh you've got your own videos?

**Fred Tomlin:** I've got my own videos yes. And as it turns out Les Hammond and I, we got onto a western.

**Bob Allen:** And what was that?

**Fred Tomlin:** Um...

**Bob Allen:** [indecipherable], was that?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, no it was a thing called The Shooting Party or The Hunting Party I think it was. I forget - I think it was The Hunting Party because they were showing a thing called The Shooting Party with James Mason.

**Bob Allen:** Yes, I did that.

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh did you?

**Bob Allen:** I did that.

**Fred Tomlin:** So it wasn't that - so I think it must have been called The Hunting Party. And it was about a man who invites some of his friends to come out hunting with him and he's a bit of a terrible man because - he's terrible to his wife, in bed, scratching her and God knows what, a bit of a sadist. And he said that he's got this new rifle that'll shoot anybody, anything up to about half a mile. And then of course a gang of nasty people come into town, led by Oliver Reed, and they are a gang of hooligans on horses and they kidnap this girl, and he whips her up into his



whatsit and that's the story, he runs off with her. Then this man gets to hear about it, and then he and all his gang, all these posh people, they follow him all across the desert until eventually he shoots him - The Hunting Party, he was hunting you see.

**Bob Allen:** And that was shot in Spain I suppose?

**Fred Tomlin:** That was all shot down in Spain, yes.

**Bob Allen:** As a 'spaghetti western' type of thing?

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right yes, because down there they've got all this wonderful scenery you know, and you've got the cowboy country with all the mountains and all that sort of thing, and you've got the desert, and you can do anything down there. In fact when we went over there on a picture called - oh that was another interesting picture we worked on called How I Won the War with Michael Crawford and John Lennon, he was in that, and Dick er...

**Bob Allen:** Dick Lester?

**Fred Tomlin:** Dick Lester directed it, yeah. And so we went down to Almeria again and used the desert there, and we used the mountains as well, 'cause the story for whatever it was, you know it was a war story. And so we got to know it quite well down there, that part of the world, what with that and this western that we worked on. But they've actually built two western villages in the mountains there you know, permanent - now though I think they're a sightseeing thing, they run people out there as a sightseeing, I don't know if they'll make any more westerns out there.

**Bob Allen:** No, I don't know.

**Fred Tomlin:** But they had all the scenery in the world there, as I say, the rolling desert and then all the mountains as well, so it was very interesting, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And if you um - you would go again as - on going into the movie business and being a boom operator?

**Fred Tomlin:** If I started again - I was quite happy, now then on two or three occasions people have come to me and said, "You're going be the mixer on our next picture." I said, "No I'm not." And so they said, "Well, why not?" I said, "Because I'll tell you, I'd sooner be an in-work boom operator than an out of work mixer, because I never stop working." Despite the fact that I was never on the payroll of any of the big studios I was always working. And in between jobs when I wasn't working I had enough money that I wasn't - we always had enough put by to see me through to the next picture, I always had another picture or series coming up so it was okay. And that was, I think it worked out about forty-two years.

**Bob Allen:** When did you actually retire?

**Fred Tomlin:** At the end of the first lot of um, in 1976 I think it was.

**Bob Allen:** '76?

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, I was sixty-seven at the time and I decided I'd had enough of going to Pinewood and back by car, and I said to the wife, "I'm not playing," so that was it, and I didn't go either. They phoned me up when they did the next series. In fact Les, I told you he got the - they wouldn't have Dave Bowen for some reason, but they offered Les the job and he rang me and he said, "I knew that you were on it and they said they wouldn't mind you coming back." So I said, "I don't want the job." I said, "I've retired, I'm not going to start again," and that was it. And then Claude Hitchcock rang me up and he wanted me to do something and I said, "No." And in the end of course the phone calls dropped off when people knew I really wasn't going to do it, so that was it. And here we are - eighty-two! I mean I couldn't hold a mike on the end of a pole these days! [Laughs]

**Bob Allen:** I don't know so much about that, they've become a lot lighter of course, as you know.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well that's right, yes.

**Bob Allen:** And I think you were in the business long enough to know that. The sad thing about it is - well you might be used to it, because they've now got back to what you were saying in the early stages of not knocking off at five o'clock, but shooting the day until it's finished.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes somebody told me that, yes.

**Bob Allen:** The work hours where ACTT over the years fought...

**Fred Tomlin:** I think it was you who told me over the phone, I think you told me that.

**Bob Allen:** Might well have been.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** But they got down to being fairly regulated and that's all gone by the board now, and people, their work for the day, you might start at seven in the morning and not finish until eleven at night sort of thing, that's...

**Fred Tomlin:** Well what about overtime pay?

**Bob Allen:** Well now of course they've tried to get everybody on deals...

**Fred Tomlin:** Hmm.

**Bob Allen:** A little thing that I did earlier this year the director said that they wanted to get early morning light and somebody said, "Well what time is the sunrise?" And this was the middle of summer, they said, "Oh it's about half past four." A number of people sort of drew breath and sort of, "Oh dear." The producer came up and said, "Oh there's no problem, we've got everybody on block deals."

**Fred Tomlin:** Ah yeah.

**Bob Allen:** So you don't look forward to saying, "Oh right, well we've worked the long hours because we're going to get extra money for it," you know. But anyhow that's the way that the business is going, and you'll agree with me, there are people now, are working for six day weeks, ten hours a day and they can start any day they like and work through any day they like...

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh no.

**Bob Allen:** So I mean, [chuckles] I say to people myself that I - not envy, that's the wrong word, but I sort of look to people of your age and say, "Well I wish myself that I was ten years older, that I had actually worked through what in fact was a hey day of motion picture making."

**Fred Tomlin:** Hmm, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Cinema motion picture making that is. I mean the titles that you can give are all good pictures, they were all well made, they were all - the technicians working on them were all super people...

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right.

**Bob Allen:** ...and it was a good time to work in the movies. I'm - well I've just reached my sixty-fifth year. I've worked on some nice movies too, but I would like to keep on working but sometimes I think from the way I see the type of movies that are being made and the way that they're trying to make them that perhaps I'm glad that the phone isn't ringing.

**Fred Tomlin:** Hmm, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** Anyhow is there anything else you would like to say?

**Fred Tomlin:** No I've finished, I've talked all about things like that. But I was working on a picture with a nice man called Gunther Krampf, a German, awkward man he was. And we were doing a picture that was very difficult to work on called This was a Woman, I think, yes - a picture with Sonia Dresdel, and she was a bit of a harridan, harassing her husband, a quiet man. It was directed by an American called Tim Whelan. He was an awkward man to work with, Gunther Krampf, but I managed to get by with him, and one day we had a particularly awkward shot where we had to get the microphone from there to right the other side of the room without getting a shadow in, and I did it. And he came up to me, old Gunther Krampf and he said, "You're not a boom swinger, you are an artist." [Chuckles] And I thought that couldn't be more complimentary!

**Bob Allen:** Well this is too often the thing, that people have not in the past realised the skill, dexterity and all the things that go to making up a good boom operator. That it is an artistic job, understanding the artists and temperaments and where people - you know, how people are doing things, and following the movie. And too often people say, especially now, it's still the same

today, that a good - although it's difficult to find someone like yourself who could operate an actual, operate a Mole boom...

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** ...there are still people who are very good with holding...

**Fred Tomlin:** A pole, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** ...a pole, doing a fish pole. But you still get the producer and the odd idiot - not that all producers are idiots, but other idiots, camera people and things like that who think that it's a simple job, that anybody can do it.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** And the old saying that a mixer is only as good as the boom operator, because it's the boom operator that's got up there, putting the right sound in the right place, there's not much he can do about it.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's absolutely right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** But people still sort of think, "Oh give it to a boy, my son can do that job easily," that's the attitude towards boom operators.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well we went on to...

**Bob Allen:** So it's really nice to hear that somebody like that realises it's an art.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well, Les and I got a job one day, a day's work on an advert, and we had to go over to a little place over at St John's Wood, there was a little studio there. So we got there and when you go on these, you don't really know what it's about, these adverts. Sometimes they don't really want the sound, but anyway we were there, and before we started the producer, a young fellow, came in bustling, he said, "And another thing, where's the sound department? I want a boom used on this advert, I don't want any of these mike shadows and things like that, I want the boom used." So we said, "Okay." Now they had a Mole-Richardson boom there with a cover on it, I undone the cover, I bet it hadn't been used for ages. So I said to him, "Well I'll tell you one thing about it, you're lucky that you've got somebody that knows how to work the boom, because you could easily have got somebody who's never seen one of these things, let alone work it!" Because when you get on an advert it could be any odd crew they've got together you know, and that is a fact. In fact I got on a picture on one occasion, there was a young man there, I don't know what he was - sound cameraman - I don't know what he was, he was on the sound crew. So he said, "I'm really a boom operator you know." So I said, "Are you?" So I said, "How long have you been a boom operator?" "Oh" he said, "about a year now." So I said, "Oh." So I said, "Well when you're talking about a boom, have you ever worked a real boom?" "Oh no," he said. So I said, "What do you mean, you were just holding a pole?" He said, "That's right, yeah." So there you are you see - they've got no idea what it was like!

**Bob Allen:** Well most of the time the only - probably the boom operators you find now are probably in TV, in the studios, the television studios.

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's right, that's right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** The people that have come through now in film have never used a Fisher Boom. And I wouldn't want to have a Fisher Boom on a picture myself unless I've got a boom operator that can work one, because it's a liability more than an asset, unless someone can operate it...

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes so we took one...

**Bob Allen:** ...a very skilled job.

**Fred Tomlin:** ...when we went out to do this western we got a - we had a Fisher Boom sent out in bits, came in a crate. And before we started the picture we were assembling it and getting ready for this. And the producer came down, Jules Levy, he was one of Levy and Something, they were the people who made the film, a little brash American. And he said, "What have you got that thing for?" So I said, "Well we always use a boom." "Yeah" he said, "you..." I said, "I don't know what you're worried about, you haven't got to use it!" "Oh" he said, "no, all right then" and that was it, that was the end of that one! And in another case we were working on a picture and there was a director called David Greene, on a picture with old Bette Davis. And he took a dislike to me, and I can tell when people do that, and he said, "Boom, we've got to be there." So I said, "Well I don't know what you're worried about, it's on wheels, it can go anywhere it likes." And the artist, he burst out laughing, he never forgot that, the artist, a very well known bloke, I can't think of his name, an American. He said, "I had to laugh at you, when you said it's on wheels, I've never heard that one before!" Well I mean it's so silly isn't it, people you know...

**Bob Allen:** Yeah, yeah. I had a similar story on a picture that I did, Return to Oz and we'd been shooting the first few days, had been in a very narrow little bedroom, cell sort of thing. And of course you couldn't get the boom in so there was not a lot of dialogue anyhow, so it was on the pole. It then came onto a big set and the artist has to get up from behind a desk and walk round and talk to this little girl who's over here and go to a cabinet and come back again and so on. And...well we had to put a placed mike because there was return over the desk, so we had to have something in under here that could pick him up on the boom. They'd got two cameras on it, two different sized pictures on the camera, you know, two different angles, so there was all that sort of hardware as far as the cameras moving about, and also we've got the Fisher Boom. We had to get the Fisher Boom out, we had the boom operator, not a particularly experienced boom operator but enough to handle that. Anyhow we'd got this, it's quite a big set-up, the American producer comes in and he says, "What's that?" I said, "Oh we've got the Fisher Boom." He said, "We don't use those in the States, they do it all on the fishpole." I said, "Well you couldn't do this shot on the fishpole." "Oh it's a waste of time, takes up too much time!" I didn't have your repartee to come back and say, "Well are you worried? If it takes up time I'll pay you for..."

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh right, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** But the shot couldn't have been done efficiently and successfully on a fishpole, it had to be on the boom to get out over the top of all our camera hardware and so on.

**Fred Tomlin:** That's right.

**Bob Allen:** But you know, you just have to console them, but as you say, it's that attitude these days that's very much so.

**Fred Tomlin:** Well I had a call, when I was at Twickenham, I had a call and they said, "Would you go over to Walton-on-Thames? They've got trouble over there with a boom operator and they've asked if they could borrow you." So I went over there and I was making a picture called Oscar Wilde. And at the time there were two Oscar Wildes being made, one there and one at Elstree, and it was a race to get done. So anyway I got there and they were doing a street scene, they were filling the studio up with fog, I started in the afternoon. So I got there, there was a dialogue scene, walking down a street, so I got a pole, I just held it underneath and walked backwards and got the thing like that you know, and that was all right. And all at once somebody tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You know your... thank you very much for coming," and it was this director, the director of the scene. He was an actor, do you know I can't think of his name off-hand. And I couldn't do anything wrong for that man. And he said to me - they had this er - he was a very prominent French lighting man, I can't think of his name at the moment. You see this is the trouble, when you get older like me you forget names.

**Bob Allen:** Yeah, I can't think who that would have been. It wasn't Renoir the...?

**Fred Tomlin:** No, no, it was. What was his name? It was the very well known one. [NB. Georges Perinal] Anyway he said to me, the director said to me he said, "Now look, we can't hold this man up, we've got to get this film out, and I'm prepared to loop the whole thing, so do the best you can but don't hold him up in any way whatsoever." And that was it. But as it turns out they didn't have to do all the post synching at all because, we got it and it was fine, you know. And I said to him one day, the director, I said, "I tell you what, there's just one line, if we can do a wild track?" He said, "Whatever you ask for you can have," this director. So he was a very nice man, he was an elderly man, a German, he was an actor and er... [NB. Gregory Ratoff]

**Bob Allen:** I can't remember from those - I remember Peter Finch was one of them but I can't remember...

**Fred Tomlin:** Oh yes, Robert Morley was another one.

**Bob Allen:** Robert Morley was, yes.

**Fred Tomlin:** Robert Morley, yeah.

**Bob Allen:** I don't remember who the directors were. I remember the time that the two were sort of...

**Fred Tomlin:** Yeah, of course as soon as I walk out of here I shall remember all the names.

**Bob Allen:** Yeah, well that's always the way, that's it. Well then that's the end, Fred!

**Fred Tomlin:** Yes that's it, yes I must be away because...

**Bob Allen:** Yes, um...

**Fred Tomlin:** A bit of a chatterbox, I'm sorry!

[End of interview]