

Tom Peacock (studio plasterer) 1908 - ?

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BIOGRAPHY: Tom Peacock was born in 1908 the son of a plasterer's labourer in Hammersmith. After initial work in a brier pipe factory, he entered the building trade as a plasterer and having trained to do fibrous plaster work at night school, he entered the film industry as a plasterer in the late 1930s. **SUMMARY:** In this interview conducted at 'Glebelands' (the CTBF retirement home) Peacock talks to Roy Fowler about his career as a studio plasterer in various studios including Denham, Riverside, Pinewood and Shepperton. A particularly interesting section discusses the typical day of the plasterer and the kind of work they were required to do, and how the plasterers shop tended to be organised. A member of NATKE, Tom discusses the role of Trade Unions within the industry, remembering several trade disputes arising out of issues of division of labour and Bank holiday rights - particularly the long-running dispute at Riverside during the filming of *The Years Between* (1946). He discusses the system of allocating location work. Among the films touched on are *The Seventh Veil* (1946), *Fire Over England* (1937), *Some Girls Do* (1969), *The Long Duel* (1967), and *In Which We Serve* (1942). Colleagues mentioned include Art Director Carmen Dillon and NATKE officials Tom O'Brien and Frank Kelly. Peacock also discusses the film made by the Trade Unions in support of Russia's involvement in the war, *Our Film* (1942) and the involvement of plasterers from the Crown Film Unit in creating WWII camouflage items at the 'Thatched Barn' at Elstree. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

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Interviewers: Roy Fowler and Sidney Cole

Interviewee: Tom Peacock

Tape 1, Side 1

Sidney Cole: Well it's nice to meet you Tom and to ask you about what you remember about that film which we were both associated with at Denham Studios all those years ago, 1942 in fact. Would you like to tell me about your involvement in that?

Tom Peacock: Well I became very interested in this because we had a works committee at Denham at that time and a very active works committee it was. And the chairman of the works committee was named Bert Batchelor. Now I personally found him very friendly, but like everything else, when you hold a position in a trade union, some people like you and some people don't. But I liked the man and therefore I've got some nice memories of the man you know, because to me, he was for the working class people, of which I am a member, of that

working class you see. Well at any rate it was suggested, it must have been from higher up in the office, that they were going to make some kind of a representation. Because in this country, when the war was on we were having a bit of a lull and the Russians were up against it. And we thought - or somebody from the offices upstairs suggested - that it would be nice if we could get together and put voluntary labour and produce a film which would be called Our Film. Well of course when we used to have these general meetings they used to give us some information of what we'd got to do. Well...

Sidney Cole: They were called by the works committees, these meetings?

Tom Peacock: That's right, yes. Well as regards to me, being in the plasterer's shop you see, I and two or three other people volunteered to give up their time, voluntary to make this film you see. So we done it in our dinner hour and then we stopped Saturdays and went in the crowd scene, you know, like when they were doing. But I can remember exactly nearly what the film was about. Now I don't know if you'd be interested in hearing it...

Sidney Cole: Yes, yes...

Tom Peacock: ... or do you know it?

Sidney Cole: ... no, tell us.

Tom Peacock: It was given to the Minister of Information, that's what it was about - what this was given to. And out of the proceedings of this film that they made, that the people from Denham collected together, and the money that they got from the Minister of Information, and they bought an ambulance and presented to the Russians. Now the film, how it started off, there was a - you know the people that were in the film, the stars, I expect?

Sidney Cole: Yes, well if you can remember any names, because I can't remember them all.

Tom Peacock: Yes well it might come to me. But it starts off like this, there was a set built and there was a window, and there was a tap on the window, you see. And seen inside was a man, his wife and two children. And the man had come from the factory, he was an Englishman you see. And he knocks on the window and he says, "Would you like to come up and have a drink?" And he said, "Yes I would." Because he's just finished work. That was one scene. And it flashed back and then there was another scene, the same window - knock on the door, and when they looked up it was a German there, and he machine-gunned 'em. That was the opening of the film. To say the contrast between this country, that we were on a lull, quiet, and trying to create a second front for the Russians, you see.

Sidney Cole: Oh yes, ah hmm.

Tom Peacock: That was the idea of the story behind it. Well then various things, they asked us to do which they used a stage for. Remember it was done voluntary, so you couldn't go on one stage because it was booked up for another film. And there would be bits of old motors that they would have, and have 'em on the crane. And so the Russians are evacuating you see what I

mean? To give the impression that everything was being taken down because they were being - the Germans were advancing into Russia at the time and they had to take these factories and shift 'em somewhere else. But this was the theme of the whole thing you see. And Mr Batchelor or Bert Batchelor as I knew him down there, he was very co-operated. You couldn't help but like the chap, in my opinion, cause we know how people are, aren't they? Some people would say, "Well he's a nice fella, but..."[Chuckles] And um, Saturday afternoons we used to stop there and make a crowd scene you know. And Batchelor would get up in the carpenter's shop and say like, "All in favour say 'aye'" and everybody would raise their hand up you see. It was all nicely done and that you see. And I do remember going to the cinema and seeing it actually.

Sidney Cole: Where did you see it?

Tom Peacock: I saw it at er - I should say The Regal at Hammersmith.

Sidney Cole: You were living round there were you, at that time?

Tom Peacock: Yeah we lived at Hammersmith before we came here you see. And I was rather keen and I thought it was a great effort. And of course at the time they had these collection boxes in the cinema, and it was a great time.

Sidney Cole: Do you remember how the audience reacted to the film at all?

Tom Peacock: Well if you remember at the time they used to send out these Ministry of Information films nearly every other week. So when they showed you a film about Our Film it would only to them be another film, but to the people that knew what it was about, it became more interesting you see.

Sidney Cole: Yeah, sure.

Tom Peacock: Oh yes.

Sidney Cole: Do you remember, I remember you talking about the crowd scene, I remember there was in the big, I think the carpenter's shop at Denham...

Tom Peacock: That's right, that's right.

Sidney Cole: ...there was a scene in the film, which was in fact a works committee, a general works meeting.

Tom Peacock: That's right.

Sidney Cole: And I remember it particularly because there was a big crane shot, do you remember that?

Tom Peacock: That's right, yeah.

Sidney Cole: Well you must have been there!

Tom Peacock: Yeah, because we're going back about forty-five years you know! [Chuckling]

Roy Fowler: That's right, forty-six actually - yeah, [19]42

Tom Peacock: Yeah, forty-six years you see. And how it keeps in my mind I just don't know, because there was nothing wonderful about it. You understand, it was just a film. But I thought it was a lovely thing for the Denham Studio to allow us to do this scene. And of course as far as I was concerned, as I say I was only just a plasterer, but the ACT and the ETU, they had a very important part to play, because once it leaves the plasterer's shop it leaves me...

Sidney Cole: Sure. You were an acting member of course.

Tom Peacock: Yes an acting member. And of course there was a lot of stuff going on behind the scenes that we never knew, you see.

Sidney Cole: But do you remember that in fact, what the story to that film was to be about was discussed by the whole meeting? Do you remember?

Tom Peacock: That's right, yes, yes. I do remember that. But it stands out in my mind that at the time that we were in, the start of the war, or we were in the war, we had a big lull, do you remember?

Sidney Cole: Yes it was called 'the phoney war' at the time.

Tom Peacock: That's right. And a group of people got together down there and said - and then there was a very popular, in the paper, there was a pressure of trying to get a second front going, which was the Russians, you see.

Sidney Cole: Yeah sure.

Tom Peacock: Eventually they did come in and there was the likes of people down at Denham, they must have been interested in the subject, otherwise they wouldn't have made the film about it you see.

Sidney Cole: Yes well now could I - thank you very much, Tom, that's very interesting about Our Film. I'd like to talk a little bit more about...

[Break in Recording]

Tom Peacock: ...film, but I can't give you the personalities if you understand, because I know them as Bill, Joe and...

Sidney Cole: Yeah. Do you remember, I think it's Harry Phipps?

Tom Peacock: Phipps, yes the carpenter.

Sidney Cole: Carpenter, yeah. Because I think that he was on the works - were you yourself on the works committee?

Tom Peacock: I became a deputy steward in the plasterer's shop so therefore I went on the works committee when our steward was occupied somewhere else you see. But Phipps and all that...and of course you've got to remember that Batchelor - Bert Batchelor - he had a brother down there, he was a manager.

Sidney Cole: That's right, Harold.

Tom Peacock: Harold Batchelor see. So at the time that I'm talking about, I think they were producing about seven films at once, if you understand what I mean. So there was a great industry going on there and it was an absolutely wonderful place. If you can't make 'em at Denham you couldn't make 'em anywhere. Why it closed I just couldn't tell you. But it was a Mecca, it was.

Sidney Cole: Can you remember what other sets there were? You mentioned at the beginning of the film there were some ordinary home...

Tom Peacock: That's right.

Sidney Cole: But I remember later on in the film there was a meeting, which was like a works committee, talking about things...

Tom Peacock: It was a works committee, it was...

Sidney Cole: And then a Russian representative came in and talked to them.

Tom Peacock: That's right.

Sidney Cole: So you must have had something to do with the building of that particular set, do you remember that?

Tom Peacock: Well it was, you see what happened it was done all voluntary, so therefore they got a few flats as they used to call 'em. Put 'em up there, put a window down there, then we would go in and put some imitation beams in to give it a bit of a Tudor effect, you see, and then the curtains. And as I say it just showed there's table as a -like shooting there, you see - a table there, children eating their food, and of course there was a tap on the window and they all looked round and there's a chap that works in the factory and he says like, "Come and have a drink," you see. Now that's in England. But if they'd been in Russia, the tap on the window, they'd have been dead, bang, see...

Sidney Cole: Yes, hmm.

Tom Peacock: ...and that's the old machine gun going and all those things. So it was nice and um... Well actually you see when you were in an industry like that and you were producing seven films and this little film comes along, which was nothing really, it had a very little 'big' effect on you, personally. You'd just give your time up and that's all there was about it you see. But it did do fairly well because they had this ambulance and they put it on the notice-board that an ambulance had been sent to Russia on the money that they'd taken from the film you see.

Sidney Cole: Can you remember the names of any of those big films that were being made at Denham at that time?

Tom Peacock: Well when I was down there you see, I have told you that I didn't do any freelancing but my - I'm a single man by the way, so therefore I had no ties. And if I was working at Denham and suddenly Denham went quiet and then someone would whisper in my ear that Shepperton is going to be busy, there's plenty of overtime there, course I was like everybody else, I was after a little bit of money you see! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Yeah sure, why not?

Tom Peacock: So I would go. Now when I start reminiscing I get mixed up with Shepperton, Pinewood, Denham, Riverside Studio, Gaumont-British, Fox in Wembley, all the studios that I worked in you see. When they were busy I would nip in - MGM, and all that you see. But there was 'Cleopatra'...

Sidney Cole: Well 'Cleopatra' was shot at Denham, that's right.

Tom Peacock: They started...

Sidney Cole: But that was later I think.

Tom Peacock: Yes. Well they done 'Cleopatra' while I was there and Gabby Pascal was the producer. Do you remember him?

Roy Fowler: Yes indeed.

Tom Peacock: A Hungarian. I think Korda got him down there - I'm not sure about that. And they done this great big set and Claude Rains was the star and er...I can't think who the girl was.

Roy Fowler: Vivien Leigh.

Sidney Cole: Vivien Leigh, yes.

Tom Peacock: Vivien Leigh, that's right. And they had these great big sets. Well I was in the plasterer's shop, making these columns you know, these Grecian columns where they've got all the Grecian figures in and that. And these columns were a terrific size, anything up to twelve foot long, with anything like nearly the size from - coved out like that, so you know, put two together on wheels so we could wheel 'em about on the sets - great stuff. And then they had great

modellers down there, modelling these sphinx and things like that. That's what was interesting to me because it was a new world that I went in you see. I'm a plasterer, I started off...

Sidney Cole: Yeah. I was going to ask you, how did you get into being a plasterer?

Tom Peacock: How did I get? Oh if I was to tell you it'd be a bit tragic.

Sidney Cole: Really? Well if you don't mind...

Tom Peacock: Well how I started, I was a young lad, I used to work in a pipe...making pipes, pipe factory, you know. And my father used to work in a plastering, a wonderful plastering shop. And he wanted me to be a plasterer - he didn't want me in a factory making pipes!

Sidney Cole: When you say pipes, you mean what sort of pipes?

Tom Peacock: Smoking pipes.

Sidney Cole: Smoking pipes, yes.

Tom Peacock: Yeah, brier pipes, briars. Well then he - he done a bit of conniving, I don't know how he done it. This is how I came in the industry - not the film industry...

Sidney Cole: But in plastering...

Tom Peacock: ...in the plastering industry. He knew a man - that was piecework, like these chaps over here. And they had a few drinks together I expect and he said, "Could you get my boy there?" "Well" he said, "you know I'm piece work and not playing around. Can your boy do any work?" He said, "No, no, he don't know nothing about it." So he said, "I'll tell you what I'll do with you." Can you hear me?

Roy Fowler: Oh yes, yes absolutely.

Tom Peacock: He said, "You give me four pound and I'll give your boy ten shillings a week for eight weeks. And after eight weeks if he doesn't come up to the scratch, he'll have to leave." So for eight weeks I got nothing, it was my father's money - ten shillings a week. Well that made me a plasterer and that made me go harder. I wanted to be a plasterer. Well then I went to night school.

Sidney Cole: And how old were you when that happened?

Tom Peacock: Eighteen...sixteen!

Sidney Cole: Sixteen.

Tom Peacock: Sixteen. And then I went to night school and I started to learn fibrous plastering. Do you know what I mean - cornices and all columns and that.

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: I won a prize, first prize.

Sidney Cole: Where was that?

Tom Peacock: Lime Grove, Shepherd's Bush.

Sidney Cole: No, the school I mean.

Tom Peacock: Lime Grove, Shepherd's Bush.

Sidney Cole: Oh it was in Lime Grove? Oh...

Tom Peacock: Yeah it was, yes, it was evening class, it was evening class. Well then the job I'd done turned out so nice, they sent it to Olympia in a building exhibition. Now I'm talking a long time ago...

Sidney Cole: When would that be? Can you remember the year, roughly?

Tom Peacock: Well I'm eighty, and say I was sixteen when I'm talking about! [Laughing]

Sidney Cole: About '24 or so...1924, something like that.

Tom Peacock: Oh I'm talking about forty, fifty years ago. I was only a young man when I went and won the prize. At any rate, the chap came round and asked me would I - he knew [me], I'd worked with him, see at Lime Grove, the night school, and he said, "Would you like to come down to Denham?" And I said, "Well I don't think I know enough about the fibrous plastering." "Well" he said, "come down because they can do with men" you see, cause they were busy. I think they were doing The Elephant Boy and things like that at the time. And that's how I came into the industry. At the end, I would say that I'm not very clever - don't get the impression I'm telling you I'm clever [chuckling], I'm only average. But I got, I got on in the industry, I got known, and if there was anything going, someone would give me a whisper and say, "Well why don't you come here with us?" and "Why don't you do this?" You know what the industry was like in them days. But since then, as I say, I've been down to Pinewood and I've had six or seven years at Pinewood. I've had Riverside Studio - no doubt you know the name of the film I'm talking about, Mason was in the film and Ann Todd...

Roy Fowler: The Seventh Veil.

Tom Peacock: The Seventh Veil.

Sidney Cole: Yes, famous film.

Tom Peacock: Now that is a famous film. Now I could tell you a little history about that. The man down there was named Sydney Box.

Sidney Cole: That's right.

Tom Peacock: And he came there - the studio at first was at Riverside Studio, Crisp Road. And Jack Buchanan owned that. Can you recall that?

Sidney Cole: Yes, yeah.

Tom Peacock: Well they made this Seventh Veil and I, I couldn't see nothing wonderful in it really, because I had a premier ticket to go and see it! But it nearly collapsed. But when you read the life story of Muriel Box - remember her, do you?

Sidney Cole: Yes.

Tom Peacock: When you read the life story of her, it tells you there that the film nearly collapsed for the want of finance. And this Sydney Box was one of the nicest chaps I've ever met, a proper gentleman, a really lovely fella he was (but anyway that's his life story). But the film, it made quite a hit. And I think she made another one, cause Riverside is right by the Thames, as you know, and this was all about a bargee going up and down the water, you know. I had about six or seven years there...quite nice...under a person name of Knapman, Bill Knapman. Now Bill Knapman's grandson is in charge of Pinewood at the moment...

Sidney Cole: Ah...

Tom Peacock: He was a plasterer and they've all gone and they broke away from the normal procedure of making films and they've gone freelancing haven't they, Pinewood?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: He's the only chap that's been kept on. And they come down here [NB to Glebelands] every Christmas, and they put a lovely show on here for us, every Christmas. And everything is there, whatever you want - mince pies and...

Roy Fowler: The studio does this?

Tom Peacock: Pinewood do it. Shepperton used to do it at one time.

Roy Fowler: Um...I'm stopping...[break in recording] I'm rolling...

Tom Peacock: Am I doing all right?

Sidney Cole: Yeah you're doing fine.

Roy Fowler: Excellent, excellent.

Sidney Cole: But we want to - what Roy was saying, we want to sort of start autobiographically, at the beginning a bit more. So could you tell me - you've said you were eighty years old, so you

must have been born the same year in fact as I was, which was nineteen hundred and eight, is that right?

Tom Peacock: 1908 yes that's right, yes.

Sidney Cole: And where would that be?

Tom Peacock: When?

Sidney Cole: Where?

Tom Peacock: In Hammersmith, Great Church Lane - Great Church Lane, opposite the Gaumont, which is the Gaumont Palace now isn't it?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Well there's a big lane there and it's called Great Church Lane, but I think it's called Butterwick now.

Sidney Cole: And where did you go to - you went to school there did you?

Tom Peacock: Well I went to school yeah. Actually if I'm honest, if you'd like to know, I'm a Catholic, so therefore I went to a convent. It doesn't make me any better, don't think that! [Chuckles] But you want to know the history. And that was in the Hammersmith Road. Then as you get bigger you get sent to the St Mary's School in Brooke Green, there's a church there and being Catholics you had to do a lot of church work you see. But I was only average, I don't think there was anything - I never came out with any diplomas I can assure you that! I could play football, I could play cricket, but I couldn't get no diplomas! [Chuckling]

Sidney Cole: But you did all right, presumably?

Tom Peacock: I got by. I think I've done wonders. To have finished...

Sidney Cole: What age did you leave?

Tom Peacock: School?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: Fourteen. That was the age you see. You only got fourteen, unless you won a scholarship and then you may have had - but see we're talking about seventy years ago. You had nothing, did we?

Sidney Cole: No. Were you much aware of the First World War during that time?

Tom Peacock: Yes, yes I can, yes I can remember the First - I remember going with my mother up to the top of the Great Church Lane, and my father was volunteered you know. And in them days there would be a kind of parade and all the chaps would go into the - well what could you say - recruiting offices.

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Now this is nineteen - oh this is going back 1914 isn't it, really? And I was about six years old.

Sidney Cole: Hmm. So did your father go into the army?

Tom Peacock: Oh yes, oh yes he was. The amazing part about it is that [chuckles] I don't know if I can tell you this, it was interesting. See my father, he was a plasterer's labourer, I told you that didn't I?

Sidney Cole: Yes.

Tom Peacock: Well like everything else, you know, if you didn't go in the army in them days, they threw a feather at you, didn't they? So he went into the army, didn't he. Now my brother, he went in the army...

Sidney Cole: He was older?

Tom Peacock: Older than me?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: Oh yes he was older than me, and he went into the Huzzars. Now my father goes out and he goes to France and he gets to a place called Rouen. And he knew my brother was out in France and he asked if anybody knew Darkie Peacock. And somebody said, "I think he's just come out of the line." And they met! And they got terrible drunk both of them. [Chuckles] Because it was so wonderful to meet your own son out there. And of course that was when they - as you say - and he became looking after the Prisoners of War, my father did, in Rouen at the time. And of course we come from rather a big family, there's only me and my sister left really.

Sidney Cole: Well how many children did they have altogether?

Tom Peacock: Seven...

Sidney Cole: Ah hmm.

Tom Peacock: Seven, in them days. Hmm, oh yes it was a struggle, that's what I'm saying, I say to my sister, "It's marvellous where we finished up."

Sidney Cole: What here, at Glebelands?

Tom Peacock: Oh this is a - this is a gift from God, honest I mean that, I'm not putting anything over. It's a gift from God for us because you've got all the security in the world, and as you get older you realise how important that security is for you. If you're sick or if you're not well, a doctor comes here every week and he gives you special attention. It's wonderful, it really is...

Sidney Cole: How long have you been here, Tom?

Tom Peacock: Well this September will be my ninth year.

Sidney Cole: Hmm. Going back to your own history, earlier history, did you go into that pipe factory you were talking about earlier, immediately you left school?

Tom Peacock: Yes, yes I did.

Sidney Cole: You did.

Tom Peacock: Yes I did you see. I was lucky to get a job, especially boys, out of school. I went sweeping up the floors. I don't think, when I was a youngster I wouldn't be able to talk like I'm talking to you now. Somehow or other you've got to wait until you become adult before you can express yourself, isn't it really.

Sidney Cole: Yes. Can you remember what you earned in that pipe factory?

Tom Peacock: Yes. I tell you it used to belong to the Imperial Tobacco Company and...Glackstein[?].do you remember Glackstein[?] do you?

Roy Fowler: Yes, Simon and Glackstein [?]

Tom Peacock: Fourteen shillings a week was my first week's wage - a week. And then they used to give an annual bonus. Well if you were earning say five or six pounds a week you got a bonus according to your wage. I think my first bonus was twelve pound. Twelve pound I got for the year. And I remember going to the post office and putting it in, and the fellow behind the counter said, "Have you robbed a bank?"

Sidney Cole: [laughs]

Tom Peacock: I'm only a little, 'ain't I? At fifteen, fourteen...

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: So that is how I started see.

Roy Fowler: What exactly was your work, Tom, in the factory?

Tom Peacock: Pardon?

Roy Fowler: What was your work in the pipe factory? How actually did they make pipes, was it all by hand?

Tom Peacock: Oh yes! Well there was a...there used to be a 'Civic pipe', called a 'Civic', that's where it was, that was the name of the factory see, in the Fulham Palace Road. Well a 'Civic' pipe used to cost six and six. And then they used to have an 'Imperial Tobacco' pipe, which was a cheaper pipe, you see, I think it was three and six. I think they're seven or eight pound now, these pipes. And it was all done by hand. And of course after a while you had some good tradesmen in them days, they were, they were good tradesmen - they were making pipes by hand! And there's a lot of difference between a brier pipe and a pipe. A lot of people don't - You get a French brier, that is a pipe. But you get some of these briers that they grow in this country and as soon as they're on the machine they crack. And sometimes when you look at a pipe you see where they've dug it out and put putty in there and puttied it up and then stained it. So that when you buy it you don't detect it, but after you've smoked it for a while it [chuckles]...it comes out.

SC Hmm. How soon did you get on to actually making - onto the pipe making itself, before you, you know, you said you started sweeping floors and things.

Tom Peacock: Well I went there, I could tell you little tales about it, but whether it would be interesting or not I don't know...

Sidney Cole: Yes go on, yes tell us some of them.

Tom Peacock: When I went to this factory I was a - like a boy, and I went sweeping up and making tea and all that, and then someone says, "I want you to go and work with a fellow named Mr Crowle." He was the one that used to put the - bore the pipes, you know, it's all a big machine. But I had to go with him and I had to stain the insides of the pipes, the stems, and of course it was piecework. And he was the one that introduced me to the theatre. Talking to him like, I would look on him like my dad see. And he's talking to me and he said, "Where do you go at night?" And I said, "Well I don't go anywhere." He said, "Well you go to the King's Theatre, Hammersmith and you'll see some lovely plays there." You know, No, No Nanette, do you remember them days we're talking about, and all that. Matheson Laing, The Wandering Jew. And he said, "You'll learn something there." And that man helped me, you know, so that I could go and be able to talk in company. Otherwise you're isolated aren't you, as a young boy you see. Your father didn't want to hear you talk! [Chuckles] And um, I've had a very interesting life - I think so - a very colourful life.

Sidney Cole: So you went to the theatre quite a lot after that did you?

Tom Peacock: Yeah. Well I used to go to the theatre, then I - I worked on the theatre...

Sidney Cole: Ah...

Tom Peacock: You'd never believe it would you, really?

Sidney Cole: What was that?

Tom Peacock: You heard me say The King's Theatre didn't you?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Well I had some friends see, and I used to play cricket with 'em for the King's Theatre Cricket Club, and they asked me if I would like to go on nights and help with what they call "getting out" and "getting in" - er, scenery shifting. So I used to do plastering in the day and go with my mate to the King's Theatre and shift the scenery! [Laughs]

Roy Fowler: What did they pay you for that?

Tom Peacock: Oh I think you got about two and something - two and something a night. It could be two and three a night, that's all you see. And - very little really, two and three, what could you buy with it today? [Chuckling]

Roy Fowler: Were these travelling companies, Tom, that would come in for the week? Or was it a permanent company?

Tom Peacock: Well actually, I tell you one of the characters I learnt - I don't know if you know much about the theatre - Tod Slaughter.

Sidney Cole: Oh yes! I remember Tod Slaughter melodramas - Sweeney Todd!

Tom Peacock: That's right, he came there with Sweeney Todd and Maria of the Barn. [NB Maria Marten or the Murder in the Red Barn] Well when you get these - I'll give you an idea what I'm talking about... I expect you know. You know a 'flat' don't you? You know you put two together don't you. And they've got a cleat down the bottom - do you know what I'm talking about?

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Tom Peacock: Well these were eighteen feet long - or twenty. And you've got to know how to throw that cord up and get it on the top, then fit it down and tie a loop so that you will get - have you seen this done?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: Well you know what I'm talking about! Well he showed me, because he could see I was a bit of a rookie - I'm going like that, "It won't go." [Chuckles] And he said, "I'll show you." Bang! And up it went. Now that man, Tod Slaughter was a gentleman of the theatre in them days, do you remember that? A real gentleman he was. And er - oh I've had a rather colourful life really, and I like that, see. I like the theatre and that's why. I think the first film I can remember was Hitchcock. [NB possibly The Man Who Knew Too Much]

Sidney Cole: Ah hmm, where was that?

Tom Peacock: It was being made by Gaumont and it was at the Albert Hall. I think that's about the first I can go back. And then they had a lot at Northolt, and they used to build the sets at Northolt by the racecourse, there used to be a racecourse there, do you remember that?

Sidney Cole: Yes, hmm - trotting races weren't they?

Tom Peacock: That's it, trotting races, yes that's right.

Sidney Cole: What sort of sets on that Hitchcock film? Can you remember?

Tom Peacock: Well there was a street set, you see they used the lot at Northolt for a street set, a big street set, and then they had all these German soldiers, all dressed up you know. And when I first went in it was, it was so - well I wouldn't say romantic but it was such an eye-opener to me to come into it and be working you see. To come in from the building trade and coming into the film industry. They used to take me up to the cafeteria and then you'd see all these people walking around with jogging clothes on and dressed up as Indians and dressed up as anything, and to me that was very colourful you see.

Sidney Cole: How did you first get into the film industry? What was the first film studio and how did you get there?

Tom Peacock: Well the first film as I say, the first studio I actually worked in was Denham. And the films they were making, I think, at that time was Fire over England which was Flora Robson.

Sidney Cole: Flora Robson, yes.

Tom Peacock: Er, Rembrandt...

Sidney Cole: Oh yes with Charles Laughton.

Tom Peacock: Charles Laughton.

Sidney Cole: Did you ever have a word with Alexander Korda when you were working at Denham, did you speak to him?

Tom Peacock: No Alexander Korda was there. It was a very funny - I don't know if I'm talking silly or what?

Sidney Cole: No, no, no, you're fine, you're doing fine.

Tom Peacock: Well when I was there and Alexander Korda was there. Now I can get mixed up you see. Er - Rank, now Rank, he started making films and he started making religious films...

Sidney Cole: That's right.

Tom Peacock: And one of the films he made was The Life of Handel [NB The Great Mr Handel]...can you recall this?

Sidney Cole: Yes I remember that, yes.

Roy Fowler: That's much later.

Tom Peacock: That's much later. You see now this is where...

Roy Fowler: About '41, yeah.

Tom Peacock: ...this is where I get mixed up with the various studios.

Roy Fowler: Norman Walker, The Great Mr Handel.

Tom Peacock: When Korda was down at Shepperton they'd just made a Sound City, is that right?

Sidney Cole: Sound City they called it, yes.

Tom Peacock: Sound City, they called it Sound City. And Korda had his brothers there, Vincent...

Sidney Cole: That's right, the art director...

Tom Peacock: Yeah. Well...

Sidney Cole: ...and Zoltan.

Tom Peacock: That's right, yeah. He used to be dressed up in breeches if I can remember rightly.

Sidney Cole: [chuckles]

Tom Peacock: They were strange people weren't they really? [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Yes.

Tom Peacock: And um, yes see I get a bit mixed up with things - it was a different studio.

Sidney Cole: Well not to worry.

Roy Fowler: Well let's...

Sidney Cole: Not to worry, just er - you were saying about Denham and Fire Over England with Flora Robson and er...

Tom Peacock: Beautiful place, Denham. We used to go in the woods there, they had - you were there...

Sidney Cole: Yes, yeah.

Tom Peacock: So you'll know if I'm [indecipherable]... There was a lovely - well they had places very similar to this, they had a brook running through or a stream running through, they used to do lots of sets there. And then we used to go out and take squeezes off trees. Well you see a tree like that you see, well there may be a scene that's outside, a bit of lovemaking you know or...well now they want to bring that inside but they want the same tree!

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: So we used to have to go down there and take squeezes off 'em in clay...

Sidney Cole: So that you could make them, the artificial ones in the studio...

Tom Peacock: Fetch 'em back into the studio you see. And then you could have - you know where you'd got these big boughs coming out, branches coming out, and they're laying against 'em, you can repeat that you see. Because a lot of people don't realise that in the studio it's - nothing was slaphappy, nothing! It all had to be done by drawings, all scaled down, and you had the art director coming round and he would look and er - because he was the big noise in them days, not like they are now.

Sidney Cole: Do you remember names of any particular art directors that you worked for?

Tom Peacock: Yes nearly all of 'em nearly - all the Bond - I just can't think of the names where I'm talking about their names...

Sidney Cole: Do you remember a lady called Carmen Dillon?

Tom Peacock: Yes, oh yes she was great, she was. She finished up very bad - you know that?

Sidney Cole: No I didn't. What happened?

Tom Peacock: Oh she did, yes she was. Now she used to...

Sidney Cole: What happened to her?

Tom Peacock: [Chuckles] I don't...

Roy Fowler: She drank. It's all right because she'll never hear it, it's...

Tom Peacock: She was a lovely - to be honest the name of the film that she used to come - on the set, a very conscientious woman she was, and she was a lovely woman. But like everything

else they have strains and stresses in that industry as you know. They give you something to do and they want it - not the next day, they want it the day before that! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Sure, yeah.

Tom Peacock: And, yeah I've been on one or two sets. But she used to work for someone else, now I can't remember...

Sidney Cole: Paul Sheriff.

Tom Peacock: Paul Sheriff, that's his name, yeah. He was a nice, big, upright man wasn't he?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: And she was his prot♦g♦. Well I do know that, you know, she had a lot of strain and stresses, and then you can't get a picture and they're all worried. And she started drinking and she got in a very bad way with it. And of course you know you get someone drinking, they're not reliable.

Sidney Cole: Sure.

Tom Peacock: Another little thing, if you want to know a little thing, they done - yeah I think that I'm right, I'm not sure about this. The First of a Few...

Sidney Cole: Yes, First of the Few, Leslie Howard...

Tom Peacock: That's right, and that was Amy Johnson, wasn't it?

Sidney Cole: No, no, no.

Tom Peacock: No, am I right?

Sidney Cole: That was about the man who invented these er - it was about the Battle of Britain in fact...

Roy Fowler: The Spitfire.

Sidney Cole: Spitfire.

Tom Peacock: Oh was it? Well now...

Sidney Cole: Because I was the editor on it.

Tom Peacock: I'm trying to get hold of Robert Newton.

Sidney Cole: Yeah, well Robert Newton yes, but he wasn't on First of the Few.

Tom Peacock: No, no.

Roy Fowler: I know the one you mean, it was a Wilcox film.

Tom Peacock: That's right.

Roy Fowler: I can't remember what it was called. [N.B. They Flew Alone]

Tom Peacock: That's right, I'm trying to get it. Anna Neagle, she was in it.

Roy Fowler: Yes that's right, yeah.

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Is it 'They...' no, the names go.

Roy Fowler: I can't remember the title.

Tom Peacock: But I remember him down there, and I was working there, and you get a standby, so you're on the set aren't you?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: And Anna Neagle, she was...

Sidney Cole: Can you explain what standby is for the sake of - you were the standby plasterer on the film, what did you do?

Tom Peacock: Well when the unit comes in to make a film you see, the unit themselves they want someone on the spot, not like to bring 'em from one stage to another, they want you on the spot. So you've got to standby that film you see. And then you had a standby carpenter, standby painter, standby plasterer, you see. And then if there is an emergency - I'm talking about years ago when the union on the films were pretty stiff and you couldn't shift a light from there to there, see, you had to call an electrician, you had to call the standby electrician. Same as, say for instance there were columns, you know what I mean, columns...

Sidney Cole: Hmm...

Tom Peacock: Well if they wanted to shift a column, there was no one touched that bar the standby plasterer, because it was his work. Of course that's all gone now, it's all gone, it's all help yourself now I think in the industry.

Roy Fowler: Yes, there are stagehands now.

Tom Peacock: The same as what you're talking about, what you're doing, your stand. Well they were the kingpins. I always thought they were, the ACT. If the ACT said, "Yes," you could have

it, or if they said, "No," you didn't. If they said, "Right! Cut! No overtime," then - the ACT, they were most powerful, then the electricians, and then the poor construction workers came last!
[Laughs]

Sidney Cole: I suppose when you were standby plasterers too, sometimes there would be another er - you'd have to make good where a flat had been removed and then put back again, you'd have to help make good wouldn't you?

Tom Peacock: Well yes, yes. A little incident that I can tell you that happened when you're on standby - this is what happens with standby plastering. Now you've got to be capable of doing anything that's asked, you can't say, "Well I can't do that." You've not gone out there for a holiday, I must tell you that, you're out there to work! Now there was one little incidence I can remember, it's such a small little incident. I'm out - now let me see, whose is it? It was Betty Box's film, she made a film and it was called Some Girls Do or something, I don't know, it was a bit of a flop. And I'm on the location like, as I would be here, and someone calls out, "Plasterer!" So I go along and I see Kit West - do you know Kit West? Do you know Kit West?

Roy Fowler: No I don't.

Tom Peacock: Well he does all the tricks in the films, special effects.

Sidney Cole: Ah ha.

Tom Peacock: Well he comes along to me and he says to me, "I'm in a bit of bother." I said, "Why is that?" "Well" he said, "I've got to get a lock on this door, a padlock, so that when the chap comes along with a ray gun], he just shows it pshhh, and he gets hold of this lock and pulls it off and crushes it. And it's all got to go in the water, all dust." "Oh", so I said, "well what do you want me to do?" He said, "Well will you do it for me?" Now he's the special effects man, I'm not! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: Anyway it was out in Spain, now you know how hot it is out in Spain. So I made a little mould and I said to him, "We want some wax." So he said, "I'll get you wax." So when the fella comes back with this wax, it was bee's wax. Well you know how soft that is don't you?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: So I said, "Well that won't be no good." Well we happened to have some bottles, wax bottles, you know, to crash 'em on the head didn't you?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: So I said to him, "What about them bottles? I'll melt them down and I'll try and do what you want me to do." So he said, "All right." Well I made these wax - and I got this um, the name's gone you see - padlock.

Sidney Cole: Padlock.

Tom Peacock: And I got a mould off it, and I poured the wax in, and then when it came out it was soft because of the weather. So he said, "Well that won't be no good." So I said, "No, no." So he said, "Well what can we do?" And it came to me, I said, "Well there's only one thing to do, put it in the fridge and freeze it, so that when you get hold of it, it becomes like a wafer." And that as you put the vermiculite in, so that as he crashed it like that, it was frozen, it all went away for dust. Well they are the jobs you have you see.

Sidney Cole: That was very ingenious of you though. I'm surprised the special effects bloke didn't think of that.

Tom Peacock: Well you know, it's an old trick, and it doesn't matter where you go, somebody passes the buck!

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: [Chuckling] It's the old army game isn't it!

Sidney Cole: Sure, yeah.

Tom Peacock: And someone comes along and says, "Well done, kid, thanks very much!"

Sidney Cole: Could I ask you something about wages. Can you remember at all, for instance the first sort of wages you got as a plasterer in the film studios? It would have been an hourly wage presumably?

Tom Peacock: Yes, it was one and eleven pence.

Sidney Cole: One and eleven pence an hour?

Tom Peacock: Yeah. The reason I went into the film industry, on the building they paid one and nine pence an hour and if you went into the film industry you got one and eleven pence an hour you see.

Sidney Cole: Very good.

Tom Peacock: I think it worked out about somewhere round about three pound a week you see.

Sidney Cole: Yeah, yeah.

Tom Peacock: But can you remember, or are you aware of when they had that first agreement come in?

Sidney Cole: The first NATKE agreement? No I don't remember that exactly, when was that?

Tom Peacock: Well it must have - didn't it affect you? It affected everybody I thought. Oh this was...[indecipherable interruption by a third party]

Sidney Cole: How much more?

Roy Fowler: Another minute to two minutes of tape on this side and then I think we should break.

Sidney Cole: Okay we'll stop. But I wanted to ask more about - are you running?

Tom Peacock: Wages!

Sidney Cole: Wages, yes. And compare, when - that was one and eleven pence an hour when you started; when you finished working in the industry had they gone up very much from that?

Tom Peacock: Oh yes, oh yes, you had an agreement come in you see...

Sidney Cole: What would they have been then?

Tom Peacock: ...it was different altogether you see. Cause when you first went in the industry, bank holiday Mondays and Saturdays, you'd just worked Saturday morning for four hours...

Sidney Cole: That's right.

Tom Peacock: And you used to get up at somewhere about six o'clock in the morning to catch the train by seven, to get down at Denham by eight, and twelve o'clock you'd knock off, and you'd only got four hours wages, and you'd been up half the night! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Yes, quite.

Tom Peacock: See they are the differences, you see.

Sidney Cole: When you say the agreement, do you mean when we went over to the forty hour week and no work on Saturday mornings?

Tom Peacock: That's right. Then they used to have another one with the agreement - because you see that's where Batchelor was very handy. You see Batchelor went on the negotiating committee to get this agreement up. So it's not the agreement, it's the interpretation of an agreement...

Sidney Cole: Sure.

Tom Peacock: Because you had the management side and you had the worker's side, so now they'd both interpret it differently you see.

Sidney Cole: But what was the final amount, do you remember, that you were earning in the industry, hourly wage as a plasterer? Can you remember?

Tom Peacock: Oh gracious me, it was about perhaps four shillings an hour when I left.

Sidney Cole: Which is - when did you last work?

Tom Peacock: But now they tell me they're earning a bomb, it's all just freelancing business, you know!

Sidney Cole: It's all right when you get it, but I mean they wouldn't be working all the time anyhow.

Tom Peacock: No, that's what's happened isn't it? You see they're cutting it right down tight, you see. But I enjoyed it and my sister enjoyed it. [Speaks to sister?] I'm telling them my experience in the industry and how I got in the industry and how Dad paid four pound wasn't it, gave the man four pound and I had ten shillings a week out of it.

Sidney Cole: How are we doing, tape wise?

Roy Fowler: Well we could break here if you wanted, there's very little left on this side.

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: Okay then we'll pick up on the other side. [Break in recording]

Sidney Cole: Right this is Side 2, Tom Peacock, here we are at Glebelands still, hearing more about your memories. What I wanted to ask you was, could you go through - it was very interesting, you made some references earlier to, you know, getting up very early in the morning in order to go and work at Denham or whatever studio you were at.

Tom Peacock: Yes.

Sidney Cole: Could you go through the day in the life as it were of the plasterer that you were then, starting at the crack of dawn and going through to the end of the day, and say what you did during the day.

Tom Peacock: Well actually if there was an emergency they would come and ask you, like the foreman or whatever, "Will you come in early call?" Now early call in them days used to be seven o'clock, so now if I lived an hour and-a-half away from Shepperton or Denham in them days, it meant that I had to get up somewhere about half-past five, to get there at seven. To get one hour's - they used to pay you an hour and a-half, or time and-a-half, that was an early call in the morning. Well then you get there, obviously.

Sidney Cole: How would you get there? For instance if you were going to Denham from somewhere in London?

Tom Peacock: Er, How did I used to get to Denham? I've got to think...um...

Sidney Cole: Where were you living at that time?

Tom Peacock: We were living in Hammersmith.

Sidney Cole: Ah yeah.

Tom Peacock: So what I used to do, I used to go to Ruislip or Harrow and change and catch the old steam train as it came through you see...

Sidney Cole: Hmm, and go to Denham.

Tom Peacock: ...and then Denham had their own station didn't they?

Sidney Cole: That's right yes and then you walked across the fields.

Tom Peacock: That's right, you walked across the fields. Because there was no transport in them days, you didn't have a coach. Well then if you started work, as you say, everything was busy. So as soon as you got there they blew you up like, blow up like, you see, so at seven o'clock you started. You didn't even walk round the place and have a look at it, you had to get started...

Sidney Cole: You had to sign in did you?

Tom Peacock: You clock in.

Sidney Cole: Clock in rather, yeah.

Tom Peacock: You register yourself that you're there, you see. Well then whatever there was, sometimes there would be an emergency on something, so whatever you were doing the day before, they'd say, "Now leave that, we've got to get this out." So right, off you go. Well now, you may have moulds - as you know all the work in plastering is all done in the reverse. It's not done like normally, you know, you make a cornice, you make it in the reverse, so you cast out of it, you see, and bring one out. So everything you do is in the reverse. Same as if you were putting down a fireplace like that, you see. Well then you do that in the reverse see, so that when you cast out of it, like you'd put a custard or jelly you see, and you can pull the job out you see. Well all those were very tricky jobs because sometimes there would be - you had to make sure there was no undercut. Now while this is going on you've got the pressure of somebody saying, "Will you have it done by lunchtime? Can you get it out by lunchtime?" And you say, "Well I'll try and do what I can." They'd say, "Well try and get it out." Well that's - you're getting pressurised, that's a normal thing.

Sidney Cole: How long would it take, Tom, when you'd put one of those moulds and filled it, how long would it take before you could take the actual thing out?

Tom Peacock: Well actually the plaster would set, there was a way of deterring it from setting by putting sides in[?]. But all you had to do, say for instance you were casting cornices, you didn't have to but it was a recognised thing that you did eight, nine lengths which could be twelve foot long in one day, that's nine lengths of cornice you see, that's over - about a hundred feet of cornice you see. Well the price of cornice was shockingly dear, because it's a trade in itself. You've seen it done, stick and rag they call it. Well now while you're working they might say, "Right we've got enough of them. Now you come in here will you. We've got a street scene here and we want some over-doors put up." Like the over-doors, you see all this enrichment in the over-doors. So you'd have to go out and...

Sidney Cole: What are over-doors? I'm not quite sure what an over-door is. You mean a thing that goes over the top of a door?

Tom Peacock: Yes you know, you see that, that's an architrave isn't it. Well over-doors has got a cornice on top of it with returns in it you see...

Sidney Cole: I see, yeah...

Tom Peacock: ...all enrichment, you see. It's all according to what set they're on. Well then you might be on that for four hours you see, this is the colourful way of studio work you see, because you didn't have sitting down there, producing the same things, you had all sorts of things you see.

Roy Fowler: Were these from existing moulds or did you have to create a mould each time?

Tom Peacock: No, no you had to be a tradesman.

Roy Fowler: According to the art director's drawings?

Tom Peacock: Oh yes. Oh no, you - there was no chancers, you couldn't, you know you get a fella - they call 'em cowboys today! [Chuckling]

Sidney Cole: Yeah. [Chuckling]

Tom Peacock: Oh no, you had no chancers. As I told you before, you had the finest plasterers in the industry, in the country, there!

Roy Fowler: What I meant Tom was, were they stock items?

Tom Peacock: They did have stock items but you see there used to be a chap there - well obviously if you were making a cornice, you know what I mean, you see one up there. Well then you make the mould and you cast out a bit, and then they say, "Cast one for stock." Now then, you clean that up and they put it up in the gallery. Well you might go along as an art director and say, "I think I'll have that, yeah I'll have that cornice." So he says, "Right." And when he looks at a drawing it's a 906 cornice, you see, so they get so many lengths out of that cornice from stock you see. But of course when the boys come down, I'm talking about the art directors, they knew

what they were doing on, they wanted to put their best foot forward, obviously, don't they. They want a good show, they want a good set, it's his reputation. So he didn't want stock, so you had to make the models, see. And that is the art of plastering, is making the models.

Sidney Cole: Presumably the art director would er - or his draftsman would give you a drawing?

Tom Peacock: Well he would - actually what happened was that er, they would get - a set designer, he would go along and take photographs you know, off the set like, er Houses of Parliament - something like that. They'd go along with a gauge stick, you've seen it? I don't know...

Sidney Cole: Yeah...

Tom Peacock: And then they'd take it into the draftsman's office and then he'd get the drawings out of that, what we're going to reproduce. But it's all in er - I can't think of the word now!

Sidney Cole: Don't worry.

Tom Peacock: ...er, it's gone out of my mind. And then they would be given to the plasterers, the foreman plasterer, in full detail. And then he gives you that drawing and tells you what he wants and he says, like, "Do you understand what..." "Yeah, yeah, all right." Then he would leave you to it and then you would make the mould. Well making the mould could be on average about a week, one man. Because there's a lot of work in it you see, it's a process and you've got to know the process of doing it you see. Years ago they used to have gelatine, you've heard of the gelatine moulds?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Well now they've got this vidi-mould and it's different altogether, you can get a hundred out of a vidi-mould where the gelatine, it would melt, the heat of the plaster would make it melt, you know those caps. And of course it's all so different now. They've got these machines now that push out these sheets of bricks, well we used to have to cast 'em, see you'd perhaps make thirty, forty sheets of bricks a day, see one man, you were on the go all the time. Well there was pressure in the studio and you had the head of department, the supervisor, shop foreman, then you had the outside foreman, this was all pressurising you, you see. Well it was too much for some, they'd be, "Oh I don't want it, I'd rather be on the building where they're doing their little jobs." But I used to like it cause it was so colourful you see.

Roy Fowler: How many in the shop at Denham?

Tom Peacock: At Denham, in the days that I'm talking about, I think I said eighty, which would be forty plasterers and forty labourers, see. So you went out, you always had a labourer, you never went out on your own. No, you had a labourer. That was a part of the business, you see. And if you didn't have a labourer, the labourers would get together and say, "Why is Peacock working on his own? He should have a labourer." So they kept it, like - amongst themselves you see.

Sidney Cole: You're permanently working at that time? I mean you weren't casual?

Tom Peacock: Well no there was no permanent. The better you were for them, the more you'd be kept there, they used you. See you don't go and sack a good man, do you? [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: No quite.

Tom Peacock: And if you could get up to the top, well then you're recognised. And then I expect...

Sidney Cole: So you're just taken on for a - week by week you were going, were you?

Tom Peacock: Yeah weekly servant, you see. And then when a picture come in like the Bond you see, I was on quite a lot of them Bond pictures where they had great caves and rocks and all that, well they took weeks. And we used to get so busy that they would send outside and ask outside people to make these - you know, the moulds, and you'd make 'em you see, because they were so busy. And there used to be - now let me see, on a day's work - and then you could work till nine, so you have an early call at seven and work up till nine o'clock at night, half-past nine, book till ten! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: Oh I remember that one yes, "Half-past nine but you can book till ten."

Tom Peacock: That's right 'ain't it, yeah!

Sidney Cole: Yes something like that.

Tom Peacock: And then you had to clock out you see.

Sidney Cole: What were the overtime rates then?

Tom Peacock: Er the first - the first two hours was time-and-a-half. I really forget now. I think you used to get thirteen hours in a day if you worked till half-past nine at night, thirteen hours a day. So that's how your money came up. And double time on a Saturday or Sunday.

Sidney Cole: Sunday or Bank...

Tom Peacock: ...and this is only later, you never used to get that.

Sidney Cole: Yeah...good. So tell me something, because you were a member of NATKE, do you remember, did you ever meet Tom O'Brien, that rather sort of colourful general secretary?

Tom Peacock: Yes, yes, yes. My experience with Tom O'Brien. Do you know much about him?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Oh well then, see if I'm telling you the truth. My experience of Tom O'Brien - Well, when he originally started in the industry, he was a stagehand, right?

Sidney Cole: Ah hmm.

Tom Peacock: Can you remember that?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: He was a stagehand. And then they made him general secretary, and there's no doubt about it, the man could talk. But he had one failing, in my opinion. Say they would have a meeting, he wouldn't start the meeting till seven o'clock at night, and he'd keep that meeting on till two o'clock in the morning! But you couldn't get him there at three o'clock in the afternoon - I don't know why! And then we had another chap named Frank Kelly, do you remember him?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Now he was a brilliant man. I had nothing else but respect for that Frank Kelly. Well he finished up as a personnel manager at Shepperton.

Sidney Cole: Yeah I remember, yes, hmm.

Tom Peacock: He was a lovely fella, a really good fella. But er...

Sidney Cole: Well tell me, do you remember any other - have you got any anecdotes about Tom O'Brien?

Tom Peacock: Pardon?

Sidney Cole: Have you got any stories about Tom O'Brien?

Tom Peacock: Well I haven't got anything about Tom O'Brien but I can tell you a story about Frank Kelly.

Sidney Cole: Do.

Tom Peacock: [Chuckling] If you're interested?

Sidney Cole: Yeah sure.

Tom Peacock: Well...in the trade there's a person named Knapman, I don't know if - have you heard of Knapmans? Plasterers you know, plasterers they were.

Sidney Cole: Ah hmm.

Tom Peacock: Well I'm working at Riverside Studio and a film was just about to be finished and er, this is strange this is. The film was about to be finished but they couldn't finish it because the studio is booked out for another film to come in. So they transferred it to Highbury, Highbury Studio. And I think it was called The Years Between. I can't think of the name at the moment - I can't think of the name. Well anyway we go down there, and this Knapman wanted us to come back to Riverside Studio to work the weekend which was a Bank Holiday Monday, Easter. Well we booked so many hours between us, like there could be four or five of us, there was. They said, "Well what do you think?" So we said, "No let's have the holiday." So we wouldn't go back to Riverside Studio. But when we got - this'll tell you it's the old days! - when we got back there, we got back there on the Tuesday, and on the Friday this Knapman came along and gave us all our cards and sacked us on the spot - bang! Because we wouldn't give up our Bank Holiday Monday. This is what they used to do to you!

Sidney Cole: So what did Frank Kelly do?

Tom Peacock: I'll just tell you. Any rate, the works committee get together and they instigated a bit of a revolt. And they said, "It's not right, you shouldn't do this. You should at least give 'em a week's notice." But no, they wouldn't have it. So we were out of work, the five of us, and we had our cards. And there was a chap in the industry called Harvey, Ted Harvey - I don't know if you know him, but at any rate. Frank Kelly got brought in on negotiations about this strike and he came out after this meeting with the management. And we said, "What's happening, Frank, what's going to happen?" So he said, "Well look, all I can tell you is that you'd better go home"...this is hardly believable this is... "you'd better go home and come up on Friday and get your wages." I said, "No!" "That's the conditions" he said, "you're still on the payroll." [Chuckles] Fantastic isn't it?

Sidney Cole: You mean you were still on the - you would come in the next week as well?

Tom Peacock: No!

Sidney Cole: No, you'd just be paid off?

Tom Peacock: No, not paid off, we were on the payroll at Riverside Studio, but we had to go home and stop there.

Roy Fowler: He didn't want to see you?

Tom Peacock: No he didn't want to see us. See that was through Frank Kelly, very clever he was. And eventually we went in there for a period of - I used to go up there Friday and stand in a queue and get my money!

Sidney Cole: [chuckles]

Tom Peacock: And all the boys used to say, "You'll get no money, you're not entitled, you're not here! Go on, hop it!" It'd make me feel embarrassed! I got a weeks' wages for nothing!

Sidney Cole: How long did that last?

Tom Peacock: Oh it's a big history this is, it lasted for - seven weeks. I got terribly embarrassed, terrible! The money wasn't all that good. At any rate we went back and Frank Kelly said, "You've got to go back Monday morning." And we went back Monday morning and this Mr Knapman said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well we've been told to come back." He said, "No I'm not having you here, I'm not having you!" And these are damn good tradesmen I'm talking about. So at any rate there was a meeting called, Frank Kelly came down again, he said, "Get your tools together, now go down to Denham and you'll go on location rates." Have you heard of them? [Chuckling]

Sidney Cole: Explain what location rates were though for the benefit of people...

Tom Peacock: Well you see the thing is, if you worked at - we'll say at Riverside Studio - if you worked at Riverside Studio and they sent you down the location, you'll be out of pocket. Because if you lived at Hammersmith and you were in Riverside Studio (which was nearly walking pace) and then they sent you down to Denham, the fare in them days would be somewhere round about one and six. Well you get five one and sixpences in them days, it was quite a lot of money, so they would pay you location rates. So they would pay your fare from Hammersmith to Denham and back. And then you'd get two hours on top of your eight hours for, like, out of pocket expenses. And then you could go up to the canteen and get a dinner! See, of course everybody wanted location rates you see! [Chuckles] And that was through Frank Kelly.

Sidney Cole: Good.

Tom Peacock: There was a lot to do with that. I'll tell you another instance. When I went back there I became very ill. I don't want to talk about myself if I can help it. And the electricians, they were great, they were really great. And the head of the electricians came up to me and he said, "You haven't been well have you, Tom?" I said, "No." He said, "You just come out of hospital?" I said, "Yes." He said, "There's location going on at Cornwall, would you like to go?" An electrician, telling me! So I said, "I don't know, I don't know what to say." He said, "Well leave it to me." And the head of department came up to me about three days afterwards, by the name of Knapman and he said, "You're going down on location." I said, "Where?" He said - oh, "Penzance" round that way, Cornwall. And while I'm down there, there's a strike - I don't expect you'd know this. There was a strike and it meant that I had to come back you see, I had to come back on my own steam you see, because I had to cease being on the payroll for the...

Sidney Cole: It was a NATKE strike, was it?

Tom Peacock: Yeah it was a NATKE strike, it was a plasterer's strike really. And - I'll have to cut it short. These electricians they were ever so good for some reason, I don't know why, and they said, "You've got to go back haven't you?" I said, "Yes I've got to go back." And they said, "Well don't go back tonight." I said, "All right." And in the morning, the manager of the unit came over to me and he says, "You stay down there, you can't earn no money but your lodging will all be paid for and you go and have your meals in there. Now you stop down there because I understand you haven't been well." So I said, "All right." And do you know what they done,

these electricians? They got together and took a sheet round, and they went to the unit and they asked 'em would they put on the sheet. Because it would be embarrassing for me wouldn't it? And at the end of the week they came along, they said, "Here you are." I said, "What's that?" They said, "It's your wages." I said, "Oh no..." "You take it!" They'd got more money than I had, they said! [Chuckles] And that's what they done for me. And I was down there for about five weeks. And then when I got back I got in real trouble, you can bet your life, you see. But these are the things that used to happen.

Sidney Cole: Who did you get in trouble with?

Tom Peacock: The head of my department, he said, "I wanted you back, I want you here, you're here to do the work."

Roy Fowler: Tom you mentioned a strike, a plasterer's strike. It would be interesting to know what the cause was if you remember?

Tom Peacock: I told you the cause.

Roy Fowler: Ah it was that same strike, right, okay.

Tom Peacock: If you remember I told you that the set had to be taken to...

Roy Fowler: It was that one, I didn't realise.

Tom Peacock: ...Highbury, Highbury Studio.

Roy Fowler: Yes, understood - the Easter, not working Easter.

Tom Peacock: They wanted us back into Riverside.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay.

Tom Peacock: See, and I'd been working a lot of overtime and it can get you down, when you're working, it's not when you're there, it's when you're working overtime.

Roy Fowler: You must have been into Denham when it was still quite a new studio.

Tom Peacock: It had only just started, they came from Isleworth.

Roy Fowler: Yes, London Films do you mean?

Tom Peacock: London Films yeah. And the first one they done there was where they got the name 'City Square' from, was er... Things to Come? That's right isn't it?

Sidney Cole: I think so yes, Things to Come, that big square yes.

Tom Peacock: That's it, City Square they called it, that's where it got its name from.

Roy Fowler: Can you give us your memories of the studio when you first went there? How it seems in your memory?

Tom Peacock: Well to me it was a Mecca, if you understand what I mean. You had these great long corridors, it must have been Americanised, with stages shooting off, and they used to call the stages, A, B, C and D, you know, that way. And then all along, you see there'd be different lines - yellow, blue - then of course when you got to one stage it was Stage C and then the other lines went on and there's Stage B, and it was all so new to me you see.

Sidney Cole: Yes, because that was your first studio wasn't it? Denham was the first studio that you worked at?

Tom Peacock: Yes, yes. And then from there I went - I went to Shepperton, now what's the name? African Queen.

Roy Fowler: Oh that's twenty years later. There's a film I'm curious about at Denham, did you work on I Claudius? Which must have been a plasterer's delight I would have thought.

Tom Peacock: Well if you remember that got all mixed up didn't it? They started it...

Sidney Cole: That's right, they never finished it.

Tom Peacock: ...never finished it. There are some beautiful scenes...

Roy Fowler: Magnificent sets.

Tom Peacock: Who was in I Claudius, it wasn't Claude Rains was it?

Sidney Cole: It was Claude Rains.

Roy Fowler: No, no, no, it was Laughton.

Sidney Cole: Oh it was Laughton, of course, yes, beg your pardon.

Tom Peacock: Laughton, yeah. The one I was in with Laughton...

Roy Fowler: I think Zollie was er - not Zollie, er...

Sidney Cole: Vincent.

Roy Fowler: Vincent was the art director, yes?

Tom Peacock: Hmm, hmm. The one I was with Laughton, it was a Lancashire film' I think it was called [NB possibly Hobson's Choice]. Oh no, it was...

Roy Fowler: But you didn't work on the sets of I Claudius?

Tom Peacock: No, no, no.

Roy Fowler: You weren't there, right.

Tom Peacock: No, no, it was all going on but you know you're making stuff in the shop and all you had was a number, say 507, that was the set you were on. But you didn't know what 507 was because you're working in the shop see, and all the stuff's being done out there.

Sidney Cole: But you were standby sometimes?

Tom Peacock: Yeah, quite a bit of standby I done.

Roy Fowler: What was the gossip though in the studio about the film, do you remember?

Tom Peacock: Pardon?

Roy Fowler: What was the gossip in the studio about I Claudius? Because it was a very troubled production.

Tom Peacock: That's right. Well I must admit that I - no I wasn't involved see...

Roy Fowler: Okay, right.

Tom Peacock: ...I was outside. See as I say it's like you being in here and then there's a fight over there and somebody says, "You were there weren't you?" Well, you... [pause] I tell you what I did see down at Pinewood - now this is nothing to do with what you're talking about, it's just a little incident in the film industry. We're sitting in the canteen like this see, quite a - hundred of you. And every Friday or Thursday or whatever, I don't know, every Friday they used to come round with the money. Have you heard this?

Roy Fowler: No, of course not.

Tom Peacock: No. They used to come round with the money, so of course they have the security officers there. And they unload the money and they take it upstairs and get it counted out to pay the wages. I'm sitting there one day like that and there's a bit of a fight going on over the corner there you see. There's two cars going, a fella gets out, there's special windows. And I'm, "What's that?" like that, and I take no notice, and I'm - you know. A fella says, "What are they shooting over there?" I said, "I don't know, something for some film." It was a wage snatch! [Chuckles] Honest, it was a wage snatch!

Sidney Cole: A real wage snatch! [Chuckles]

Tom Peacock: A real wage snatch! And if you go - well not now, but if you was to go down to Pinewood and you'll see a security officer there and he's walking with a terrible limp where they

shot him with a shotgun, and you know, it spread out. And it smashed all the windows, and of course the people on the gate, they see it and the car went [zoom], they didn't know if it was a film or not! We had no wages that week! [Laughs]

Roy Fowler: They knew where to come for the money, obviously.

Sidney Cole: Hmm. Were they caught, the people do you know?

Tom Peacock: No I don't think they were - that I don't know, you know. But as you say it's pretty colourful. And in the Denham days it was terrific for me because they gave you anything to do in the plasterer's shop. Like say for instance, I'll try to give you an example. Say they wanted...[TP picks something up] they come along and give you that, and they say, "We want a dozen of these out Tom, and we want 'em in glass because we're going to throw 'em about." That's all, they don't tell you no more. Now you cant' go to the fella next door and say to him, "How do you...?" You've got to know how to do it, you've got to know how to do 'em. And about two days afterwards they'd say, "How did you get on? Have you made 'em?" You know all that rush, see?

Sidney Cole: Now how much - earlier on you said you went to evening classes and got a - did you get a proper apprenticeship when you started?

Tom Peacock: No as I told you, I told you, my father paid.

Sidney Cole: Yeah, what I mean Tom is that did you in your early things outside the film industry as a plasterer, did you learn some of these tricks of the trade that were useful to you later on in the film studios?

Tom Peacock: No, no.

Sidney Cole: You had to learn them on the job in fact?

Tom Peacock: Well actually I expect seventy five per cent of my knowledge is looking at the other chap, to be honest.

Sidney Cole: Ah ha, yeah.

Tom Peacock: See I never had a proper - I wasn't lucky enough to have an apprenticeship. They wouldn't let me have an apprenticeship in them days, because I told you my father worked in the art department of Browns, and the governor said to him, "Why don't you get your boy there?" But the union there said, "No, we've got enough apprentices so he cant' come."

Sidney Cole: Ah what a shame.

Tom Peacock: So I got barred. And my father said, "Well that's it, I'm going to get him as a plasterer" and he had to pay, see?

Sidney Cole: Yeah, good. You were talking about having lunch in the canteen at Denham. Can you remember what sort of money it cost to have a meal there?

Tom Peacock: Well roughly speaking, you see there was two canteens at Denham, if you can remember. There was one they used to call The Cafeteria, that was up on the...

Sidney Cole: Yeah...

Tom Peacock: And then there was the canteen as we had amongst the workers, you see. Well course when it was - I think it was about half-past twelve we used to knock off and then some of the chaps would knock off about quarter-past twelve to get down in the queue in the canteen you see. When you went in it was seventy-five per cent subsidised, so you could get a lunch there for about eleven pence you see...

Sidney Cole: Cor!

Tom Peacock: Which again was subsidised by so much. Tea - we used to have a tea-boy come round and you used to have to give him sixpence a week like for tea for all the week like.

Sidney Cole: Yeah. Can you remember a typical lunch you got for that eleven pence?

Tom Peacock: Well the normal, normal canteen food it would be, like a steak and kidney pie or a bit of beef or bit of lamb. It wouldn't be like - today I don't expect you could ever get the stuff. And of course I did, like everything else, if you go to a place, like up there - now I'll just give you an idea what I'm trying to say. You go up there and I say to you, "Was it nice, did you enjoy it?" "Yeah it was nice, sausage toad or something like that." But you have that every day and...

Sidney Cole: Ah yeah...

Tom Peacock: See this is what happens in a canteen, you say, "Oh not again!" [Laughs]

Sidney Cole: [Laughs] And could you get a drink in the studio?

Tom Peacock: Oh they had a bar, yes they had a bar, but um, well in them days see, I was a lot younger, I never - I don't drink much now. Like there's a drink up there today, I mean I didn't go up there, I didn't say like, "Come on, let's get up there." It doesn't worry me, I don't want it to worry me, I'm afraid of it. It does a lot of damage in my opinion. It's like smoking. I used to do all these things, but not now, not now. But they're very good up there, honestly I couldn't wish for anything better.

Sidney Cole: You mean here in Glebelands, yeah.

Tom Peacock: Oh yeah they're nice. And the matron, Sister Randell I call her, Sister Randell, that is her official name. Did you see the bungalow? You haven't seen the bungalow they built here have you?

Roy Fowler: No, you can show us later if you like.

Tom Peacock: Yeah I'll show you later, yeah, oh yeah.

Roy Fowler: There's something, if you don't mind going back to the industry - was it a closed shop at Denham in those days when you went there?

Tom Peacock: Oh yes, oh yes.

Roy Fowler: And that was when you joined NATKE, was it?

Tom Peacock: Well you come in on the boom.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: See when you're - I'm talking about myself here - when you're a plasterer, my father was a strong trade unionist, the family was. So when I joined I had to go and be made - get a ticket as they called it, a plasterer's ticket.

Sidney Cole: This is before you went into the industry, the film industry?

Tom Peacock: This is before I went into the film industry. So I had to become - get a plasterer's ticket you see. I've never done labouring, never in my life have I done labouring, I've always been a plasterer. Well when the boom came on, the only way you'd ever get in the studio was when the boom came on and they wanted people. See you couldn't get down in there casually. Well then when the boom came on see, they couldn't stop me from going in the studio because I was a plasterer - I had a plasterer's ticket. No one could have got in there without a ticket. Now having got the ticket they told me, "Would you join NATKE?" And I said, "Yes." So then I've got to go and join another union which was the NATKE.

Sidney Cole: Well what was the original one called?

Tom Peacock: My one?

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: The NO...er...I've seen it forty years and I cant' even think of the name! The NACK...NOAP, National Association...something of Plasterers. I've got the tickets upstairs. Oh no, and I think our contribution was sixpence a week when I first joined and they said, "Would you go in for the superannuation?" And there were a couple of elderly men there who were trying to guide me and they said, "Well the best thing is, don't go in as a junior, go in as a senior because it'd be better for your superannuation." And when I reached superannuation age, they went broke! Not a penny did I get!

Sidney Cole: Oh!

Roy Fowler: They weren't absorbed into another union?

Tom Peacock: Well they were absorbed but the superannuation stopped because there were too many plasterers and they'd been too long.

Roy Fowler: Sounds a bit fishy.

Sidney Cole: Hmm, hmm.

Tom Peacock: And that would have been about - perhaps seven and six a week in them days, ten shillings now, I don't know what it would be now.

Sidney Cole: So you're belonging to both, two unions at once?

Tom Peacock: Two unions, two unions, yes. Then say, for instance, I packed up at a studio, say I finished, I packed up at Denham. Well I'd go on the books as they used to term it you see, you'd put your name down on the books. Well perhaps Pinewood would be busy, and they'd send me a card, would I go down to Pinewood to work. Well that was a white card. Now before I could start work I had to show that white card - got what I mean? To say that I'd been, I haven't gone through the back door, I've done it through the front door see, the proper way you know.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: But they were really guarded, I will say that, the union, when I went like to branch meetings they were very guarded on their trade, they didn't want anybody - you know. It's no good you being a labourer and saying, "Well he's handy, make him a plasterer."

Sidney Cole: No.

Tom Peacock: Wasn't allowed to pick a tool up when I first went there! A labourer would come round and pick something up like that and the plasterer would say, "Leave that! Get on with the sweeping up." [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Tom, other than that one particular strike you told us about, have you participated in other industrial actions and can you tell us what they were like, the cause, how they developed?

Tom Peacock: Well I've always leaned that side of er - because you know, I expect they used to know I used to be on a branch committee at the plasterer's union. And of course when I used to go to the studio, after a while they wanted a steward, or an assistant steward. Well no one would want that job cause it was a naughty job you see. Because you had to go and ask the head of department...I've had heads of departments turn round and say, "Are you trying to blackmail me or what?" You should be friends together, but instead of that there was a bit barrier, I don't know why. Management and worker, there always has been that barrier, it is today isn't it really!

Roy Fowler: [indecipherable]

Tom Peacock: [Laughs] And that's why I take my hat off to the organisations that I was in, they guarded that trade, same as you, same as that, "No one must touch that wire, only the ACT!" I don't know if they do that now.

Roy Fowler: Not in that way.

Sidney Cole: No it's not as tight as that.

Tom Peacock: I mean to say, they tell me that when I last went down Shepperton to work, that was on those - Pink Panther...

Sidney Cole: Oh yeah.

Tom Peacock: And when the plaster came in, it used to come in by the lorry load cause the amount of plaster, I expect you know. And there was plasterers unloading it! And I remember going up to a fella, I said, "You're not supposed to do that." "Ah," they said, "What are you talking about? You're living in the past!" [Chuckling] And then you can't do nothing you see. And another trick they used to do in the studios, because we broke it all down, I must admit that. See things were hard and you were head of department, now you were a very powerful chap, because not only were you worrying about the work, but you might come along and say to me, "Are you busy over the weekend? Do you want anybody?" Now that's what you had to stop, and this was done. You know what I mean, don't you. I think they call it backside crawling, and that is what you had to stop. So that if anything came along - a location, and your friend said to you, "I hear there's a location." And he said, "Yeah, do you want to go on it?" So me, I would get nothing. So you had to stop that. So you had rotas. They had to give you rotas. You know all about this don't you. And when it was your turn there was no question of saying like, "Well old Charlie, he's been good to me, let him go"... No, that was your turn and you had to have it, whether it was a good location or a bad one. Well that is the trade union movement in the industry you see, looking after the trade really. How it is today, I don't know what's happening today. I'm really glad I've got off the roundabout because it's too much, it was too much for me even. You were getting yourself disliked by people that you shouldn't be disliked by, you know what I mean.

Roy Fowler: Did it affect your work do you think, being a shop steward?

Tom Peacock: Er...

Roy Fowler: Your employment is what I mean. Did it affect your employment by the studios?

Tom Peacock: I got into a lot of trouble, I got in a lot of trouble because - I don't know why but there's certain things in my life are principals. There's nothing wonderful about it, but it's very hard, very, very hard to keep to a principal, because sometimes they catch you on one leg and your principals would go. Like say for instance someone came round - weekends, that used to be a trouble when you were a steward. You had to go round with a sheet you see, and then they've

had their turn and they wanted six you see. And when you look down you've got certain people that have had their turn and then you go round and you say, "Weekend? Saturday or Sunday?" Then someone would come up and say, "'Ere, why aren't I on?" I'd say, "Well look, you've had your turn." "Oh no I never!" Now, who wants that aggro you're at work! You're not a play! There used to be all that aggro see. And another thing, I remember once being on a location or going on a location - this is true I'm telling you... and the name was 'Duel', I think it was called - The Long Duel, that's the one, yeah. Do you remember that, The Long Duel?

Roy Fowler: Yeah a friend of mine was in that.

Tom Peacock: You remember that?

Roy Fowler: I didn't - a friend of mine was in it, Yul Brynner.

Tom Peacock: That's it, Yul Brynner yeah, and er...

Roy Fowler: Terrible film.

Tom Peacock: And this head of department came down and he said, "I see that you're..." - this is to me you see, because you see I wasn't a rebel, no I don't think that. And he said, "I see you're on location next." I said, "Well I understand so." "Well" he said, "I've just been up to a meeting and I don't think you're the right chap for it." So I said, "Why?" "Well" he said, "I've been told that it's one of the hardest locations they've ever gone from this studio." This is my head of department talking to me! So I said, "Well there's nothing wrong with me." "But" he said, "you've got to have a medical before you go and it's going to be a stiff medical." So I said, "All right." Well as he went away a couple of chaps came over, like ourselves... "What was he on about?" I said, "He didn't want me to go on this location." "You go on, it's your turn, you go on. It doesn't matter what he says." [Chuckles] See this is how you get in trouble! So I thought, "Well I'll have this." So I went on this and I had to go and see the doctor. And this head of department said, "Now the doctor is going to...it's going to be a stiff examination." So I says, "All right." So I go in and see the doctor, I take my coat off, and he said, "Oh there's no need to take your coat off." I said, "What, aren't you going to give me an examination?" "No that's all right, that's all right." "Where is it?", I said. "Yes" he said, "it's out in Spain. Oh go on, it'll do you good." Well you see how it all twists! And then they're stopping you and it's your turn! Well if anybody went out of their turn, I would be the first to go off about it! Trying to keep the thing in order, otherwise it was all getting out of order you see.

Roy Fowler: One final question from me then, the plasterer's shop, the union, was it in any sense politically motivated or was it just a matter of trade unionism?

Tom Peacock: Well when you come to think about it, you see I'll be honest, I'll try and be honest. You see I've been brought up as a working class boy. Now there's only one political party I can belong to isn't there? That's it...

Roy Fowler: How far left?

Tom Peacock: Oh no not on there, not on there!

Sidney Cole: [Chuckles] You mean you always supported the Labour Party?

Tom Peacock: Yes, I'm a Labour Party boy. And er, I've never belonged to the Labour Party, but I've always...

Sidney Cole: Supported it...

Tom Peacock: I was brought up by it. My sister - you see in the world that I lived in you had to look after yourself and your fellow worker - not yourself only, your fellow worker as well. And the weak, you had to look after the weak, and if you were weak you'd be looked after. We had people down at Denham, I'm not saying no lies, and Pinewood, they were not far off of idiots, but we looked after 'em. And then they didn't get sacked, no we looked after 'em, and they couldn't take liberties with 'em.

Sidney Cole: But they wouldn't be able to do the sort of jobs you did.

Tom Peacock: No but there are posts.

SC ...they could be labourers and...

Tom Peacock: No they wouldn't be labourers, no they were plasterers see, they had a plasterer's ticket.

Sidney Cole: Oh.

Tom Peacock: Oh no you couldn't do that to 'em, you see, they had a plasterer's ticket. And if they want to sack 'em they've got to sack 'em correctly, by giving them a week's notice. See it's all got to be done by the book you see. And there were chaps there, as you say, I don't mean it disrespectfully, because if a man is down and he's poorly, mentally poorly, he needs help! It's not the man at the top needs help, is it? It's the man at the bottom! So they helped him and they looked after him and they only gave him jobs that he could do. Put him on brick moulds, casting bricks you see, he'd do all that. Oh no...that's how I've been brought up. Oh no, you don't help the strong people up the top, it's down below. And we all did help in some way or other.

Sidney Cole: How long were you a deputy shop steward, can you remember?

Tom Peacock: How long would I be?

Sidney Cole: How long had you been a deputy...

Tom Peacock: Well it's all according you see. They used to have an annual meeting and then they put up people to say, you know, we want an election of officers and it might be every three months.

Sidney Cole: I see, ah hmm.

Tom Peacock: Yes. And then course you took everybody, little complaints that they had, which were stupid sometimes, and I used to say to 'em, "Look, I don't mind taking your complaint up but I've got to mention your name." "Oh no" they said, "no, don't do that!" I said, "Well, then don't complain." See they wanted to grumble but they didn't want 'em to know who'd done it! So that was my only safeguard, I said, "I'll mention your name." They said, "Oh no, don't." "All right, so I won't mention it."

Sidney Cole: Would you say Tom that in general you enjoyed all those years you spent in film studios?

Tom Peacock: Yeah, yes, finest time of my life. It was so colourful you see, and er... Well I did enjoy it and I was a part of it. I felt that I was a part of the industry - a very small part, but there it was. You was a small cog you see and without those cogs it wouldn't work properly.

Sidney Cole: Did you go to the cinema much?

Tom Peacock: Yeah and I think I was - yeah well in them days I'm talking about it was always open to an average working-class fella, we used to go to the cinema or go to the theatre to see a show. There was nothing like you hear these leisure clubs and all that. And snooker, I used to play snooker, it was sixpence a half-hour, it was on a clock and just as it was getting interesting the clock stopped! [Chuckles]

Sidney Cole: The clock would go, yes. When you went to the cinema, you got satisfaction did you if you were watching a picture that you'd actually done some work on?

Tom Peacock: Yes oh yes that is what I say, you see. The age we're living in today, I cannot understand what they're saying, the dialogue is mumbled. They're even turned away from the microphone they're talking through, they turn their back on it! So if you can't see a person speak it's very hard to know what he's saying isn't it? If you see him you can do a bit of lip-reading. Oh in them days they were shot weren't they? They were great actors weren't they? Let's be honest about it. I mean to say, these boys today, well... I tell you what I was on, another one, Denham, In Which We Serve.

Sidney Cole: Oh yes.

Tom Peacock: John Mills.

Sidney Cole: Noel Coward.

Tom Peacock: Yes. And do you remember that period there?

Sidney Cole: Yes...

Tom Peacock: When they came, now who was it the Prince of Wales or the...

Roy Fowler: The King went down on that set.

Tom Peacock: That's right, that's right.

Sidney Cole: It wouldn't have been - there wasn't a Prince of Wales then.

Tom Peacock: That was 'The Kelly' wasn't it? Well that was all done in wood - now it's all hydraulic I expect you know.

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: Hydraulic with revolves and that, they can make a boat do anything they like. But in them days it was all done in wood on rockers. [Break in recording]

Tom Peacock: No, no, no it was casual.

Sidney Cole: Yeah this is in the bad times, because the industry went up and down so much didn't it?

Tom Peacock: We're talking about the bad days, talking about the bad days aren't you?

Sidney Cole: Yeah, yeah. So what did you do then? Were you able to draw unemployment pay of any kind?

Tom Peacock: No, no, I went back on the building.

Sidney Cole: Ah yes I see.

Tom Peacock: Oh yeah, I went back on the building. It was so bad, I'll tell you something, you're ACT aren't you?

Sidney Cole: Yes.

Tom Peacock: I'll tell you something about ACT [chuckles] - not against it! I'm working on the set, and I'm talking about the Denham days, and they were throwing employment cards about like playing cards see. And there was one chap on the boom and I was speaking to him, and I mean he was a bit of a 'lad', you know you do get these comedians don't you?

Sidney Cole: Yes.

Tom Peacock: He's standing on the boom, like that - Sid, his name was, I don't know his other name. So I said to him, "How do you get on, like when they finish you off?" Because I had a trade, now the ACT didn't have a trade.

Sidney Cole: Sure.

Tom Peacock: They was all right when they were playing around with that machine, but you take that machine away from 'em and they couldn't do nothing! This is true isn't it, what I'm saying?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: They were experts on that, but take that away and what are they? I said, "Well what do you do then?" "Well, to tell you the truth," he said, "don't say anything...I drive a lorry." I said, "You don't do you?" He said, "Yeah, yeah - I got to 'ain't I? I've got to live!" And that was them days, that was Denham days. Because they used to sack ACT just the same. Oh I think they were under - if I remember rightly they were contracted weren't they? And they put 'em off for about three week's notice before the end of the film.

Sidney Cole: Something like that.

Tom Peacock: Do you remember them days?

Sidney Cole: Yeah something like that.

Tom Peacock: That was right wasn't it?

Sidney Cole: Yeah I think so.

Tom Peacock: And then if they went over that time they would get a double week's wages wouldn't they? Something like that.

Sidney Cole: Something like that.

Tom Peacock: They had a good term.

Sidney Cole: Yeah. So there was plenty of building work going on, outside building work was there, when the studios were slack?

Tom Peacock: Well you see what it is you're talking about when I was young - I say young, cause you know I was pretty tall. Well, if I went for a job and someone - well I tell you what happened to me [chuckles], do you know The Gaumont, Hammersmith?

Sidney Cole: Yeah.

Tom Peacock: Now it was so bad in the days when I'm talking about, that they put a barrier round it so that no-one could go in in the daytime. I'm out of work. I go up there and I thought to myself, "Well I've got to try and beat this!" Because I wanted work, I wasn't on the dole. And I went up there one morning and it was a quarter past seven, and I got to this cinema and I went up and I said, "Could you tell me where the foreman plasterer is?" So he said, "Go along the corridor." I went along there, quarter past seven, I knocked on the door and I said, "How are you fixed for plasterers?" He said, "We don't want any." And I walked back through the corridor and

somebody called me out. He came up to me - I know his name, I won't say who it is. He said, "You must want a bloody job mustn't you?" I said, "Why?" He said, "It's quarter past seven, and you're asking for work?" I said, "Well that's what I want."

[Break in recording]

Sidney Cole: You were just saying weren't you, about quarter past seven one morning at Gaumont.

Tom Peacock: That's right yeah. And he said to me, "You want a job don't you at this time of the morning?" And I said, "Well that's what I'm up here for." He said, "Well, you fetch your tools up in the morning." And that was the Gaumont, Hammersmith. You've seen the Gaumont, Hammersmith haven't you in the...

?: Did they employ plasterers?

Tom Peacock: No they were building it!

Sidney Cole: They were building it.

Tom Peacock: Now Clarke and Fenns, you've heard of Clarke and Fenns? It's a big plastering company, and they were doing all the decorations you see, and of course he said, "Can you do fibre work?" I said, "Yeah." "All right," he said, "you can start in the morning." And that's how I started!

Sidney Cole: And of course they had some very elaborate decoration in cinemas in those days didn't they, very often?

Tom Peacock: Well that's why they want you in the films, because you had to do that.

Sidney Cole: No but I mean in the cinemas themselves.

Tom Peacock: Oh yes.

Sidney Cole: It's the sort of thing you were doing at the Gaumont I imagine.

Tom Peacock: That's not fibre working...

Sidney Cole: No.

Tom Peacock: See when you say a plasterer, you're not talking about that, I'm talking about decorative plastering you see, you had models. You had all sorts of things to do. Oh I've had some strange things. I remember down at Pinewood they brought four monkeys in, stuffed, and they wanted six - no six or eight monkeys. So we had to take moulds off 'em and cast 'em in plaster - monkeys! And they sent me to the - we'll say the property department, and the chap came along and put all this fur on, so therefore you had six monkeys...

Sidney Cole: Six monkeys, yeah.

Tom Peacock: ...see all that type of work. And after a while - now I'm not trying to boast that I'm clever, I'm not - I don't know if I can explain it. After a while you feel it, you feel your work. You might think - it's like painting, when you start off it's just like you're holding a shovel in your hand, but after a while, which I had three year's training, I could draw and I could feel it in me. But it didn't last for long, I expect you'd call it an inspiration. Well doing so much plastering and, all curves and caps and that, when you did come to paint you could paint so that you could get a projection you see. And it's a marvellous thing when you can feel it - do you know what I mean? When you can feel it. Sometimes you might be doing something there and it's all going, then suddenly, bang! It clicks, and you feel it. Same as cement work, I used to be pretty good at cement work. I've never handled cement and I've had over fifty years in the trade - never handled any cement in my hands.

Roy Fowler: Did you never want to sculpt, to model?

Tom Peacock: You can't! Impossible! You can't get out of one trade into another, you 'ain't got a ticket!

Roy Fowler: No I didn't mean that...

Sidney Cole: No, not professionally, he meant as a hobby, as something to do for your own pleasure.

Tom Peacock: Well actually, to be honest, we used to do a little bit of clay work down there - take squeezes with clay. And at the end you became very interested and then became a little bit intoxicated with your own ability like you know! [Chuckles] But as you say it was barred you see...

Roy Fowler: No, you did!

Tom Peacock: You were barred from doing it. Did I? Well, say you were in a modeller's shop and you went in there to do some plaster work, well if you went like that he'd say, "No don't, leave that Tom, I'll do that" In a nice way you see. You didn't tread on other people's trade, you just - if you did you were stupid, unless you wanted bother.

Sidney Cole: Yeah but what Roy was really talking about, Tom, I think was not - we know about in the studio there's a very strict division between one part and another.

Tom Peacock: Oh you're talking about going to an evening class or a day class?

Roy Fowler: Doing a statue for your garden?

Tom Peacock: Well did you see what I've done out there?

Sidney Cole: Well anyhow I think we're getting a little confused...

Tom Peacock: Yeah look, there they are...

Sidney Cole: ...because the point we've actually established Tom...

Tom Peacock: That's a Balinese...

Sidney Cole: ...you did a lot of painting for yourself didn't you?

Tom Peacock: Yes.

Sidney Cole: When did you start painting as a hobby?

Tom Peacock: When I left work, when I retired. Do you know what that was?

Roy Fowler: That's exactly what I meant you see, as a hobby, as a craft.

Sidney Cole: You did that, did you?

Tom Peacock: Shall I tell you a little history on that?

Roy Fowler: Well describe it first of all so that...

Tom Peacock: Well it's a Balinese thing...

Roy Fowler: It's a Balinese bust or head...

Tom Peacock: Yes.

Roy Fowler: It's just because we're recording on audio tape and people can't see it.

Tom Peacock: Oh I forgot that! [Chuckling] But in the wartime they had a film unit, I can't think of it, what was it called?

Sidney Cole: The Crown Film Unit.

Tom Peacock: Crown Film Unit. Well when the war started they wanted someone to do some camouflaging. Perhaps you can recall all this? So they got some plasterers you see and they belonged to the Crown Film Unit. Well the Crown Film Unit went down - you may think I'm romancing now - they went down to the British Museum and they got these...

Sidney Cole: Careful of the lead!

Tom Peacock: Oh I mustn't do it! Just give me a moment...got to the top as it... Well this came from the British Museum, the model, the original. And do you know what they used to do to this? They used to get these plasterers to cast these and then they would make a hole there, underneath, see, so there would be no plaster there. So there's a hole there, and then they used to

put dynamite in there and seal it up. You may think I'm romancing! They'd seal it up, see. Now when the British troops got down to Dunkirk and places like that, they'd put these on the shelf - one here, one somewhere else, see. And the German man would come along, he's plundering 'ain't he. You know what I'm going to say, don't you? [Chuckling] So he goes round, he's looking for anything he can get his hands on, "Oh that's good, isn't it!" Once you pick it up the battery starts...bang! It blows his hands off! And they used to do it to coal...do you remember they used to make coal, see...

Sidney Cole: Yeah...

Tom Peacock: ...and put a little dynamite in it. He'd go along the resistance, and throw it in the trucks, in the coal trucks. As they're putting the coal into the fire...bang!

Roy Fowler: Who was doing this, Tom? Who was doing this? Who was making these booby traps?

Tom Peacock: Plasterers.

Roy Fowler: At Denham, at the studio?

Tom Peacock: No, no, the Crown Unit Film Unit.

Sidney Cole: No I don't think it was the Crown Film Unit - they made these things, but I think there was a place at Elstree called 'The Thatched Barn' where they did all that camouflage.

Tom Peacock: Yes you're right, you're right.

Sidney Cole: And also, the other thing they used to do I remember, cause when I was at Ealing they had a film which was based on that, they used to make explosive horse dung and leave it in the roads.

Tom Peacock: There you are, that's the same as I'm telling you.

Sidney Cole: ...for the cars, yeah all that, yeah.

Tom Peacock: ...and they used to do all those kind of things. Well that's how it come, that's how - it was one of 'em, see?

Sidney Cole: So you did some of those...

Tom Peacock: And then the Balinese Belles, you know the Balinese girls, there was great like fans on their heads, I made two of 'em. All that stuff they used to do. Well there it is, it's actually a wonderful trade and I was so proud to be a plasterer, you know, inwardly...

Sidney Cole: With you being Catholic, did you ever do any plaster work for churches?

Tom Peacock: Yes, yeah! [Laughs] You might think I'm romancing but I'm not, no. No, I've done a couple of churches. I even went in the wartime - this is my experience now. I'm working for a very first-class, er, what do you call it - interior decorator. Not the decorating like this, I'm talking about the big stuff - Lenigan Morance[?] the name of the firm was. And me and another chap, we were partners, and they asked us if we would go down to Newberry. There was a woman there by the name of Mrs Fellows and she'd got a squash court and they want a cinema built there. And they asked me and my mate, would we go down and build it? But when I say build it, I don't mean brickwork. You know they had the carpenters down there. But it was all this Norman - you know what I'm talking about, Norman period - arches and all that, columns. And we went down there and you had to be very careful because you had to have a permit in them days, I don't know if you can remember these things? So I said, "Well the only trouble is," to the fellow by whom I was employed, I said, "We've got no permit." He said, "Well don't worry about that, you go down there, I'll get you a lodging and you can work in the basement." And me and this chap, we worked in the basement and we built the cinema for the woman that was there. It was only just a stage like, but it was all in Norman style and - the church work and all. Well I've had a very colourful life really...

Sidney Cole: Hmm.

Tom Peacock: ...and it's all done by these, [indicating]not by that!

Sidney Cole: You mean by your hands instead of your head?

Tom Peacock: That's right, yeah.

Sidney Cole: No, but your head came into it.

Tom Peacock: I used to envy those that could work with their head, but I had to work with my hands.

Roy Fowler: Would you have chosen a different path?

Tom Peacock: No. [Lil - (his sister?) enters room] Come on dear, we're talking about you!

Sidney Cole: [laughs]

Unknown speaker - "Lil": Nearly time!

Tom Peacock: No we're all, I think we're nearly finished haven't we?

Roy Fowler: Your time is up is it?

Tom Peacock: Yeah - well not, we've got ten minutes to get up there and we keep on regular time because...

Unknown speaker - "Lil": Sometimes we're up there about twenty minutes...

Tom Peacock: Sometimes it's about twenty...and I er...

Unknown speaker - "Lil": He makes the tea and I run it round.

Tom Peacock: She rallies round. So you can go up there and have a cup of tea up there, you're welcome.

Roy Fowler: Yes, well...

Tom Peacock: Are you going to clean this mess up? [Laughs]

Unknown speaker - "Lil": Are you going to clean this mess up? [Laughs]

Sidney Cole: Yes we will. Right okay from our point of view...

Tom Peacock: Well then you can see out there. I'll take you round and show you...

Sidney Cole: Yeah that would be great, thank you.

Tom Peacock: I'm sure there'll be enough room...

Unknown speaker - "Lil": Sit in the lounge...

Tom Peacock: Oh yes. Did you know anybody up there? Did you see anybody you knew?

Roy Fowler: Manny did...

Sidney Cole: Manny saw someone...

Manny Yospha: I knew Bill Vickers who I used to...

Tom Peacock: Bill who?

Manny Yospha: Bill Vickers.

Tom Peacock: Oh yes.

Manny Yospha: Cause he's on the camera committee with me.

Tom Peacock: He was a camera operator...no he was a camera mechanic wasn't he?

Sidney Cole: That's right yes.

Tom Peacock: Did you work, were you a cameraman?

Manny Yospha: Yes I was a camera operator.

Tom Peacock: Did you work the Mitchell camera?

Manny Yospha: Oh yes.

Tom Peacock: That was a good'n wasn't it? That was Denham days.

Manny Yospha: Yes, they're still using those.

Tom Peacock: Do they?

Manny Yospha: Well the ones we were using were about fifty years old and still going strong.

Tom Peacock: I used to know one or two of the camera chaps you know, I used to be pretty friendly with 'em, but all the names, they fly away and I just can't think of 'em.

Roy Fowler: Anyway you've done a sterling job today, Tom, thank you very much.

Sidney Cole: Yes you really have thank you, it was great.

Tom Peacock: Oh that's all right. Well I tried to play my part, it's not much, not of much importance.

Sidney Cole: No you shouldn't say that, you've been underrating yourself.

Tom Peacock: Well I've had some jobs 'ain't I, Lil?

Unknown speaker - "Lil": Yes!

Roy Fowler: Well thank you both very much indeed.

Tom Peacock: That's all right, it's a pleasure. I'm glad you enjoyed it, I hope I've played me part.
[Indecipherable]

[End of Interview]