

Anthony Mendleson (costume designer)

2/1915 – 10/1996

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BIOGRAPHY: Initially a painter and designer for the stage, Anthony Mendleson joined the staff of Ealing Studios as costume designer and wardrobe supervisor in 1947. He remained at Ealing until the studio closed, designing for most of the studio's classics including *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and *The Man in the White Suit* (1951). During the 1960s and '70s he worked at Pinewood, on a wide variety of films, including *The Yellow Rolls Royce* (1964), and *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969), for which he was awarded a BAFTA. **SUMMARY:** In this interview he talks in detail to Linda Wood about his work at Ealing, the working atmosphere of the studio, and the specific demands of designing for black and white and for Technicolor. He discusses the role of the costume designer and wardrobe supervisor – the demands of working for realist as well as flamboyant productions - and the relationship between the studio designer and the couturier who might costume a leading actress. There is some material on the difference between Ealing and Pinewood, and Mendleson recalls many of the directors and actors who he has worked with, including Richard Attenborough, Rex Harrison, Ingrid Bergman, and Alexander Korda. The interview is a particularly successful mix of anecdotes and technical information on the work of the costume designer, containing some fascinating insights.

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Interviewer: Linda Wood

Interviewee: Anthony Mendleson

Tape 1, Side 1

Linda Wood : Anthony Mendleson, Side One, Tape One. Can you tell us where and when you born?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes I can, in February 1915.

Linda Wood : and where?

Anthony Mendleson : Where?

Linda Wood : Ah hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : London.

Linda Wood : London, yes. Did your family have any connection with the film industry or...?

Anthony Mendleson : No not at all.

Linda Wood : Not at all...?

Anthony Mendleson : Ah hmm.

Linda Wood : And, did you go to the cinema as a child?

Anthony Mendleson : Did I...?

Linda Wood : Go to the cinema as a child?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes I did, very much so because I was brought up in a very remote part of South Wales, by my Aunt, because my Mother died. And there we had a silent film show every week in the village hall, so I saw a great number of silent films, we used to go every week. And it was extraordinary because, one of them I remember particularly was 'Carmen' with Pola Negri, and years and years and years later I worked with Pola Negri on a film called 'The Moon Spinners' but I hardly like to remind her of that!

Linda Wood : [Laughs.] What sort of cinema was it - was it a proper cinema?

Anthony Mendleson : No it wasn't a cinema...

Linda Wood : A village hall?

Anthony Mendleson : It was just a village hall, and they had a projector and somebody to work it.

Linda Wood : Hmm...and a lady playing the piano? Or...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, oh yes, definitely...hmm. And then afterwards, when I came back to London, when I went to school up here, I used to go to - by this time I think they were getting toward talkies. There were a lot of cinemas. But I was brought up then, my Father lived in Chiswick and there were the cinemas at Hammersmith, The Blue Hall, and The Commodore - there were a lot of cinemas. It was, you know, a great cinema era. And I used to go and see double features and you never sort of bothered those days, you just walked in, in the middle of it and then sat until it came round again! [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : Ah hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : But I did see a terrific number of films.

Linda Wood : Hmm, hmm. So right from an early age you were attracted by this cinema?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, oh very much so, hmm.

Linda Wood : Did your education have any - did you have any art training as part of your education? Specialist art training?

Anthony Mendleson : Well yes, in a sense, because I went to St Paul's School and they had a very good art department, I suppose, whatever it was - art teacher. And I used to go there because I liked it, and secondly I thought it would be a good subject to take when I did my School Certificate. Which I did, I included it in that and passed.

Linda Wood : So from a very early age you had a hankering to do something in the art line? Was it...?

Anthony Mendleson : Well I always liked drawing and looking at paintings and that sort of thing. And then, from then on, I gradually became very interested in costume design. I used to go to the ballet a lot, for instance - you know, in the old days, at Covent Garden, when the remains of the Russian Ballet came over here. And all sorts of ballet companies used to arrive in London. I used to go a lot to that and I used to go to the Mercury Theatre where Marie Rambert started the ballet club. On Sundays, I used to go there, and you'd meet a lot of designers and dancers and so forth. And I was very interested in all that and so I used to have dreams of becoming a costume designer and that's about as far as it went. And then of course, the war came...

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : ...and that was the end of all dreams, so that was that. And it wasn't until after the war, naturally, that I found that there were - not openings for film costume - but I didn't think of that particularly, I wanted to do stage. And I did, oh some various things, some friends of mine and I got together and started the Manchester Intimate Theatre, or Manchester Library Theatre it's called now, I think, and put on the first shows there. And I designed 'The Seagull', with the sets and the costumes. And we were so hard-up in those days that the costumes were made by lining materials from - because one of the backers had an interest, or his Father I think, was the man who ran a chain of clothing shops and consequently he had access to all these waistcoat linings. And it's surprising how useful they were, they were very pretty, some of them, and they were absolutely right for the sort of costumes we wanted. So they were all made for literally next to nothing. And then the first introduction I ever got to the film world, strangely enough, was... I was painting - portraits and so on - and I had an agent then. She - I don't know how she found out, but anyway she did - that they wanted a portrait of Greta Gynt over the mantelpiece, for a film called 'Dear Murderer' which was going to be made at Islington, I think it was - Gainsborough anyway. And so they asked me if I'd do it and I said, "Yes," of course I would and I went over and met Greta Gynt and posed her in the still studio. Got the photographs and took them back, and worked out this portrait, which was, I must admit, given full credit, [chuckles] because the camera opened on it and drew back and there it was, and it was the sort of focal point, so it was rather nice. Er, and years and years and years later, again, I met up with

Greta at a party somewhere and she said, "You remember that picture you painted of me?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "I've still got it!"

Linda Wood : I was going to ask you that - had she kept it!

Anthony Mendleson : "Over the mantelpiece in my flat." And I said, "Good God, what does it look like now?" And she said, "Well it rather flaps a bit in the wind!" [Chuckles.]

[LW Laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : So that was my first introduction. And it was nothing to do with costume as such, of course. And then, after that I went on painting a bit and did the odd thing, and suddenly I got a call from my agent to say that she had heard that the designer at Ealing Studios was leaving and the post was vacant, and why didn't I go down and try? And I said, "Well I've never...I don't know anything about that!" So she said, "Well look, collect all the sketches you've done for costume designs for the theatre and...just as projects and so forth...put them in a portfolio and go down and see Michael Relph."

Linda Wood : Ah hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : So I did, and saw Michael and, to my utter amazement, he said, "OK." So that was how I started there and, of course, it was the most extraordinary beginning because it was like being thrown in at, really the thick end or the deep end, you might say. Because I'd never been in a studio really, working, at all. And I not only found that the lady whose place I'd took was not a designer, she was a wardrobe supervisor and when there was any designing to be done in any of the films at Ealing, she used to farm it out.

Linda Wood : Oh...

Anthony Mendleson : And consequently if it was a modern film she had a lot of um entrées - she was a very smart woman. And she knew Victor Steibel and some of the big couturiers, Hartnell and so forth. And she'd go along there and say, "Look, we've got Miss so-and-so, who's playing a very smart lady. I'd like you to dress her." And they did. If it was a period film she used to either go to someone like B. J. Simmons who would design as well as make, or she would employ somebody. There was a film called 'Loves of Johanna Godden' for instance, which was set in 1900 - before I got there, naturally - and she employed a designer called Mark Lucca[?] who was a couturier, he wasn't a stage designer or a film designer. And he did these period clothes for Googie Withers, and very well too. So that was how she worked, and consequently when I arrived it was a different cup of tea, because if there was any designing to be done, I was expected to do it and I wanted to do it, so that was fine. But at the same time, it was a very busy time, because we made on the average, five films a year - that wasn't counting sometimes films made away from England, like Australia and so forth. And I had a wardrobe department who'd been there obviously long before me, and I had a wardrobe mistress called Lily Payne and a wardrobe master called Ernie Farrah, and they had their two little departments. And so you had to be guided in a way by them, and they were very helpful and very nice, they'd no reason to be, but they were. And they had their staff and I had my own office and,

consequently, it was like...there I was, there was the women's department, and the men's department. We didn't carry a stock of clothes because; a) there wasn't room, and b) it wasn't really practical. We did keep, obviously, shirts which had been used in a film, waistcoats - the odd thing which had been bought - but most of the stuff, you see, was hired and at the end of the film it was returned to the costumier. So there was no chance of building up a wardrobe, which in a way was perfectly all right. Um, and consequently what I was going to tell you about the union, which would come in now. When I started off there, they were making - they were finishing off a film called 'Frieda' and they were - I think, the first film that was coming up was 'It Always Rains on Sunday.' So I did that, and that involved a mass of extremely dreary clothes, you can imagine. And very wet clothes, I mean it was absolutely soaked from morning to night. But they were awfully nice people, all the actors, it was a wonderful cast, when you think about it.

Linda Wood : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : Most of them, unfortunately now, have died but we had everybody you could think of who were part of the Ealing 'stock' company. Anyway, that was that. And so I'd been working for some time down there - I suppose about a month or six weeks, something like that - and a man came up to me in my office one day and said, "Do you belong to any of the unions?" So I said, "No I don't, I don't know anything about it...should I?" He said, "Oh yes, you'd better." So he said, "Now look, if you just sign this form, and I'll see that everything is done and that's it." So I said, "Fine. Anything to pay?" "No, no, no...just sign the form." "Right!" So that was that. So I became a member of NATKE. And then about three days later, another man came in and he said, "Have you joined the ACT?" And I said, "I don't know, what's that?" So he said, "Well it's the union, you should belong to it! Oh..." he said, "You should, of course - look, you'd better sign this form immediately and leave it to me, and everything will be all right." So I did! Innocent me! And that was fine, until they finally got together, and there was hell to pay! They went to the management and they said, "We can't have this! This man is doing two people's work! He belongs to the ACT, he belongs to NATKE. NATKE controls the wardrobe and the wardrobe supervisors, and the ACT controls the designers so he's got to do one thing or the other." So I then had a letter saying, "You are forbidden to do any designing whatsoever" from NATKE, and a letter from the ACT saying, "You are forbidden to do any wardrobe supervision work at all." So I went to the management and I said, "Well what am I supposed to do about all this?" So they got together with Michael Balcon, and it was Hal Mason actually, who was the General Manager, he was a very sweet man, and he said, "Look, leave it to me." So they called a meeting and they thrashed it out. And in the end it was decided that I would remain in NATKE with a written letter, which I've always kept, saying that if and when I left Ealing, I would automatically be transferred to the ACT. Meanwhile, I continued to design and supervise the wardrobe! So there you are! So they were, I suppose, they were both satisfied - didn't make a slightest difference to me, except that I kept that letter like mad because I wasn't going to suddenly find myself, when I left Ealing, restricted to only belonging to the NATKE branch. That was that. I used to go to meetings and... Oh it was the usual carry on! And sure enough, when Ealing was sold and I went out into the great big world I was automatically transferred to the ACT, and that's where I remained ever since. So that's the story of that, which I think...

Linda Wood : [Laughing.] Yes!

Anthony Mendleson : ...is quite funny. Because I don't suppose anybody in their innocence has managed to infiltrate both unions! [Chuckles.]

Third voice: I wonder who signed the letter which gave you the OK to work?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh NATKE

[Third voice: Oh, no, I mean, can you remember any of the personality of that NATKE?

Anthony Mendleson : No, they were shop stewards, both of them, but I can't remember who they were.

Third voice: No...how interesting. Terrible mess up really! [Chuckles.]]

Linda Wood : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes isn't it? But you see they were, in those days, enormously strong, as you know, the unions.

Linda Wood : Yes, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : And, I mean, they could - they were calling a strike - If I had walked on that floor at that particular moment, they would have struck!

Linda Wood : Hmm...hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : It was extraordinary, the strength that they had. At the same time, they found themselves in a right Royal jam. What they wanted to do, I suppose, was to try and get me sacked - not me personally - but get the job divided into two, to have a designer and to have a wardrobe supervisor. And Michael Balcon, bless his heart, was very firm and said, "No! It doesn't justify it, the films we make down here do not justify a designer full time." So there we are, that was that. So a lot of the films I made down there, um, there weren't an awful lot of designs to be done. A lot of it was going out and buying the clothes, finding them, going to the costumiers, going through the rails, which was splendid training in every way. And then of course you get a lovely film like 'Kind Hearts and Coronets' which you design the whole thing. So, you know, what you lost on one, you gained on the other. And it was the same with most designers really. You talk to any of the ones who were down, of that era, at Pinewood, like um, or even The 'Bush', like Julie Harris and people. They didn't sit and draw and draw and draw, of course not! They used to go out and go around the shops and buy things as well. Anyway, that was that. And then of course there was the - it was a tricky time because, you see, clothes rationing was still in force. So you had to cope with all those coupons which you had to get, to draw, at the beginning of a film and then you had to allocate them, and you had to be bloody careful you had enough to go round. Um, and then of course, the other thing was that I had to do all the ordering, all the buying, keep the orders, make sure that you hadn't overspent. Before any film at Ealing started there was a meeting called in the restaurant there, which had a big round table, and every head of every department had to go there with your budget made out and

presented and had to justify it. And it was incredible, you'd go there and you'd say, "Well no, Sidney Tafler, I think he must have two suits, four ties..." "Four Ties? Two ties will be enough." And you'd say "Really? Oh well... cross out two." So, of course, what you did was you'd cushion your budget, naturally. Make sure that you had enough. But it was - and they always knocked off certain things at the meeting and you came out saying, "Oh well, I got off really quite lightly then!" [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] You added things on because you knew they were going to knock them off!

Anthony Mendleson : Yeah, but you had to keep to that budget and if you went over, you had to go in and justify it.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : It was marvellous training, um...

Linda Wood : Yes. What would happen, you would get a script...?

Anthony Mendleson : I'm sorry, what?

Linda Wood : How would you work out what costumes were needed?

Anthony Mendleson : Well that was the whole point, that was your training! I mean, you went through the script religiously, you had meetings with the director and the producer, and you'd say, "Now I reckon that Susan Shaw will need three changes and the last change you had six versions of..." or something like that, "Is that what you think?" And they'd say, "Yes, I suppose so... yes, that's all right." And then, of course, there's always the trouble that when you get on the floor, the director suddenly says, "I'm sorry, I don't like that... we'll have to try again." So you try again. Or something awful happens, like I was called on the floor during 'Pool of London' and it was Renee Asherson in a rather cheap cotton dressing gown in a sleazy basement flat. And I thought, "Well now, what could possibly have gone wrong?" It was a black and white film... "Oh no, would you please go on the floor?" So I go on the floor and everything is stopped, and it's the most embarrassing moment in one's life if you find that. Everyone is looking, (like that) and you walk on the floor and you go up to the director and you say, "What's the matter?" And it was Basil Dearden who, bless his soul, was not exactly the easiest person, and he said, "Well look..." And I looked at Renee and she was wearing the dressing gown, and the wallpaper was exactly the same pattern!

[LW Laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : Now that's a chance in a million!

[Background laugh.]

Anthony Mendleson : [Chuckling.] So I said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" I said, "I can change the dressing gown..." "Oh there's not time for that!" So I said, "Well then you'd better change the wallpaper." So they got a spray gun and sprayed the wallpaper down! [Chuckles.] But, I mean, that would only happen once in my life! But it was extraordinary! [Chuckles.] Oh, there it was! But you never checked when you were doing a black and white film, you very rarely checked your costume with the art director. When you were doing colour, that was a very different matter, of course you had to then, otherwise the most awful things could happen. But in a black and white film, no. Still, it was an amusing story, I suppose, and that was that.

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] When you were designing with black and white, what were you looking at? Sort of...did...?

Anthony Mendleson : Well you designed - designed or bought, whichever it was - in colour, naturally.

Linda Wood : Hmm, yes.

Anthony Mendleson : Um, but we always had a special lens, which we used to carry around with us, which you looked through and when you looked (like that), you could see the colour, how it would register in black and white.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : It was invaluable, because I mean, a lot of the time, with all the experience in the world, it's very difficult to tell whether that red is going to photograph in black and white, darker than that brown of the wood there. But by looking through this you could tell immediately. And also, you see, you weren't allowed to use white, so all the shirts always had to be dyed, either lemon yellow or pale blue. And that was fine until, of course, it came to colour, and then it was really hell. Because you see, when you went to the costumiers and you took something of the rail there, they had already dyed it for black and white film, well it was no good for colour. Because then, although you still couldn't use white, you had to have various tones of 'Technicolor grey', which was murder to get. Everything had to be dyed this very off-white, and there were four different shades of that. And you had a card with a hole punched in each of them, and you had to put it over the material (like that) [demonstrating] and the hole was cut out. And this was the dyed section so you could tell if that, [pointing] this shirt was going to be the same colour as that. Ohh! There was a film once called 'Lease of Life' which was all about church matters and there was a choir...

Linda Wood : A film I really like, it had Robert Donat in it, didn't it? It was one of Robert Donat's films?

Anthony Mendleson : That's right. And all the choir and the clergymen were in surpluses, naturally, and there's a lot of white in a surplus. And so we had to have those all dyed, and it got to the pitch when I was nearly screaming mad because whatever we dyed, it seemed to be wrong! [Chuckling...] And in the end I got Dougie Slocombe, who was the cameraman on it, to sign each surplus, that it was OK. Because every time they were washed, obviously they used to change

colour slightly, so what started off as a lovely subtle grey ended up as glaring white! Anyway, we all got over that, and then of course, later on in life, Technicolor wouldn't have anything but pure white, so everything had to be bleached out then. And those are little difficulties which are interesting, I suppose, to the lay mind, but I mean they were a bloody nuisance if you were in the business! [Chuckles.] There we are...

Linda Wood : What were your first impressions when you arrived at Ealing? Was it how you imagined a film studio should be?

Anthony Mendleson : Um, you mean...? I don't quite see what you mean. You mean, what, the running of it or the atmosphere or what?

Linda Wood : Well, sort of...yes, the atmosphere?

Anthony Mendleson : Um, well Ealing was a comparatively small studio compared with Denham or...

Linda Wood : Had you been in any of the other British studios?

Anthony Mendleson : I'd been in them, oh yes - been down to visit friends who were acting or something like that. In fact, once I was pushed into being in a film, it was no great acting part, I can assure you, but they wanted somebody who could talk Russian in 'A Matter of Life and Death' - Mickey Powell. And somebody said, "Oh I know, he can." Well I couldn't talk Russian at all, but I had a friend who could talk Russian who was also in it, so he said, "Don't worry, I'll teach you phonetically." So I did about four days on that, so I was - you know, I wasn't completely ignorant of films, the studio working. But Ealing was a very - I wouldn't say 'cosy', it's the wrong word. It was small, intimate. Everybody knew everybody, everybody had been there for years and years and years, or most of them had. And if a stranger arrived like me, it took you quite a while to sort of get, acknowledged and accepted. The directors had all been there, the producers had all been there, and it's a mark, you know, of how nice everyone was that it... you didn't feel such an outsider. And of course, after a bit, you were part of the team, and that was that. But it gave you great confidence so that when later on I worked mostly at Pinewood or Shepperton, or wherever, you didn't mind, you just walked in and that was that. And you got to know people in other studios too.

Linda Wood : Did you work in a normal working week. Like, did you have to get in at eight-thirty in the morning, every morning?

Anthony Mendleson : No we worked originally on Saturday morning as well. We did a five and a half-day week.

Linda Wood : Hmm, and you had to, sort of, work ordinary working hours - sort of office hours?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, yes, they were much more regimented then. We used to work - I forget what time - I think it was eight-thirty they started on the floor, which meant that you had

to be there at about seven-thirty, obviously. And I think we knocked off at five-thirty. I can't honestly remember. I think there were two early nights, when they probably left at five or something like that, it was around then. But I mean there was no such thing as um, you know, working all night or any of that nonsense, it was all done like that. But then don't forget, that was all studio, it wasn't location. When you were on location it was a very different cup of tea because then you can't control things in the same way. But that was really basically it was just perfectly ordinary office hours you might say.

Linda Wood : And you said initially you didn't have any set costumes. Did you develop a store of costumes? Because I would have thought, having someone like Jack Hawkins who tended to work a lot for Ealing and always seemed to wear the same type of clothes, sort of, was it worthwhile with...?

Anthony Mendleson : No, I think it depends entirely on the character; I mean, you're not designing for a person, you're designing for the character that that person is playing. It may have been that Jack happened to play a character that was very like Jack...

Linda Wood : [Chuckling.] Yes!

Anthony Mendleson : But I mean there were other people like, for instance, Cecil Parker who was in a lot of films for us. Well he played a variety of parts and, you know, when in 'The Ladykillers' he was, sort of, the phoney colonel, that was one thing, and then he was 'His Excellency' I think it was, he was a diplomat. I mean they were completely different clothes. I mean there were people like dear old Glad Henson who was in most of them, we used to have a special little wardrobe of [Glad Hensons'] aprons and things [laughing.] And she'd say, [AM impersonates Gladys Henson] "Oh no, I'm not going to wear that one, dear, I wore that one in the last film!" [Laughs.]

[LW Laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : But, I mean I think that is what people perhaps don't realise, that designing for films is nothing to do with couture.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : And that is why, very often, and I say this many times, that the grand couturiers, shall we say, are not the best people to design for films. Because they're only thinking about beautiful clothes that'll look absolutely lovely on the actress, which isn't the sort of thing you want at all.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : It can be all right in certain cases, if you're designing a film for very, very smart milieu - well that wasn't the way in Ealing, I can assure you! But, I mean I found them awfully nice, for instance, very often, Victor Stiebel used to let me use his workrooms, which was marvellous. I don't mean - what I mean is, if I designed something, he would have it made

up in his workrooms. And, on the other hand, if somebody like Valerie Hobson, for instance, suddenly said, "Oh I'd like Victor to do my gown for this" or something, well fine. But then, I would always be in on it, I would always have the say if it was right or wrong. They were sweet in that way, but otherwise I always, naturally, tended to go to costume houses or I had a sort of favourite dressmakers who made when we could afford it, those sort of things.

Linda Wood : Hmm, so presumably if you want someone looking just 'everyday', you don't want them of posh clothes...

Anthony Mendleson : No...

Linda Wood : And sort of, if you hire something from the costumier, presumably it's got to go back in relatively good condition, so you couldn't make it looked bashed and battered and worn? So that...

Anthony Mendleson : Well, do you mean the clothes that you find in costumiers which have been worn in other films?

Linda Wood : Well, sorry, couturiers, sort of, if you borrowed things from couturiers - did you borrow them or did you actually...?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh no, no, no, wait a minute now, let me make this clear. Costumiers are theatrical hire - and make, if necessary - costume houses. Now they keep an enormous stock, which you can draw on at any time. Couturiers, I'm talking about Norman Hartnell and Victor Stiebel, those sort of people - they don't keep any stock. If you have a dress from there, you buy it and that's it. And that would either be bought afterwards, maybe if you're lucky, by the actress, or it goes into what little stock you have. We did have some stock at Ealing, naturally. We had all the 'Kind Hearts' dresses, because they were made by a very good dressmaker called Therese and after - I mean they were bought and then they remained our property, but we never used them again because they were too individual, you couldn't...

Linda Wood : Yes, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : So that was a waste in a way. But on the other hand, when I'm going through - or used to go through - the rails at Burman's for instance, you very often find your own clothes there, of course. And you can't recognise them half the time, because they've been out on other films, altered, re-cut, whatever. But you know that it was yours originally at one time, so what? You know, that sort of thing. I mean I'll never forget that when we were doing 'Kind Hearts' it was actually the crowd clothes there, Simmons where the costumes came from were extremely strict in the way that they let out clothes. And you weren't allowed back-stage at Simmons at all, you stayed in the fitting rooms and they wheeled in rails with clothes on which you could have for crowd. And I used to come across clothes which I recognised from some of the lovely Korda productions. I remember coming across a dress which Diana Wynyard had worn in 'Kipps', things like that, but was now in crowd. And you felt, "Oh dear, it's such a shame because they were... I remember a striped dress that Paulette Goddard wore in 'An Ideal

Husband' ended up on crowd scene - but, never mind, that's the luck of the game. You can't keep clothes indefinitely, nobody wants to anyway, they disintegrate - that's that.

Linda Wood : Which was your first major... the film that you think was your first, sort of, major designing job?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh I would think 'Kind Hearts' definitely.

Linda Wood : 'Kind Hearts'? Hmm...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. I mean I did do 'Saraband for Dead Lovers' before that, which was an enormous film, it was the first costume film - not really costume, I wouldn't say that - the first colour film that Ealing had ever made. Um, and it was arranged before I got to the studios, when I took up my job at the studios they'd already got the programme for the next year - naturally they always have - and 'Saraband' was on the agenda, and my predecessor, as I say, wasn't a designer and she had give the whole thing over to Simmons and said, "Look, will you do this, give us a quote?" And, what's more, they did the clothes, they designed. The man who ran Simmons, a man called Mr Norman, used to also design himself, if he had to - he didn't do it professionally in that sense because, I mean, his job at Simmons was enough. He never called himself Norman, he called himself Frederick Dawson, don't ask me why. He couldn't draw but, of course, he had all the access to the materials that Simmons kept in their storeroom, and he used to use those. And he'd got masses of sketch artists there who'd draw out the thing to present, and that was how the costumes evolved for 'Saraband.' But of course, that was for 'principles' and it didn't apply to the crowd, so that was me. I had to do all of those as well, and it was a hell of a job. And Françoise Rosay insisted on having her dresses designed by her favourite designer, a man called George Benda who was very good. Um, so it was a mishmash, altogether. I did the uniforms and with all the shortage of materials it was an absolute nightmare. In the end, the army in, sort of, lovely period scarlet square-cut coats and britches and everything - we couldn't get them and you couldn't afford them to be made properly - so they were made out of scenic canvas and dyed. So that if you took the costumes and put them (like that) they stood up on their own because they were so stiff!

[LW and Background laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : I mean, God knows what the poor bastards who wore them must have suffered, I don't know! And we had the sort of tricorne hats and all the swords and everything, it looked marvellous! The only thing - the snag came when we had to get footwear, and there were no stock anywhere in England, (and you couldn't go to the continent in those days) of seventeenth century buckled shoes, for in crowd. I mean I'm talking about, I think we had three hundred. You could get principles, that was a different matter. But no question could you have them made. And it was absolutely down to - I think were a week before we were leaving for Prague, where we were going to shoot. And I was distraught, I thought, "Well I can't do anything about it, I don't know what we're going to do." And suddenly, from out of the blue, dear old Norman from Simmons met me in the street one day, in the West End, he'd sorted me out. And he said, "Look I've got this cutting for you from the paper, it might be of interest." Gammages were having a sale of garden clogs!

[Background laughter.]

Anthony Mendleson : And I rushed up to Gammages and bought one pair. They were, naturally, black leather buckled, with white wooden soles. So I painted the soles black and got a cheap buckle and put it through the strap and they looked absolutely perfect for seventeenth century shoes. So I said, "Can you do three hundred pairs?" "Oh yes, no problem." So we had three hundred pairs, dirt-cheap! And then, of course the problems started. We had to pack them, then the sound people said, "You can't use those, the noise on the cobbles is too..." So we had to felt each pair!

Linda Wood : [laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : It was a nightmare! And then in the end they came back and they were stuffed into an old disused room at Ealing and they remained there right to the very end. The smell was unbelievable!

Linda Wood : [laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : They were stacked to the ceiling and never used again.

Unidentified : Good heavens!

Anthony Mendleson : And that was that! But anyway, there it was - we got past it. And then they wanted to have the army uniforms torn and shredded, coming back from the war, they had to do it with a blowtorch!

Linda Wood : [laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : [Laughing.] Only way they could get the scenic canvas to burn! You couldn't rip it. Oh there were various problems in that I can assure you! But it all worked out and if you see it on screen it looks marvellous.

Linda Wood : It looked absolutely beautiful on screen...

Anthony Mendleson : Absolutely marvellous, yes. And I did a lot of the clothes then for the big fair scene - all those masks and everything, you know. So really I regarded it as... The last print I saw, I must say I was rather flattered. They'd taken Frederick Dawson's name off and they only had mine on...so! [Chuckles.] But I never liked cheating and saying, "I designed it," because in all fairness, I didn't. I just did a lot of rather dreary hack work on it. But um, it was a great experience, that. But the one that I really treasure most of course was - two of them I think - was 'Kind Hearts and Coronets' and 'The Ladykillers.' Which isn't a very 'showy' film by any manner of means but it took a lot of working out and it was very gratifying that it all seemed to work so beautifully in the end. So there we are, so that's that. But I mean, since then, you know, I've done lots more films which have involved much more work and many more costumes, they never seem to be quite so good! [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : What sort of research would you do for something like 'Kind Hearts and Coronets' which was a period piece?

Anthony Mendleson : Sorry, what?

Linda Wood : What kind of research would you do?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh I see. Well, not an awful lot really.

Linda Wood : [Chuckling.] Not a lot, no?

Anthony Mendleson : No, because I mean, I knew the period really awfully well. And also, I didn't want to keep to, you know, the really hard and fast costume designs of that, so we sort of snipped a bit there and put in a bit there and, you know, worked our own style into it. And had fun, because I mean it was really monstrously overdressed, but never mind, it all worked out.

Linda Wood : I thought that it looked marvellous again, really beautiful. But probably, except for 'Saraband' and 'Kind Hearts and Coronets', at Ealing you were mainly doing modern dress weren't you? There seems to have been a lot of - most of it was contemporary?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes most of it was really. 'Scott of the Antarctic' was period for instance.

Linda Wood : There was a strange credit on that one... er... here we are...it says 'wardrobe design'. Was that just an alternative term for 'costume design'? Or was it like a combination of wardrobe supervisor and costume designer, so I just wondered...?

Anthony Mendleson : Which one are you thinking about?

Linda Wood : 'Scott of the Antarctic.'

Anthony Mendleson : 'Scott of the Antarctic'? Oh I don't know why they put that in, I'm sure.

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] Probably what was on the...

Anthony Mendleson : No, I mean I really did design that. I mean, we went up to Cambridge to the museum up there and got... I did drawings of all the arctic clothing they wore, obviously, and they've got photographs of that. But there wasn't an awful lot of design in it, it's true. But before they took off for the far North, there were one or two ordinary scenes...um...

Linda Wood : And again it was a colour film, which was unusual at Ealing, so...

Anthony Mendleson : Um. [AM is looking through photographs] 'Train of Events' - nothing very much. 'Run for your Money', 'Blue Lamp', 'Dance Hall.' You know, one designed the odd costume, like I remember doing Pet Clark's costume in 'Dance Hall.'

Linda Wood : I can remember there was a scene towards the end, isn't there, where she's going to give an exhibition? And first of all you had to do a dowdy costume which her Mother made and then this really sort of swish thing?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm, that's right, that's right, that's it, that's it. 'Bitter Springs' I did - Tommy Trinder's costume, that's why I didn't go to Australia. 'Cage of Gold', now that was um... a muddle, in many ways! [Chuckles.] We had some quite glamorous clothes for a girl called Madeleine Lebeau, who was a night-club singer. Oh, 'The Magnet' was nothing, 'Pool of London' nothing, 'Lavender Hill' - Audrey Hepburn - first time I did her clothes. 'Man in the White Suit', yes, we did quite a lot. Joan had some quite pretty clothes in that and there was some terrible trouble with the white suit itself, I really thought I was going round the bend there!

Linda Wood : What were the problems with the white suit?

Anthony Mendleson : Well we made it originally in white material, white sort of - linen, sharkskin or something - but, of course, when it was disintegrated, we tried everything under the sun, cotton wool, acid on the material, nothing worked! And, again, I was despairing and suddenly somebody in the art department, I think, said they'd found a great roll in the stores of - you know that sort of paper you have on the top of - compressed tissue paper, on the top of chocolate boxes?

Linda Wood : Oh yes!

Unidentified : Corrugated...that corrugated stuff?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes that's right. And there was a great roll of that, nobody ever found out why it was there, but anyway, it was there. And I persuaded - Maurice Angel I think it was - to make a suit out of that. It was murder, because it couldn't go through the...

Linda Wood : It must have been!

Anthony Mendleson : Oh! It was awful! But of course, it worked perfectly, because as you only did (that), and it came away, completely. And I said afterwards - it saved my life, we had about ten suits made - "What on earth was it there for in the first place?" And it apparently turned out that it was there because it had been left by some war department - I don't know why - perhaps they'd occupied Ealing or something? It was what they made sanitary towels out of for the WRENS! It came in very handy! [Chuckles.] 'His Excellency', I did some quite pretty clothes for that, for Helen Cherry. 'Secret People' that was all designed by me, and it looked dreadful! Because it was meant to be 1932. 'I Believe In You', I went down the street markets there, with Joan Collins and got real second-hand muck!

Linda Wood : That's got quite an incredible cast.

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm?

Linda Wood : 'I Believe In You' had got quite an incredible cast.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. 'Mandy', nothing very much...

[Telephone rings]

Anthony Mendleson : Excuse me a second...]

[End of Tape 1, Side 1] [Tape 1, Side 2]

Unidentified : Side Two.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, it would never do nowadays, but it was all about the troubles in Ireland. But it was again, vaguely period - '20s. 'Titfield', I did some clothes for that. 'Cruel Sea', nothing but uniforms. 'Square Ring', just boxing. 'Meet Mr Lucifer', we had quite a funny - um what do you call the thing? - pantomime sequence in that. 'Love Lottery', yes I did a lot for that.

Linda Wood : Again, that was one of Ealing's more expensive films wasn't it?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, it didn't work in any sense at all, but it was quite fun to do. The first time I worked with David Niven. 'West of Zanzibar.' I did, you know, I used to do Anthony Steel and Sheila's clothes, that sort of thing. I didn't go out there. 'Rainbow Jacket', oh God! It was all about racing. I had to go and spend hours up in - where is it that they have the colours to make sure you don't tread on someone's, you know? We had to design our own silks for it.

Linda Wood : [Chuckling.] To make sure you didn't have someone else's, there must have been so many that you had to check against!

Anthony Mendleson : 'Lease of Life', well that was all surpluses. 'Divided Heart', now there, I remember, I went out there to one of those places in the Tyrol. I bought a lot of clothes out there in the village, because they were sort of peasantry clothes. 'Out of the Clouds', didn't do much... 'Touch and Go', I did some quite pretty clothes for Margaret Johnston. 'Ladykillers', yes, I liked that very much. 'Feminine Touch', we did a lot of filming in Guy's Hospital, in the courtyard there. And it was in colour, and all the nurse's uniforms had to be done in Technicolor grey. And the real matron of the hospital, who was fearsome, strode up one day when we were filming and [chuckles] looked at poor Belinda Lee dressed as a nurse and said, "Your apron is a disgrace!" We had to take her quietly on one side and explain why! [Chuckles.] 'Who Done It?', oh yes, there were lots of cabaret clothes. 'The Long Arm', nothing much there.

Linda Wood : No. Could you sort of, say something about some of the production designers you worked with at Ealing?

Anthony Mendleson : About - sorry, which designers?

Linda Wood : The production designers and how you worked with them. People like Jim Morahan and...

Anthony Mendleson : Oh I see! Well you see, as I said to you earlier, when it was a case of black and white film, you didn't really have anything much to do with it.

Linda Wood : You were a totally separate compartment? You just...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. When it was in colour, obviously then you had to have a certain amount of get together with them. But I mean, one I think that - it was 'Love Lottery', Tom Morahan, who I'd never worked with, who wasn't Ealing at all, came in from outside to design that. And he was a very interesting designer and he really wanted to know what colours one was using for the clothes. But I didn't honestly design at Ealing with any great - what's the word I want - rapport with the set designer; they did the sets, I did the clothes, and that was that.

Linda Wood : Hmm, to what extent at this stage would you, sort of, show the director before the film started, all the costumes? Because you mentioned the story about Basil Dearden and the dressing gown. Did the directors not tend to see all the costumes, or were you expected to...?

Anthony Mendleson : No! What happened was that usually when you had an artist, you used to have a sort of costume parade, if it was a leading artist I'm talking about now.

Linda Wood : Hmm, yes.

Anthony Mendleson : And you would show the director either probably in the dressing room or in the wardrobe, "Look, these are the clothes I've got for (Miss so-and-so), are they alright with you?" And she'd parade around in them, and that was that.

Linda Wood : And how much say would the actor or actress have? Would they be able to say, "Oh I don't like the cut of this..." or...?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh yes, very much so. Oh yes, it's hopeless trying - you can't bulldoze experienced actors or actresses into clothes that they automatically are not comfortable in, or they feel don't suit them. I mean, they're quite amenable to looking sights if the part calls for it but they've got to have their say. After all, they've been dressing themselves for years, and so you've got to go along with it, you've to say, "Well, that's alright..." Everyone's got some little quirk you know, like, even men say "I can't bear a high collar," or "I must have a shirt that's cut down here," something like that. So OK, unless it's absolutely wrong in some way you go along with it, of course. But that's all. Can we break off for one minute?

[break in recording]

Linda Wood : Did you keep measurements of the various people under contract, in your department?

Anthony Mendleson : No, not at all. Occasionally - not occasionally - usually, if an artist had clothes made at any of the costumiers, they would keep the measurements, but if they were just wearing stock clothes that were taken of the rail, shall we say, obviously they didn't keep the measurements. But if it was a leading artist, usually you would find that they would have had

clothes made, very often private clothes, so you could ring up their tailors or even their personal dressmakers and they would let you know - otherwise, no. Have we exhausted Ealing do you think?

Linda Wood : Could I just ask, um...?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes...

Linda Wood : You said 'The Ladykillers' was a favourite film of yours...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes.

Linda Wood : Can you say why you particularly liked that job?

Anthony Mendleson : Well I'll tell you exactly why. Because Sandy Mackendrick, who directed it, was an extremely visual director, which is the sort of kind that obviously I would prefer to work with. He started off in advertising and he was a most marvellous - or is a most marvellous draughtsman. And he did the most lovely continuity sketches for 'Saraband' when he - long before he became a director. And consequently I found that he had a most wonderful eye to how the picture would look, including the costumes. And it would... When we were doing 'The Ladykillers' he knew exactly what he wanted and how he wanted the characters to look. So it was a great help to me and, you know, we achieved that, I think, quite easily and quite well. That was really all, and that's why I liked it, because I felt that the director was personally very interested in the clothes. A lot of directors couldn't care less what the clothes looked like, and that's a little bit disheartening.

Linda Wood : What sort of contract did you have at Ealing? Was it that you just sort of went from week to week?

Anthony Mendleson : No, no, no, it was a yearly one.

Linda Wood : Hmm...

Anthony Mendleson : And every year, my then agent would come down and have lunch, go and see Hal Mason who was the boss at Ealing and arrange the next year's contract. She once succeeded admirably in getting me a cut!

Linda Wood : [Laughs.] A very good lunch I take it!

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, it took me two years to get back to my original salary! Though I must say, when you think about it, of course it was so small, the salary, but then everybody's salary was.

Linda Wood : Yes, hmm...

Anthony Mendleson : It was all in relation and, of course, the cost of living was quite different. But um, I mean nowadays, you know, you wouldn't even be able to post a few letters with it! But still, there it was.

Linda Wood : Hmm, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : But I must say that, after Ealing, can we go on now, after Ealing?

Linda Wood : Can I just ask you, how did you come to leave Ealing?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh well that was simple! [Chuckles.] Because Ealing left me!

Linda Wood : [Laughing.] Ealing closed?

Anthony Mendleson : There were rumours going on for about a year that the studio was going to be sold, somebody was going to buy the studio. Everybody was always gathering in corners and saying, "Have you heard? Oh look! They're starting to re-paint the front gate, it means we're going to be sold!" All this sort of carry-on!

[LW and Third Voice Laugh.]

Anthony Mendleson : Because television then was becoming quite, you know, an up and coming thing.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : And nothing happened at all, and we were gaily carrying on, and then suddenly there was a notice saying, "Would you all please come into the Viewing Theatre after..." (whatever it was, rushes or something.) And we all went in and, Goddammit! there Major Baker got up and said, "I'm terribly sorry to say it, but we've sold the studios. Some of you will be kept on when we find new places to go, and some of you won't." Well I was the one that wasn't because they went then, if you remember, to MGM?

Linda Wood : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : And MGM had a very admirable costume designer called Elizabeth Haffenden who'd been there for years, so naturally they didn't want anyone else, and that was that.

Linda Wood : Were you sorry that your time at Ealing came to an end, or after so many years were you ready to start branching out and...?

Anthony Mendleson : No.

Linda Wood : No?

Anthony Mendleson : I was sorry in a certain sense of course, but it was a way of life - after all, I'd been there for getting on for ten years - and it was a regular salary.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : On the other hand, one felt, I think the whole - everybody in the studio will agree there, that Ealing had somehow lost its way.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : The great days seemed to be over and the films they were making now were either - like 'The Long Arm' was - you know, they were always well made but they were somehow, unexciting, repetitious, the same old thing all over again.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : In that sense, I'm sure everyone would agree, you know. And the curious thing is that when Ealing did leave and they did manage to keep a nucleus of people, and they went to MGM, the films they made at MGM weren't successful.

Linda Wood : No.

Anthony Mendleson : I don't know what happened. And then, of course, they went to ABPC and, again, they weren't successful films. It was just a lucky few years and thank God I was there at the time, because it was the most, it had never happened before, it's never happened since.

Linda Wood : Hmm, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : Um, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world. At the same time, I think that the end came, for me, at a good time.

Linda Wood : Yes, you were just about the right age to be moving on.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, and I think I needed, shall we say, a kick up the arse, because I wasn't going to just vegetate doing the same old thing over and over again. It was time to branch out and fight for yourself, that's all.

Linda Wood : Yes, and in an industry which - there's so much insecurity, it's a hard decision to actually say, "I'm going to give up a full time, a permanent job and go, sort of, freelance," so...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, oh quite, quite. Then of course, I didn't know - I wrote, we all wrote hundreds of letters, of course. I ended up at one of the television companies, I can't remember what they were called in those days?

Linda Wood : There was an ITC television series, which was Lew Grade was it? No...?

Anthony Mendleson : No, it was long before that. It was called... I don't know, I can't think what it was called, but it was a big one anyway. And they had a headquarters in - around Bush House, that area.

Linda Wood : Yes that was ATV wasn't it?

Anthony Mendleson : I think so, yes.

Linda Wood : ATV before it bec...umm..

Anthony Mendleson : Umm. Anyway, I went in there, and they were very, very nice to me, I'll never forget them, how nice they were. Because they said, "Look, this obviously isn't going to be your life work, but if you want a job, we can give you a job for six weeks, a contract for six weeks." And I said, "Well fine, that's lovely for me." And, my God, I noticed the change. I went in there - it was like suddenly being back at, in - I don't know what - it was like Civil Servants. You went, I had a room shared with three other designers, I think - or four, I can't remember now. One telephone, everything had to be done in triplicate, you had to write out these forms. Oh, the paperwork! And these other designers running in and out and making 'phone calls and doing different shows, you see. And I had - I had The Vera Lynn Show...

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] Oh...

Anthony Mendleson : It was absolutely extraordinary! And one of the designers, a girl who I hadn't seen for years and years and years, turned out to be... Years before, when I was at Ealing, I did a ballet at for Marie Rambert at The Mercury Theatre for no money at all, they couldn't pay and it was nothing. And I said, "Well that's alright, it's a Sunday night show, why not?" And I'd always wanted to design for ballet, and they couldn't pay, they couldn't even pay the dressmaker. And this girl was the dressmaker who'd made these - there were only three costumes I think - out of scraps. And there she was now as a, sort of, quite important designer. So anyway, that was that. And anyway, I stuck it out, they were very nice people but, oh God! it was a soul destroying job! And then, thank God, I left and I had this, you know, I went to Betty Box at Pinewood, on 'Checkpoint'.

Linda Wood : Was that through one of the letters you'd been sending out, or did she just know you and was aware that you were available?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh no, she knew...she knew of me, didn't know me personally. Because I knew Sidney Box, I'd done something for him in the old days...

Linda Wood : Was that the Greta Gynt thing?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm?

Linda Wood : Was that the Greta Gynt thing?

Anthony Mendleson : Well yes, that was part of the sort of 'Box Empire' as it were. But, after that - I can't think how I came by it, but I was going to do paintings for a film which was never made called 'Mr Perrin and Traill' I think they were called...

Linda Wood : I think there was a film called 'Mr Perrin and Mr Traill'...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, but I think it was done later...

Linda Wood : Later, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : It was a Hugh Walpole story, and it was about a painter, and they wanted paintings, you know, to put on the set. And I did some roughs, but it all came to nothing and that was that. So I mean, you know it was sort of a funny, you know somebody and they know somebody, anyway, whatever it was.

Linda Wood : Yes, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : So anyhow, that was that. So back I went, thank God! And I was so glad, because Pinewood was so - It was so different from Ealing in so many ways. Because there they had three or four designers, and we had a special room with lots of telephones. We had a huge wardrobe with a lot of um - there was another wardrobe which was the hire wardrobe, where a lot of the clothes that were bought, they ended up there, and you could go over there if you wanted to. It was quite a different world, and a big studio with lots of stages. Oh I loved it, it was great. And they were so nice there! Because they were used to people coming in and not staying for very long, and going out again. It was far less parochial than Ealing was. On the other hand it was far more impersonal.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : But anyway, that was that, so there it was. And off I went to Florence and had a lovely time. And then I did 'True as a Turtle' with Wendy Toy which was, again, a lovely time. And no longer was I studio - sort of - 'bound', shall we say? [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : I mean, I went out with the film, we went all over the place. 'Fortune is a Woman', then I...

Linda Wood : Can you explain why you needed to go out with the film?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, because then the film was made, shall we say - for instance, take a case in point - 'True as a Turtle' was made on boats and things like that, and we went down to Poole harbour and somewhere else. So you had to be there, because you had your wardrobe with you, and it was up to you to see that the clothes were worn correctly, and what somebody wanted, that - you know, I mean, somebody's suddenly cast and wanted to be dressed, you had to do it.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : So it was like a travelling studio, you might say. It was quite different. And the same thing with 'Checkpoint', I mean we were out in Florence and somebody wanted - Odile Versois wanted some more clothes, you had to bloody well go out and get them, in Florence. And the same - it's a different thing entirely. You were in charge, you had your wardrobe master, you had your wardrobe mistress and your assistants - to them, not to you. Um, but it was your responsibility to see that when that artist, whoever it was, or all the artists, or the crowd, went on the set, they were properly dressed, they'd got all the clothes and they could work properly in them, that was that. They were lovely days, I enjoyed every minute of it. And then, I mean there was the other side as well. For instance, 'The One that Got Away' was absolute torture. There was a Prisoner of War Camp, and we shot it all in the real place, up in Northumberland or somewhere...

Unidentified : Oh!!

Linda Wood : Was Hardy Kruger...

Anthony Mendleson : It was grim and horrible!

Linda Wood : ...in the same costume throughout the film, more or less?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, more or less I think. Horrible! Um, 'Smallest Show on Earth', now that was great fun!

Linda Wood : Oh that was a lovely film!

Anthony Mendleson : Lovely film!

Linda Wood : The opening sequence, where they sort of have, the various people coming into the cinema is one of my favourite sequences and er...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, I know, it was lovely. And, you see, that we did in - a lot of it was on location, somewhere around Edgware Road again. Basil Dearden's favourite stamping ground! Um, and a lot we did in the studio, the interior of the cinema was there. But there, I mean, you know, I did design there, for instance, for Margaret Rutherford, Peter Sellers, Bernard Miles. I think that we bought Virginia's clothes, I can't remember now.

Linda Wood : Hmm. How, when you said you went on location with that, I'd assumed that you'd gone off to Wales, so it was a surprise when you said it was made in Edgware Road!

Anthony Mendleson : Which was, what?

Linda Wood : 'The Greatest Show on Earth'...

Anthony Mendleson : 'The Greatest Show on Earth'? 'The Smallest Show on Earth.'

Linda Wood : 'The Smallest Show on Earth', sorry! [Laughs.] 'The Greatest Show on Earth' was sort of...

Anthony Mendleson : Yeah that's right...

Linda Wood : The John Wayne thing, isn't it?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. No, no, we didn't leave London at all. I forget, I think it was, the facade of the cinema was shot on an old cinema or something like that, off the Edgware Road. But the interiors were all done in the studio. I think it was Shepperton, I think. I can't remember now. 'Chase a Crooked Shadow', well all I did for that was Anne Baxter's clothes. 'Batchelor of Hearts', I went up to Cambridge, it was very nice. 'Innocent Sinners', we were around Pimlico, that wasn't very nice.

Linda Wood : [Chuckles.] Oh!

Anthony Mendleson : 'Follow a Star' with Norman Wisdom, oh God! You see, I've been through the mill there, that was studio. 'Right, Left and Centre', that was - again, I loved Launder and Gilliat, they were lovely people, lovely people. 'The Mouse that Roared', that was fun, that was all designing, you see.

Linda Wood : What was the set-up at Shepperton? Because that was, again, different from Pinewood. Because you get the impression that they didn't have a big studio back up?

Anthony Mendleson : Shepperton?

Linda Wood : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : Oh yes they did.

Linda Wood : Did they have a wardrobe department at that time then, as well?

Anthony Mendleson : It was very much, sort of, Nissan hut offices, because there was only the old house, the original old house there, where there were 'Star' dressing rooms and one or two sort of, big rooms. But otherwise, it was a collection of huts, a lot of huts. And there were some buildings there as well. It was a rather ramshackle place. But the stages were big and nice and there was a big lot, a very big lot there. 'Mouse that Roared'...yes...

Linda Wood : Was Peter Sellers already sort of - was it clear that he was going to become a major star when you...?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh no, not a bit!

Linda Wood : No...

Anthony Mendleson : Not a bit! The first time I think I saw Peter was um, what do you call the thing?

Linda Wood : 'The Smallest Show'...?

Anthony Mendleson : 'Ladykillers.'

Linda Wood : Ah, yes, hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : He was then becoming, sort of, fairly well known, and he took a great liking, thank God, to me. So it was a pleasure when I worked with him, and I worked with him quite a lot then, various things.

Linda Wood : Hmm. What about his costume for 'The Smallest Show on Earth'? Because he played an old man in that, did you have to...?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh well you found old costumes and aged them and played around with them, you know. They weren't made...

Linda Wood : Did you find...?

Anthony Mendleson : A good character actor, like Peter was, would come with you, for instance, to Bermans or somewhere, and go down the rails, and we'd say, "Try that on," you know, "That might be just the thing." And he'd try it on and, you know - age that, darn that - that's the way you evolve a costume.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : You very rarely, if it's a character costume, you very rarely sit down at the drawing board and draw it and then say, "Now make that!" You don't, you find it somehow.

Linda Wood : Hmm. Did you enjoy that part of the job?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm, very much. 'Interpol Calling', now why was I doing that? Suddenly something dropped away. Because it was the most awful period. It was a television series with an American actor called Charles Korvin and we did - did them at Pinewood, that's right. They were done in three days.

Linda Wood : An episode in three days?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes, and it was quite frightening because they, I think - I can't remember the exact way they worked now - but I know I never went down to the studios at all. I was stuck at Bermans waiting for the cast for the next episode, and they would come in then, if you could get them. You'd dress them and send them off, and that was that, and they'd film, and then the next lot would come in. It was like a sort of - terrible thing - you never got up to date with anything.

Linda Wood : Hmm. No sooner did you get one finished, the next one...

Anthony Mendleson : Because I mean, people were cast at the last minute, then they'd be rushed down there. And they were always police uniforms, you see, so I had to spend an awful lot of time going round libraries and thinking, "What do the police in Turkey wear, and Istanbul in the summer," that sort of thing. Oh! It was a nightmare! Then to try and get them made in a day!

Linda Wood : Yes I was going to ask you if it was international, with the title 'Interpol'? So, presumably it was set in all these different...

Anthony Mendleson : Well nothing was in the same country at all! And they used to rush and take a unit out, you see, and shoot all the background stuff in - wherever it was - which you never saw. And then the rest of the stuff was done in the studio here, and they had to match up. It was a horrible period, I hated it! 'Make Mine Mink', that was very good, I loved that, it was one of my favourite films. Lovely, I did all those clothes. 'Mr Topaze', um Peter Sellers took a liking to me, thank God, and he got me to do those, all those clothes. That was quite nice. 'Man in the Moon', 'Bulldog Breed' oh back to Norman Wisdom!

[LW chuckles.]

Anthony Mendleson : 'A Matter of Who', that was fun, we did that in Germany and Switzerland, or Austria, I can't remember now. It was quite nice. 'The Impersonator' was a funny little film, directed by a friend of mine, Alfred Shaughnessy. We shot the whole thing in the Met, Edgware Road. I was given fifty pounds to get the clothes, I got them all from stock and it was a complete pantomime, that was something.

Linda Wood : My God! What was an average budget for...?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm?

Linda Wood : What was an average budget at Ealing for instance, for the costumes, or...?

Anthony Mendleson : I'm sorry...I...?

Linda Wood : How much would you have to spend on each film at Ealing?

Anthony Mendleson : Ah well, it varied. I mean this was fairly - oh, it was one of his first films and he was doing it on the cheap, as it were...

Linda Wood : Trying to prove himself, yes...

Anthony Mendleson : And we were friends, so he said, "You can do it, fine, but I can't pay more than fifty quid." So that was fine. But I mean on the whole, of course, the budget for films, I can't remember what they were at Ealing, they were nothing like they are now. But I mean, nowadays, films are budgeted completely differently. You know, I mean there seems to be no

particular ceiling. I mean I've had the most terrific budgets on certain films. But it's awfully difficult to budget for a film because you never know what the director is going to suddenly pull out of the bag and say, "Now look, I don't like that, I want this" or "I that thing was a good idea." You know, it's not allowed for. Well how should you be? But you could always go to the producer and say, "Look, so-and-so wants something, can I spend it?" "Yes you can" or "You can't" [Laughing] - whatever!

Linda Wood : Would the costumiers have set rate? You know, fifty costumes for sort of...?

Anthony Mendleson : Well they don't really, but you can always do a deal, if you know them. And I got on very well, thank God, with all of them, and if you just said to them, "Look, I'm sorry but we can't afford that," they'll meet you. Not always, but I mean most of the time they will. They're not going to cut their own throat, why should they?

Linda Wood : No. Do you think that's another part of your job? Sort of, on the one hand there's the designing and then there's the buying of costumes, and on the other, there's the negotiating with the various...

Anthony Mendleson : You've got to do all that, oh yes, absolutely. Yes, indeed you have, hmm. 'Billy Budd', that was lovely to do, that. Oh all those were made because none of the existing period uniforms of that period were accurate.

Linda Wood : And that was one where you were able to go off and do, thorough research and did the...?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh yes, I spent days and days down at the Maritime Museum, they were very helpful to me, I loved doing that. 'The Road to Hong Kong', well that was great fun. 'Mouse on the Moon', 'She'll Have to Go', 'Mind Benders'... And then I worked for Disney...a lot.

Linda Wood : What was Disney like? Because we've had some people who worked for Disney and they say that they got - the cameramen used to get very precise instructions...

Anthony Mendleson : Oh very! But in no way were they fussy about the costumes.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : I mean, the director had storyboards sent over from America, which he couldn't vary from, those were 'The Bible.' But as far as the clothes were concerned, no - they were absolutely amenable to everything, they were lovely. I had very happy times with them.

Linda Wood : Hmm, and did they have a higher budget than the average British film company? So were you able to, sort of, be a little - well not extravagant, but have a bit more time than would be the case on a typical British film?

Anthony Mendleson : I think so, yes, I think that's true. Yes, they gave you quite a long period just to prepare it and they were altogether absolutely lovely employers, that's all. Then I did that and...

Linda Wood : Did you ever meet Mr Walt Disney himself?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes I did, funnily enough. Because when we did 'The Moon-Spinners' out in Crete, we took over (we took over!) - they took over the village, which is now, I'm told, one of the most popular tourist resorts called Agios Nikolaos in Crete. And when we went there, which was when? In 19 - when was it? - 1964, that's right, it was a completely undeveloped fishing village. It was marvellous, and they took over - it was the way that Disney worked, you see - there was one hotel, which was a beautiful hotel called The Minos Beach Hotel, which is still there, which was, sort of, the main house. And then on the beach there were lovely chalets, all individual, and it went right down to the sea. And it was quite isolated, quite a way out of Agios Nikolaos. But in the town itself there were a lot of empty buildings, and the production manager - the location manager, was given permission to go over there and rent all these, either to let places or empty places, and furnish them. And I went out, luckily, early on and the man said to me, "Well, I'll take you round and you choose where you want to live, and that's it." So I found a marvellous house on the harbour, overlooking the harbour there, which had a business, some business premises in it, but the whole of the sort of second floor overlooking the harbour was empty, and I said, "That'll do fine." And they whisked in beds and wardrobes and you name it. It was absolutely wonderful! It was far from luxurious, I mean, it was an outside loo. The business people used to be in there in the daytime, well we went in the daytime, so it didn't make any difference. But I stayed there with my wardrobe mistress and two of the wardrobe staff, we all had our own rooms, which was fine, we were altogether. We did our own cooking, had a little kitchen. I did all the shopping when I could get away, in the village - learnt a bit of Greek. And then we had a lovely car and some Greek assistants, and we used to travel over to this place called Elounda, which is now a great big tourist centre. But there was nothing - there wasn't even a beach. And they imported sand and made a beach and built the 'Moon Spinners Inn' there, on the beach. It was quite magical! And it was a lovely cast, you know - Joan Greenwood and Hayley Mills and oh, everybody was absolutely lovely time, the weather was blissful, wonderful! One of the happiest memories. And again, I mean I went to Athens quite a lot because Papas, Irene Papas was playing a part. And so the obvious thing to do was to um, when I was in Athens I went around the markets and bought the local materials and found a dressmaker and made her clothes up. She was only playing a sort of peasant woman, but you got the right materials and they knew how they were cut, that was fine. Oh it was absolute heaven!

Linda Wood : Decided! [Chuckles.]

Anthony Mendleson : And that was that! 'Mr Moses' I only did the clothes for that. 'Yellow Rolls-Royce', that was an extraordinary film.

Linda Wood : That one, I looked at it and practically half the cast seem to have their own designer! So, did you have to co-ordinate all the different costumes for that?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes well, it's extraordinary. I was sitting here one Sunday after a party and the 'phone went and it was somebody I knew, a production manager, saying, "Are you busy?" And I said, "No not particularly, I've just got a hangover, why?" So he said, "Well, if I send a script over, would you come and look after the first episode of this 'Yellow Rolls-Royce'?" And I said, "Yes, OK." And the script arrived by hand, and I looked at it, and he said, "I want you to be, at ten o'clock tomorrow, at the tailors, Sullivan Woolley[?] to fit Rex Harrison." I said, "Alright." I'd never met Rex Harrison, I was told he was one of the most horrifying characters you could meet. He'd sort of been the death of most costume designers! So anyway, I went along and met him - he seemed all right - and got him dressed up. And then I gradually did all the drawings for all the crowd's clothes at Ascot - it was 1930 I think - a whole lot of those. And the star was Jeanne Moreau, well she was living with Pierre Cardin at the time so, not unnaturally, he did her clothes. And um - oh we had - everyone else's clothes I did. Oh there were a lot of people, lovely people Isa Miranda and (what's the name?) Moira Lister and, a lot of people. Anyway, that was that, and the first time I'd ever come across Anatole De Grunwald.

Linda Wood : Ahh...

Anthony Mendleson : I'd never had anything to do with him before, and he was charming, really my idea - he was the, sort of, the nearest thing to Korda, I should think, you would ever meet. Absolute charm and calm and great fun, and, he came on the set and everything was going all right. So we did the Ascot sequence, and I said, "Well that's it." And he looked at me and he said, "Now I want you to go tomorrow to Paris because..." (what's-her-name? Who's the other woman? Not Isa Miranda, the one who died, you know - lovely woman - Bergman!) "Ingrid Bergman isn't very happy with her clothes."

Linda Wood : Oh...

Anthony Mendleson : So I said, "Tomorrow?" He said, "No, no, no - you go now, you go now." I said, "But I've got nothing..." He said, "Never mind, you buy everything out there, we'll fix it up. You catch the twelve o'clock plane, you go to Paris..."

[LW exclamation of laughter.]

Anthony Mendleson : And those were the days! I thought they'd never come back. So I got on the plane with nothing - just my - didn't even have a toothbrush. And went to Paris. Luckily I had a friend of mine staying there, so I stayed in the same hotel. I went straight from the airport to Lanvin-Castillo who were making Bergman's clothes, and I walked - I'd never met Bergman before, and she was sweet. And of course, I realised why - Tolly had sort of left it all to her, just said, "I think you ought to wear this, that and the other." And she'd left it all to Castillo, he'd gone off somewhere else, he'd left it in the hands of an assistant, and she said, "Look! I look like the Queen Mother!"

[LW laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : [Chuckling.] And he'd dressed her in a terrible, sort of, awful violet coloured velvet, with a purple fur and... She said, "What can we do?" So I said, "Well whatever it is, we've got to do something, and quick!" So, that was that. So we changed that completely, I found some material in their workrooms and they remade it in a different colour and a different fur, everything like that, and everything worked out all right. And she was sweet, as always, and that was that. So then I came back and we got round that one...

Linda Wood : Did you go out to Italy as well?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm?

Linda Wood : Were you involved in the Italy sequence?

Anthony Mendleson : Was I what?

Linda Wood : Involved in the Italy sequence, with Shirley MacLaine and Alain Delon?

Anthony Mendleson : Yes! Well then I came back, and then he said to me, "Now Edith Head has done Shirley MacLaine's clothes, you'd better have a look at them." So there it was, so Edith Head came over with the clothes and we had a fitting at The Dorchester. And she said to me, [A. M. imitates an American accent] "I want you to bring a fully experienced cutter with you, in case there's anything wrong." So I said, "I haven't got a fully experienced cutter, all I've got is my wardrobe mistress and she can do what's necessary." So we went over there and there was nothing to be done except shorten a few things, something like that. But the wardrobe mistress did all that and they Tolly said to me [A. M. imitates De Grunwald] "Now you must go out immediately to Paris and see Alain Delon, he must have his clothes done, you go there now." So off I go there, saw him. Oh it was - it went off - we shot the whole thing in the border of Yugoslavia, Austria and Germany I think it was, because we couldn't go to Yugoslavia. Those were lovely days, you see, you went with them, you met everyone, everyone was sort of, fun...nothing was taken too seriously and it was a lovely film in the end...and there it was.

Linda Wood : Did you meet Anthony Asquith?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh he was lovely, you see I worked with him again, he was absolutely lovely. And I did 'Thunderball', that was great fun! Out in Nassau for about two months, that was no hardship!

Linda Wood : [Laughing.] Oh no! I think that's one of the best Bond films as well.

Anthony Mendleson : It was nice wasn't it?

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. And I did some - I got quite nice clothes for Claudine Auger and the other girl, Luciana. 'Dick Turpin'...

Linda Wood : Yes that was on television about two weeks ago, wasn't it?

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm, it's always on television! 'Fighting Prince', they were all quite nice. 'Alphabet Murders' oh that was dreadful! Awful film!

Linda Wood : It was sort of, from one extreme to the other...

Anthony Mendleson : Hmm.

Linda Wood : Sort of, one a great big multi-million budget film and then, the next you're doing one of these little domestic British comedies!

Anthony Mendleson : That's right. I was only got onto 'The Alphabet Murders' because the wardrobe mistress was frightened into a cocked hat by Tony Randall, who could be a nasty little piece. But, his clothes didn't fit or something, so she couldn't cope so they sent for me and then, of course, I found myself landed with Anita Ekberg. So I had to go to Rome for two weeks [indecipherable.] 'Pretty Polly', that was nice - Hayley Mills - nice clothes for that. 'The Magus', now that was a lovely film. I was out in Majorca for about three months, great! Great clothes and nice people... terrible film!

Linda Wood : [Laughing.] Yes!

Anthony Mendleson : 'Oh What a Lovely War', oh well, that was history wasn't it? I loved that.

Linda Wood : That must have been quite a chore, setting about that? Because the cast seemed to be extremely large and everyone was very distinguished...

Anthony Mendleson : Oh you mean the cast? Yeah, hmm.

Linda Wood : Was it all - presumably, people, once they reach a certain eminence, expect a level of respect, and you expect to have to treat perhaps five or six people in a film very differentially, but the rest you can expect to muck in. But when everyone is the star name in a film, it could cause certain problems?

Anthony Mendleson : I know, I know, hmm. But they're all - you see when you get, particularly theatre stars, they're so easy to work with in a way, and they don't take it all that seriously. They want it right, but that's it, I mean the dressing rooms for instance, were in the Norfolk Hotel, just ordinary hotel rooms. And there was Laurence Olivier sharing with Michael Redgrave and we'd laid all the uniforms out on the bed there [chuckles] and Michael Redgrave picked up Laurence Olivier's trousers and put them on (or britches).

Linda Wood : But they're a different size!

Anthony Mendleson : And nobody knew! And so Laurence Olivier, when he came to fit his, he said, "They don't fit!" I said, "Well they must fit, you were fitted with them." He said, "Well

look, they don't!" So I said, "Well, do you know? I think Michael's gone off with yours!" So he said, "Well get him back!"

[Background laughter.]

Anthony Mendleson : So I went up to Michael, I said, "I think you've got Larry's clothes on." He said, "Oh nonsense, of course I haven't! Look, they're perfect!" [Chuckles.] He didn't want to know! So Olivier said, "Oh look, never mind, never mind." He said, "It won't make the slightest difference, I'm sitting in the back of a car, I'll put a rug over my legs." So he did! He didn't have any trousers on at all!

[LW laughs.]

Anthony Mendleson : They were sweet people, all of them. But, my God, it was a hard film, there was no question of that. I mean night shooting, wet sequences, oh the lot! 'David Copperfield', we had every - all the stars in that again. I did all the clothes for that. 'Jane Eyre', I did all the clothes for that. 'Pope Joan', I went out with Dickie to Romania, but we didn't er - it didn't come to anything. And then, of course, I really had the most dreadful time on 'Macbeth', oh God!

Linda Wood : Yes, sort of...

Anthony Mendleson : But we survived. 'Alice', that was great fun again. 'Young Winston', lovely. 'Voyage Round my Father', Rex again. I did all his clothes, he had all the fittings, everything was fine, and then they cancelled the film! 'Persecution', I had to go to Hollywood to do Lana Turner.

Linda Wood : What was she like?

Anthony Mendleson : Oh she was lovely, oh a rather lost soul.

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : 'Quilp', that was great fun again, with 'The Old Curiosity Shop.' 'Black Windmill', 'One of my Dinosaurs.' That was great fun, because the only time I've ever been able to sit in this room, go out on the balcony and tell them they were wearing the wrong clothes, by just shouting! [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : 'Cause there were a lot of sequences, sort of...

Anthony Mendleson : [Indecipherable.] And as for 'The Incredible Sarah', well I've never done so many clothes in my life! Glenda Jackson had about twenty-five changes.

Linda Wood : The costumes for that were absolutely beautiful.

Anthony Mendleson : Oh, the whole film. 'Bridge too Far'...

Linda Wood : I quite enjoyed that film!

Anthony Mendleson : Did you? Oh it was an awful film. But Glenda was lovely, they were all lovely again. 'Bridge too Far', that was quite - if you could survive out there.

Linda Wood : You'd gone through the First World War with 'Oh What a Lovely War' to the Second World War in 'A Bridge too Far'.

Anthony Mendleson : Yeah I know...hmm.

Linda Wood : Did you find that...?

[End of Tape 1, Side 2] [Tape 2, Side 3]

Linda Wood : How did you happen to work for Richard Attenborough?

Unidentified : Side Three!

Anthony Mendleson : Oh I see! Well it was - I'd met Dickie in the Ealing days, because he was in 'The Ship that Died of Shame'

Linda Wood : Hmm.

Anthony Mendleson : Um, purely as an actor, I mean I...

Unidentified : That was the last film to be made at Wembley, before it was converted to television. 'The Ship that Died'...

Anthony Mendleson : At Wembley?

Unidentified : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : We made it at Ealing.

Unidentified : Well, some of the scenes of the boat, were done at Wembley.

Anthony Mendleson : Ah maybe, yes, but I mean, most of it was done at Ealing.

Unidentified : They had a big tank there, you see.

Anthony Mendleson : Ah, oh yes, that's right, yes quite right. And then - I think I was - somewhere or other, I was going off on something, I think it may have been going off on 'Moon Spinners.' And I ran into Dickie outside Berman's in Leicester Square, and I didn't recognise him, because he was shooting a scene from - what was that film that he did, as an actor I'm talking about now, where he had that fantastic make-up on? As a little man with a little moustache (here) and...? I think it was one of Brian Forbes's films...

Linda Wood : I know the one! The one where he played a murderer?

Anthony Mendleson : No, no, it wasn't 'Rillington Place', no, it wasn't that one. Anyway, whatever it was, he came up to me there and I honestly didn't know him at first. And he said, "Tony, I'd love you to do a film that I'm going to do soon." And I said, "Oh that'd be lovely," you know, "When?" He said, "Well not very soon - fairly soon." And I said, "Well I'm off now to" (wherever it was, Crete or somewhere.) "Is it period?" And he said, "Oh yes!" I said, "Oh lovely! Can't wait!" And that was the last I heard. And the film he was thinking about, of course, was 'Gandhi' which was - because he was already trying to get 'Gandhi' off the ground as far back as that. And nothing happened, so that was the end of that one. And then suddenly, I don't know how he got in touch, whatever it was. It was about 'Oh What a Lovely War' anyhow, and I remember I went over to Len Deighton's house in um - somewhere in the City, I think, or somewhere. And we all met up there and Dickie played the record of the show to us. And we all had lunch and discussed it and one thing and another, and that was the beginning of it. And um, he was so lovely to work for in every possible way. And unfortunately, when 'Gandhi' finally did come up again, about the third time, fourth time, and finally was made, I wasn't available to make it. And so, once you lose your place, as it were...

Linda Wood : Yes, hmm...

Anthony Mendleson : ...you know, it's too late then. Next film - actually I recommended him to have John Mollo, which he did have and did a very good job of it, and from then on John did all his other films. He was going to - he said to me he was going to try and work it so that I could do some of the clothes, the ladies clothes anyway, on 'Chaplin.' And then of course, that fell through because 'Chaplin' was made, most of the time, in Hollywood, so that was the end of that. Anyway, but I do like him enormously and I'd love to work for him again. Um, 'The Bridge too Far', yes, well we got through that. That was torture because it was so many uniforms of three different armies. It was unbelievable, we used to be taking badges off one lot of uniforms and putting them on another [chuckles], it all worked out in the end. I think it was a rather muddled story, nothing to do with the film, it was a muddled story as a muddled battle, that was the end of that. 'Gulliver's Travels', I only did Richard Harris and the crowd, because that was animation. 'Persian Ranton' never happened. 'Boys from Brazil', now that I loved doing because I loved the book, I liked Frank Schaffner very much, the director. And again, I had a lovely time, we went to film all the South American sequence in Lisbon. And we had to go, I had to go and watch a lot of surreptitiously taken newsreels of Paraguay - because you weren't allowed to go there, it was such a dictatorship - and try and match those clothes with the crowd in Lisbon. So it was a lot of dressing for that. And then I went to America, to Pennsylvania to do that sequence, and back to England. 'First [Great] Train Robbery' I loved.

Linda Wood : Yes, I did as well.

Anthony Mendleson : Beause that was great, love the clothes, love the people, and we did the whole thing in Dublin, which was very nice and very comfortable, nothing wrong with that. 'Diepan' [?] didn't happen, 'Saturn 3' - 'Saturn 3' was a very difficult one, I hate space, science fiction things, I really feel that's the kiss of death, so I had to try and sort something out for that, anyway. 'Rough Cut' I enjoyed enormously, they were very smart, modern clothes, I liked that.

'Dragonslayer', yes, that was a very nice one, very nice, lot of clothes for that. 'Krull' was a disaster, but very nice to work on. Disaster because they could never get the script right. Oh! It was - they kept on changing it and altering it, and nobody knew which period it was, if it was any period. It was, again, science fiction and they're always - well everyone can have a hand in those and you're never right!

Linda Wood : Are you usually aware when a film is going wrong? You know, do you have an instinct, can you tell?

Anthony Mendleson : Well I mean, you can, in certain instances, you certainly could with 'Krull', because poor Peter was obviously muddled with the whole thing. Um, certain films you think are marvellous and turn out to be absolutely awful [chuckles], and the other way round. But um, no I don't think you can really be clever, not in my section of the film making anyway.

Linda Wood : No. And of course your part of the film can be marvellous and still the film, as a whole, be terrible.

Anthony Mendleson : Yes. I mean, 'The Keep', that was, again, disaster from my point of view. Because we had Michael Mann directing, who is very peculiar and I could never please him. He wasn't unpleasant in any way but nothing satisfied him, so that was a very unhappy experience. 'Last Days of Pompeii', I loved that, loved every minute of it. But in the end, unfortunately, it didn't amount to a string of beans, it wasn't a very good thing. But beautiful locations, Michael Stringer did the most marvellous sets, wonderful. And I liked doing the costumes and getting them, we got most of those, we got the entire lot from, 'Peruzzi' in Rome. They made principles and they had a vast stock of that period, from all those great big epics that had been made in Spain and Rome. 'Masks of Death', that was a nice film to do, because again, it had Anne Baxter who I loved, was in it. 'Reunion at Fairborough' with Robert Mitchum and Deborah Carr - she was a darling, Deborah. 'Murder Elite'[,?], undistinguished film, unfortunately, but very nice to have Ali MacGraw, she became a great friend. 'Lime Street'[,?], might have been quite funny but it didn't work out I'm afraid. And that's the end of my career unfortunately! [Chuckles.] Well I hope not, but I mean it's getting that way! [Chuckles.]

Linda Wood : [Laughs.] I don't know, you seem to have had very few gaps in - quite a few of the people we interview have long gaps between projects, and you seem to have worked fairly consistently throughout your career, so you haven't done too badly.

Anthony Mendleson : Oh no, I think I've been very lucky. But you know, it's been quite a long career.

Linda Wood : It has, yes.

Anthony Mendleson : So consequently, you think to yourself, "Well, it's time for the younger ones to come along, I suppose." And also, of course, it's coincided with the lack of film finance

Linda Wood : In Britain...um...

Anthony Mendleson : ...to do the big films now. It's no longer big business unfortunately, over here. I mean, you know, it's like all these things; you have your day, but I've enjoyed every minute of it and that's the main thing.

Unidentified : You were very fortunate to have had employment continually through, without any rest periods. I mean, that's quite fantastic in that business...

Anthony Mendleson : Yes...

Unidentified : It really is...you've been amazingly lucky.

Linda Wood : Also amazingly talented and...

Anthony Mendleson : No, no, I think er... You're right, it's a mixture of both, of course. But it is so much luck. I mean you know, for instance, a friend of mine who is a charming costumier, are you recording this?

Linda Wood : Yes.

Anthony Mendleson : Oh well don't, because...

Linda Wood : Oh well stop.

[break in recording]

Unidentified : This is the end of the interview, the rest of the tape is clear.

[End of Interview]

Anthony Mendleson

Costume Designer

1940s-50s - Ealing Film Studios

1960s-70s - Pinewood Studios