

# Carmen Dillon (Art director) 25/10/1908 - 12/04/2000

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:07 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** Carmen Dillon was born in Cricklewood in 1908. After training at the Architectural Association, she entered the film industry as an assistant designer at the Wembley studios, working on 'Quota Quickies' for Fox British. Early in the war she moved to Denham and was the art director or production designer on numerous films for Two Cities, Rank and others until her retirement in 1979. **SUMMARY:** In this interview with Sidney Cole, Dillon discusses her work on major films such as Henry V (1944), Hamlet (1948) and Accident (1967), and recalls the different colleagues she worked with, including Paul Sheriff, Desmond Dickinson, Laurence Olivier, David Lean, and Joseph Losey. She compares the various studios she worked in, and recounts the story of her sister's role in founding Dillon's bookshop in Gower Street. She briefly touches on her experience as a woman in a male dominated industry (recalling that after an initial incident she encountered very little prejudice). While Dillon's failing memory makes this a disappointingly brief and sketchy interview, it nevertheless contains some intriguing material. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

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Interview Date: 1993-06-23

Interviewer: Sidney Cole

Interviewee: Carmen Dillon

Tape 1, Side 1

**Sidney Cole:** 23rd Actually.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** Yes, you're right. 23rd June 1993. This is Sidney Cole interviewing Carmen Dillon.

**Sidney Cole:** Right. Carmen?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes?

**Sidney Cole:** A few, perhaps slightly boring, to you, details about your origin. When and where were you born?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh, well, you'll have to work it out. What did I say I was? Sixty-four or five - 1925 and something, how much?

**Sidney Cole:** No, it must be earlier than that?

**Carmen Dillon:** Er. No, no, no.

**Sidney Cole:** No?

**Carmen Dillon:** Really, what was I? 1925? Well 1925...'25 is my birthday, whatever happens. Yes, do shout it if you want to.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** I'll just do a pause. [break in recording]

**Sidney Cole:** [to sound recordist] Have you got to do your announcement again?

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** No, no.

**Carmen Dillon:** Doesn't matter.

**Sidney Cole:** Have you wiped back or anything?

No.

**Sidney Cole:** No. Okay, now we can really start!

**Carmen Dillon:** Other people's...

**Sidney Cole:** Having worked out the correct mathematics...

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** Hang on a second, you must have pulled something out...[cut]

**Sidney Cole:** ...mathematics correct Carmen. You were born in 1908, the same year as I. Obviously a very good year.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes...

**Sidney Cole:** And where? Whereabouts?

**Carmen Dillon:** Um, I was born in Cricklewood.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. The elders of my family, two or three were born in Spain, and then they moved over here, and the rest were born over here.

**Sidney Cole:** Why were they born in Spain? What was your family's...?

**Carmen Dillon:** They were born in Spain because my father went over with my mother and his mother as well. And he was to do with the Spanish railways.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah.

**Carmen Dillon:** And he went on being to do with railways all his life.

**Sidney Cole:** He was in that great tradition of British railway engineers.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And so - he was all right. And then, when the two children were born, then they came back to London and they lived in...

**Sidney Cole:** In Cricklewood.

**Carmen Dillon:** I forget where. But then eventually came back to Cricklewood and Brondesbury, where we always lived until we went to Kensington, and after that we lived in flats in Kensington.

**Sidney Cole:** You had houses to live in Cricklewood?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmmm?

**Sidney Cole:** You had houses to live in, in Cricklewood did you? You had a house?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Yes. We had a very nice house, I've got a lot of photographs of it. And we lived there for years and years, until I went to the AA, the Architectural Association.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** We still lived there.

**Sidney Cole:** What sort of age were you when you went to the...

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmmm?

**Sidney Cole:** What sort of age were you when you went to the Architectural Association?

**Carmen Dillon:** Er - I was by a year too young. I had to wait another year, that's the thing. I was eventually eighteen.

**Sidney Cole:** Where had your schooling been before you went to...?

**Carmen Dillon:** The convent, Newhall, in Essex. A really lovely convent. All very, very good English nuns.

**Sidney Cole:** What gave you an interest in architecture?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmmm?

**Sidney Cole:** What gave you an interest in architecture?

**Carmen Dillon:** Er - oh good sense I think. I've always loved architecture. Then immediately of course I started wanting either to work with the stage or the films.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh you did?

**Carmen Dillon:** And that's what I did - yes.

**Sidney Cole:** You realise that when you were living in Cricklewood, you were near films because there was a film studio in Cricklewood.

**Carmen Dillon:** Indeed there was, yes. No I didn't think about those at all.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you go to movies quite a bit?

**Carmen Dillon:** No. Very little. And I still don't absolutely go over the top about movies. I prefer the stage really.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And working for - I also really almost prefer working for the stage although I do much more in films.

**Sidney Cole:** What happened then? You finished your course at the Architectural Association. What was it - three years?

**Carmen Dillon:** I tried to get a job in the films, which I did at Wembley.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, I remember Wembley - British Lion, the original British Lion wasn't it?

**Carmen Dillon:** No it wasn't. It was - very, very near, it's a very small studio, very funny people. Because the man who ran it was a nasty little chap, but he didn't like having women there at all.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh.

**Carmen Dillon:** And so one thing - I wasn't allowed to wear trousers, and I wasn't to mix with the workmen or anything. But then came the War, and my boss, who had been my sort of superior as an architect student - he had to go back into the Navy. So I had to take over more and less, and then I went on and I went on and I went on. And I never moved.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Could I back-track a bit?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Because you covered a lot of ground in a very short time in what you just said. So you went to - it was round about 1930 or so was it when you went to Wembley?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. It must have been, because as I say, I'd qualified and I didn't go after my RIBA because strangely in those days, it still is, you had to pay rather a lot for your RIBA. So I went without it.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah-huh. The RIBA being?

**Carmen Dillon:** The Royal Institute of British Architects.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, oh yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And so I stayed in Wembley for a long, long time.

**Sidney Cole:** What was your actual title? What was your job?

**Carmen Dillon:** By then I was an assistant art director.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Almost immediately. Because I had to get it set into it. But I had a very dear little man who was trying to carry it on, and he was a glorious dopey drunk.

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs].

**Carmen Dillon:** And so really I had quite a lot to do. And I enjoyed it very much indeed.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you know Jim Elder Wills?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmm?

**Sidney Cole:** Did you know an art director called Jim Elder Wills?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** You must have known Jim at Wembley, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** So what was the name of the actual art director to begin with that you worked with?

**Carmen Dillon:** I'm just trying to think. Oh he died a long time ago. He was in the Navy. [pause] Oh! I've no notion, I'm afraid. [NB Possibly Ralph Brinton]

**Sidney Cole:** It'll come to you in the middle of something else.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes. I knew him very well, for years and years and years.

**Sidney Cole:** So when he was called-up - what - can you tell the names of any films that you worked on at Wembley?

**Carmen Dillon:** I was trying to do this the other day for somebody else. Some of them were an Irish background and some of them had parsons in them!

**Sidney Cole:** Oh.

**Carmen Dillon:** A lot. Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Were they full-length features?

**Carmen Dillon:** They were sometimes - they made about six a year, and they were called 'quickies'.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah yes, yes. They were the 'quota quickies', yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes that's right. And then from that I was promoted to Denham.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah-huh.

**Carmen Dillon:** And then I worked in Denham for about fifteen or sixteen years, and then that folded up and we all went over to Pinewood. And then I stayed there the rest of the time. Except going once or twice - once to Wembley I think, [corrects herself] to Ealing I think, and apart from that to MGM.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh they had lovely studios at MGM.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Elstree, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Good.

**Sidney Cole:** Would you say your most interesting years were at Denham?

**Carmen Dillon:** Um...

**Sidney Cole:** You must remember some of the pictures that you worked on at Denham.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. It was interesting also for the seniors, a lot of them were put in the 'jug' very quickly, because they were Italian or something.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, I remember that. Right at the beginning of the war, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** That's right.

**Sidney Cole:** There was a quite famous producer-director, Italian producer-director who got killed didn't he?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, I'm trying to remember...

**Sidney Cole:** I can't remember his name now.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh I think I've got it here somewhere. He was a very nice man. And they dropped him in for quite a long time, and various other people as well.

**Sidney Cole:** You worked with Paul Sheriff quite a bit.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, indeed I did. And I got a very good painting of his in the next place, which is another place I worked in [indecipherable] as it were. And he was a very good painter, and he was a nice chap. But I'm just trying to show you... [looking through photos] there you are. There's Paul Sheriff.

**Sidney Cole:** That's Paul, yes. And you.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, and me. In 1945 I've got on the back.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** You haven't changed much!

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes, that was on Armistice Day.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah.

**Carmen Dillon:** I remember because we were photographed outside a little group of houses there, they called the Music Cottage, at Denham.

**Sidney Cole:** What pictures do you particularly remember working on at Denham?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh...well...Henry V.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh Henry V, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** It went on and on and on, yes!

**Sidney Cole:** Did you go over to Ireland for their locations?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, we had to. In fact indeed - I didn't have this out because of you coming, but I just had it out and I was looking at them. Henry V over in Ireland. Because we had to be in Ireland because of the horses.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** We had two hundred horses.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, the marvellous sequence of the cavalry, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** It was, wasn't it? And Paul Sheriff was driving the car, which was - we were right up the track, which only had tube[?] on it. You had to go on the wheels. And he was driving it, and I was running most of the way. I was proud of myself, I ran pretty nearly the whole mile, all up that thing. It was a very exciting thing to do, Henry V. Beautiful thing. And work of any kind with Olivier was great, absolutely great. Wonderful.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Did you get to know Laurence Olivier?

**Carmen Dillon:** Very well indeed. I mean I worked on all his films, all his Shakespearian films.

**Sidney Cole:** Hamlet, you worked on Hamlet?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. And also I did several plays for him, in the Old Vic.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes? Oh I didn't realise.

**Carmen Dillon:** For instance, um...

**Sidney Cole:** Before the National was built and the Royal Shakespeare was at the Old Vic theatre.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes, that sort. And the very, very nice one was - what's it called? 'Juno and the Peacock'.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Which was a great success. And it had a - I did a sketch for, and then - I did the set as well - I did a painting for the backcloth, which was reproduced smaller and it's sitting up on the wall there. Because it's a nice reproduction of the big one, and I'm very fond of it. With a bit of Dublin on it.



**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, yes. I saw 'Juno and the Paycock', a production of it, only the other night.

**Carmen Dillon:** Here?

**Sidney Cole:** No, no. In London.

**Carmen Dillon:** At the Gate? Oh no, not the Gate here in Dublin?

**Sidney Cole:** No, in London.

**Carmen Dillon:** It's very good.

**Sidney Cole:** Actually I'm just trying to think, it was at The Lyric, Hammersmith.

**Carmen Dillon:** It's lovely.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh it's a marvellous play. But tell me about Hamlet because I was very friendly, and very fond of the cameraman on that - Desmond Dickinson.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Who got an Oscar for that.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes I know. We loved Desmond. He was lovely, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Absolutely lovely.

**Carmen Dillon:** Wicked. Very wicked.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And his glass, his bottle of sherry he had every day.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, his bottle of sherry and his cold potato.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, that's right. There it is.

**Sidney Cole:** So what else did you do? Of course you did, you worked on First of the Few didn't you?

**Carmen Dillon:** I did, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Tell me about Leslie Howard.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh. Well he was lovely and he was so - he was a gentleman, wasn't he? Wonderful.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** I enjoyed working with him very much. [Looking through photographs] I was just trying to find a picture of - never mind - I forget everybody's name. I remember Leslie's!

**Sidney Cole:** Did you ever find - because one, far from the only, unique about you Carmen is that - being a woman in what was largely a man's world, certainly the art department, because women tended to go into the things that were thought of as the sort of jobs they could do - so you getting into that, did you find any problems about that from any of your male partners?

**Carmen Dillon:** After about the first, really few months, never.

**Sidney Cole:** No.

**Carmen Dillon:** Absolutely never. People love to say it, "Oh you must find it awfully difficult with all these terrible men all round you." Not at all, except that very first man who ran...

**Sidney Cole:** You said, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** He was a funny little man. I wasn't to wear trousers. He was very much against trousers. And I wasn't to do this and I wasn't to go and talk to the workmen [laughs]. And as the Navy man who had to move because he was called up, they had to let me do it because they had nobody to do it. And it was a small studio with not very much to do, really.

**Sidney Cole:** No.

**Carmen Dillon:** And except the one who was always drunk. [

**Sidney Cole:** laughs] But he used to disappear about four or five o'clock for the rest of the day so we just went on working!

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs] I hope you can remember his name.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. And I was living in Cricklewood then, and then in Kensington. It was always easy to get there.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes I remember Wembley because I started at Stoll Studios, and then I was at Wembley. I was a clapper boy, you know, running around bringing cups of tea and so on.

**Carmen Dillon:** I was very lucky you see, I went straight in.

**Sidney Cole:** You went straight in, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Extraordinary.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** I'm very grateful.

**Sidney Cole:** Well you're like me in the sense that my first job - your first job was in films, which is what you wanted to do, and worked a whole lifetime, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. And there was one other who got into film, she was at Ealing wasn't she, that woman? Very nice pleasant person.

**Sidney Cole:** What did she do?

**Carmen Dillon:** In the art department.

**Sidney Cole:** In the art department, I'm just trying to think. I don't remember offhand. It'll come to me in the middle of the night like we were saying always happens when you try to remember names.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes indeed, yes. She's not alive now I don't think. As you know, so few people are alive that you knew quite well.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes I know. It's sad isn't it?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** After Denham, then you went over to Pinewood?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, we all went over to there because...

**Sidney Cole:** Denham shut, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** ...Denham had shut, yes. Which was sad.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, very sad.

**Carmen Dillon:** But it was also still during the War a lot of bombing and Denham and all that sort of thing. And I was a warden of course, we were all wardens.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Either from five in the evening to eleven at night, or eleven at night until I don't know, ten in the morning or something.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** It was very hard. Very hard. Lovely long corridor at Denham.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, they call it the 'something mile' or something, that long, long, long corridor at Denham.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Do you remember, were there any particular incidents when you were being an air raid warden?

**Carmen Dillon:** No, except that we had to dive down, lie down flat just outside Denham.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Because it was pretty bad. I didn't like air raids I must say. I was never a brave creature at all. I wanted to go and hide, but it was easier to go on with the wardening.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Do you remember air raids in the First World War, when you were very young?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh I wasn't very young. Which - the '14-18 war?

**Sidney Cole:** The '14-18 war, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, I did because we were in Cricklewood then, and you could see - I remember seeing a Zeppelin from out of the window in the bathroom.

**Sidney Cole:** Transfixed by the searchlights?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And I've got a lovely little photograph which I haven't got here, of Una when she was ten or eleven - my one brother was always in Hendon aerodrome, and he took her up - oh the row at home went on for weeks!

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs]

**Carmen Dillon:** My mother was livid. She was ten or eleven months. It's a lovely little photograph of Una, so big in a black thing.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes because we share a lot of parallel memories because I can remember my early memories of Zeppelins and air raids. And I found that I used to, I rather enjoyed the air raids because it meant you were got up and sat down, "Be quiet and read your book" while the raid was going on.

**Carmen Dillon:** That's right. And also you didn't have to be so early in the morning.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh quite, and all that.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** It was wonderful. Yes. So, reverting to later. You were at Pinewood for a good many years, as you were saying. Can you remember...?

**Carmen Dillon:** Something like fifteen years. Enormously long time.

**Sidney Cole:** What pictures do you remember? There must be some you remember with more affection than others.

**Carmen Dillon:** Particularly [long pause]. Well, I was just thinking what we were doing for Olivier then. We were doing Richard III.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And, what were the others?

**Sidney Cole:** Richard III was a very interesting film.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh it was lovely I think. Very exciting.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Wonderful. And that we did at Pinewood of course.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Pinewood was a good studio as I remember.

**Carmen Dillon:** It was.

**Sidney Cole:** Better in some ways than Denham I think.

**Carmen Dillon:** I think it was.

**Sidney Cole:** In terms of effectiveness...

**Carmen Dillon:** It hadn't got a really big stage though.

**Sidney Cole:** No I suppose not, not like...

**Carmen Dillon:** The medium stage was the biggest they had.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. But I meant in terms of the convenience of where the shops were in relation to studios.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. I think it was a rather comfortable studio to work in wasn't it? In Pinewood? Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** When I was there, yes

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. It's funny, They're back again working there now...

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** A friend of mind - John Box - is...

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes, a very fine art director.

**Carmen Dillon:** ...yes, and now he's working again in a small - on a small film. He rings up quite a lot.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh good.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Tell me about the other studio you mentioned, which was called MGM, and I think had different names.

**Carmen Dillon:** Metro Goldwyn Mayer, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** That was a wonderful place, I worked there.

**Carmen Dillon:** It was a wonderful place. I never thought it had much character somehow.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah. But I was thinking it had a wonderful scene dock when I worked there.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh they had indeed!

**Sidney Cole:** Because they'd kept everything, which is an art director's delight.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes, it was like that.

**Sidney Cole:** Even on a television series, which is what I was doing there, the art director could go in and pick any kind of things he wanted, sometimes stuff left over from big MGM productions.

**Carmen Dillon:** That's right. But I always felt it had a slight smell of, I don't know, stiffness about it.

**Sidney Cole:** Mmm, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** I don't know. Of course it made some fine films. I never missed not working there. You know? I did a few things there.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** but I much. I didn't like the other one, you know, the smaller one in Elstree.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh MGM - not MGM - EMI...

**Carmen Dillon:** Not EMI, another one.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** Rock Studios?

**Carmen Dillon:** What?

**Sidney Cole:** British National?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh National...

**Sidney Cole:** British National...

**Carmen Dillon:** No...

**Sidney Cole:** It was originally called Rock Studios, then Gate Studios...

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, there was a Rock, but there was also quite a big place that got bigger and bigger. They kept on adding things to it.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh.

**Carmen Dillon:** I can't remember.

**Sidney Cole:** It must have been BIP.

**Carmen Dillon:** BIP, it must be, yes that's right.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, that was the original studio out there.

**Carmen Dillon:** And then that grew and grew and grew. Burnt down occasionally.

**Sidney Cole:** Or was it British and Dominion?

**Carmen Dillon:** B & D?

**Sidney Cole:** B & D was the one that got burnt down.

**Carmen Dillon:** One of them was always catching fire.

**Sidney Cole:** Well that was B & D I think. Because all those stories about it catching - oh yes a great story - do you remember a director called Adrian Brunel?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, a very nice man. But there's a story about him - he used to direct some of those 'quickies' you mentioned, and one Sunday evening his assistant director rang him up and said, "Sir, sir," in a great state of excitement. And Adrian said, "What's happened? Calm down and tell me." And he said, "But sir the studio had burnt down!" "Oh good," said Adrian, "That means I don't have to get up early tomorrow morning."

**Carmen Dillon:** Fine, yes!

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs] You know, if you know Adrian as you did, you would know that was the kind of humour...

**Carmen Dillon:** They weren't very nice studios.

**Sidney Cole:** No.

**Carmen Dillon:** Messy.

**Sidney Cole:** What did you work on at those studios? Anything important? Does it mean anything to you, I remember Elizabeth Bergner, the famous actress worked there.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, I wasn't there when she was there.

**Sidney Cole:** Because it was the place where Wilcox, Herbert Wilcox worked a great deal wasn't it?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you work on any of his pictures?

**Carmen Dillon:** I don't think so. I remember the Bergner one, the excitement about it. I don't remember it awfully well when I start thinking about that. I rather think away from it.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah.

**Carmen Dillon:** Pinewood I think now is my spiritual home.

**Sidney Cole:** Really?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmm.



**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Denham was a bit too big.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, factory.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. And also Denham was full of people, separate groups of people making films.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Yes there were. And everything was a long way. It was far too long a corridor.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh gosh yes. Somebody measured it once with a camera tape, and I think it was well over a quarter of a mile.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Which is a long way to walk, particularly if you're carrying cans of film or something.

**Carmen Dillon:** One was always going up and down it. And they got angry if you used a bicycle, which I did always!

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs]

**Carmen Dillon:** Well you had to.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes of course you had too. You were continually going from set to shop and office and so on.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. This chap, Gus Walker, who I was talking about, he came back. He had been at Denham, and he came back to MGM and then eventually back again to Denham, and he was a splendid chap, he was very much in charge of the whole thing. Very Scottish, very good. Gus.

**Sidney Cole:** What particular moments - can you remember any special moments of any kind that stand out to you from your career?

**Carmen Dillon:** I don't... Well I was working so much with Olivier, and so much for Olivier, that I didn't really enjoy working with other people very much.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah. Why was he so good to work with? Because he understood what you were trying to do?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes I think not only that, he was very firm and very fierce. He was a wonderful chap. But - a show-off, but in the best possible way I think.

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs] Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** He was - for instance on Henry V - he never asked anybody to fall out of a tree or something like that - he did it. He was a wonderful chap - physically - wonderful.

**Sidney Cole:** Well that's a good sign, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Wonderful. And then eventually, after the [lovely ones?] days and that sort of thing, he had a little house very near Pinewood. And my sister and I, (Tess, the other sister) went to see him. And he was getting very frail at that time. He got very ill for some years. And I remember...and he couldn't...with his hands...open a tonic bottle. I always very shocked by this, really. Had no sort of guts left - amazing.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** But he kept on. He kept on doing some big films, too.

**Sidney Cole:** That must have been the period perhaps when I heard him on television some time, being interviewed, and he said there was an awful moment when he was losing his memory, couldn't remember his lines. And he had to call the whole company together at the National and say, "Look, I've got this problem." Which is a terrifying thing for an actor.

**Carmen Dillon:** Terrifying. I've got a book of his, about his acting, behind there, which is beautifully done. And he admits it a lot. His memory would go completely, and people didn't understand, and they couldn't believe it - for him, because he was so clever and so good, that he always remembered everything. It's just behind you. Oh it means turning round, don't bother. It's a red book, with Olivier written on the outside there.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah well we'll look at it afterwards.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes all right.

**Sidney Cole:** Olivier, well that's a nice - that's a great thing isn't I find, and obviously you do, that one looks back at people that you very much enjoyed working with.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you know someone - you must have met someone who helped me a great deal and I was great friends with - Thorold Dickinson?

**Carmen Dillon:** Who?

**Sidney Cole:** Thorold Dickinson.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh Thorold Dickinson. Yes. I had terrible battles with Thorold Dickinson [laughs].

**Sidney Cole:** Did you? What on?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. I don't know. I always got against him somehow. In arguments, that's all. I'd immediately say, "Oh, Thorold Dickinson." [with a tone of dislike] [laughs]

**Sidney Cole:** Did you actually work with him on any of his pictures?

**Carmen Dillon:** Uh, no. I seemed to meet him an awful lot on the discussions what we were going to do, what we were not going to do.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, yes. His wife actually was an architect - Joanna.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes. I do remember. Oh he's probably a very nice chap. But I don't know, I came up against him a few times [SC laughs].

**Sidney Cole:** You didn't ever work for David Lean did you?

**Carmen Dillon:** [emphatic] No!

**Sidney Cole:** Ah, why do you say no in that tone?

**Carmen Dillon:** Because I'm very glad I didn't, because I didn't like him. And I didn't approve of him, and I think he did a lot of - he made some wonderful films but they had some very bad patches in them. And he wasted money like sand, and I think that's bad. He's a very clever chap. And very attractive man altogether. Very odd.

**Sidney Cole:** And maybe - it's interesting that, it's gossip I suppose in a way. But still, it helps to understand, for anybody who wanted to know more about the person or life of someone. I recently met, in the last year or so, two of his ex-wives - Kay Walsh and Ann Todd, and when I mentioned David they both had the same sort of reaction, that he wasn't an easy person to get on with or to live.

**Carmen Dillon:** No, I'm sure not.

**Sidney Cole:** When he became a director I think that's the case because I knew him mainly when we were both editors together at Denham, and that was different I suppose.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** But there we are. So, anything else?

**Carmen Dillon:** Who else were your number one editors that you enjoyed working with or at?

**Sidney Cole:** Well there was someone who became - I didn't work with, but I knew when I started, I started being an editor at one of those Elstree studios you weren't particularly fond of, BIP. It was very good because in a way it taught me what not to do. You know what I mean, you may have had that experience working on those quickies, for instance, which probably showed

you not so much what to do as what not to do. And I had that. And there, there was a very nice person called Leslie Norman, who afterwards became a director...

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes, hmmm.

**Sidney Cole:** ...and he was fine. But the main person was a person you said you didn't particularly go for, was Thorold Dickinson, because I worked as his assistant in the cutting rooms, and he taught me the basis of my craft. And I don't know whether you have someone that you felt...?

**Carmen Dillon:** Well I was myself devoted to Reggie Beck.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes of course, yes, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** He was lovely.

**Sidney Cole:** Because he cut Henry V didn't he?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes he did. But the last time I saw him it was just before whatshisname, the very clever director who I worked with a lot and I can't remember now [laughs]... Oh!

**Sidney Cole:** Oh - English director?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes. Very much so. He died about three years ago or something. I met Reggie last at his...

**Sidney Cole:** Michael Powell?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmmm?

**Sidney Cole:** Do you mean Michael Powell?

**Carmen Dillon:** No. I didn't, no. I never worked with him. Great admiration for him. I nearly did. I was to do a film with him, we worked very much on it, and then it was dropped.

**Sidney Cole:** Ah.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh what's the name? He was this director - very clever. He was pushed out of Hollywood because they said he was a whatnot, you know...

**Sidney Cole:** A Communist?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. So he came over here and did a lot of very good films, films like Accident...

**Sidney Cole:** Oh, Joe Losey.

**Carmen Dillon:** Losey, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Joe Losey.

**Carmen Dillon:** Well I enjoyed working with Losey. He's very difficult, really was - awkward man, but very, very nice I think.

**Sidney Cole:** Well that was because he was so determined on getting things exactly as he wished them.

**Carmen Dillon:** And very interesting too.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. So you enjoyed working with him?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Did you work with him at all?

**Sidney Cole:** No, I knew him but I didn't actually work with him.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Strange man.

**Sidney Cole:** You mentioned Accident - that was a film of his you worked on?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** And you worked on other pictures of his?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Yes it's interesting. But - it's interesting, you say he was difficult and yet you like working with him?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, I liked - don't you rather enjoy working with difficult people, unless you really dislike them...

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** It's something to get your teeth into, you know?

**Sidney Cole:** Yes it's a challenge I suppose, yes. Oh well, yes. He did die didn't he - Joe?

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** Yes, he has died, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** I was trying to think of something else that I meant to ask you.

**Carmen Dillon:** It's just as well if you don't, I've got a dreadful memory!

**Sidney Cole:** Ah well. No, no, you haven't.

**Carmen Dillon:** I never forget some things.

**Sidney Cole:** You'll remember all sorts of things after we've gone probably.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** What I was going to ask you was - which we ask all our interviewees - I assume that there isn't anything else you would rather have done if you hadn't become an art director or designer?

**Carmen Dillon:** No, no. I got ill rather a lot. I missed a lot.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh really?

**Carmen Dillon:** Then we had - my other sister and I, had a little house, after my other sister died, in Hove. We didn't mean to go and live there, but we couldn't afford living in London any more. And I go and slip, fall down all the stairs, every single stair, and broke all my legs, everything.

**Sidney Cole:** It was soon after that I spoke to you, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** That reminds me though, what I was going to ask you, which was what you were telling me which I didn't know before we started the interview - about your family being the Dillon's the booksellers?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Tell me about that. I mean you've told me something about it, but tell me again about how your sister started the whole thing.

**Carmen Dillon:** She was going down - no, she was working on another thing, a sort of charity thing, and she was going down the street and she saw this little bookshop, and went in and asked, "Would you like to sell it?" And it looked as if it was going to pieces...

**Sidney Cole:** Is this the one in Gower Street?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmm?

**Sidney Cole:** This was the one in Gower Street?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. And he said, "Yes," if she wanted it, he'd sell it to her for eight hundred pounds. And she went home, and she saw my father, who was very nice and very good, and he

saved all the money he had. And he gave her quite a lot of money, and a friend as well, and she bought it. And she opened it. And everyone said, "Oh it won't go in this part of the world. It's silly, nonsensical." It was near the - what's the big government thing? Very near that corner?

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** There's the university...

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, it was used during the War, you know. And also very near University College.

**Carmen Dillon:** No, not University College, not the other one round the corner. No I mean the big modern thing.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes I know the thing you mean.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes. And anyway, a lot of them used to use her shop, and they got very friendly. And eventually they - when there was a run of shops to go, they said, would she take it on? And she said, "Yes." And everyone said, "It's silly because a book shop won't go in this part of the world." And, "It isn't enough and she's not tough enough." They were quite wrong, she was very tough. And she got it, and it went on and on and on and on and on, and a few years later this chap came along and bought it up and there it is. But even that, without - she got up to the million mark on her little shop.

**Sidney Cole:** Really?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. Which - this is the one that was bombed. And so I helped the move. They moved over the road to another shop with the same signs.

**Sidney Cole:** But they still kept the Dillon name.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** It became quite a household word didn't it? I mean Dillon's was synonymous with a good bookshop.

**Carmen Dillon:** It is now. Everywhere you ring up somebody, and they say, "Oh by the way, they've got a new Dillon's bookshop..." All over the place.

**Sidney Cole:** They have one near me in Ealing.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, they've just taken over. But I gather she didn't make enormous amounts of money out of it.

**Carmen Dillon:** Una? No. She made more than everyone said she would make. And she was very...I haven't got the thing here about it, but she made a lot. Everybody was very pleased, excited, but she didn't want to carry on forever, you know?

**Sidney Cole:** No, no.

**Carmen Dillon:** She carried on, and soon after she was retiring age, of course she was quite deaf by then. But she was...[interruption]

**Sidney Cole:** We'll stop recording for the moment, we're getting towards the end...[cut]

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** Had it changed at all from when you first...?

**Sidney Cole:** Are you recording?

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** ...when you first started?

**Carmen Dillon:** I don't know. I hear a little bit again because John Box, who I see quite a lot, he's working again and comes in and chats. And he doesn't find it to be changed at all somehow. He's working in Pinewood and no.

**Sidney Cole:** I think it's probable that your department, the art department has changed less than others...

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, very probably, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** ...because what you use is very much the same. Whereas the whole camera set-up has changed.

Sound recordists: And the sound as well.

**Sidney Cole:** ...and sound as well has undergone so many technical innovations. And cutting too really - everything. But basically the art department is using the same thing, or being asked to do the same things, like finding locations and so on.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, quite true.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** I was thinking now, especially with television, they have multiple cameras and you have to cope with it. And you've got to know the lens angles to get the height right, and whether the new zoom lenses have made any difference. And also the special effects. Were you occupied with special effects at all?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Like back projection and rear projection and so on - a lot of those sort of special effects probably take the place of other things, basic things...



Sound recordists: [indecipherable] and roofs which put on are artificially with some of the cameras used. Because that was very tricky getting the perspective right.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Do you remember a thing called - David Rawnsley, you remember David Rawnsley, the art director? He invented a...

**Carmen Dillon:** Rawnsley? Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes - invented a thing called Independent Frame. Do you remember that?

**Carmen Dillon:** He what?

**Sidney Cole:** He invented a process called Independent Frame...

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes, yes, I do.

**Sidney Cole:** ...you know, which everybody disliked. I don't think even other art directors liked it. Do you remember it?

**Carmen Dillon:** No, I don't remember what it was about. I remember the term.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, well what it was, he in effect designed the set-ups, and built the set, which meant that the director virtually had to accommodate himself to what the art director had laid out.

**Carmen Dillon:** I wouldn't like that if I were a director at all!

**Sidney Cole:** No. You wouldn't like it even as an art director probably.

**Carmen Dillon:** No.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** And there's also another process - travelling matte - where you foreground the... Did you have to build any extra sets to...?

**Carmen Dillon:** I've sort of stopped thinking about it that way rather, you know? I have too many gaps.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, one does, I know. And things which - the whole world, the film world has changed a great deal since our day.

**Carmen Dillon:** I think things like when all sorts of types of shapes of things - I don't think really got in your head really solidly, you know, you didn't mind too much. I've no wish at all - I mean well I've stopped for some time - to go back into the film industry at all.

**Sidney Cole:** No?

**Carmen Dillon:** No.

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** They're not like they used to be.

**Carmen Dillon:** No, no, they're not at all.

**Sidney Cole:** I suppose you did a lot of location finding?

**Carmen Dillon:** A lot of location finding, yes. More than location work! [laughs]

**Sidney Cole:** And did you find the sort of thing - the sort of thing that would interest you, and you must have had occasion to go into - was, sometimes you needed to - the unit couldn't go back to its original location in a certain town...

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** ...the instance I'm quoting is the north of England, on Merseyside. And when we came back to Ealing we needed another shot. And it was unbelievably difficult to find a house in or around Ealing or anywhere in London, that would match something up in Merseyside.

**Carmen Dillon:** Nice job though, trying to find things like that.

**Sidney Cole:** Because the whole style of building was unbelievable different.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you have any occasion like that, that you remember?

**Carmen Dillon:** I'll tell you who I do hear and see of quite a bit now - Edward Fox.

**Sidney Cole:** Oh yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Who did the shooting of de Gaulle, but he didn't shoot him.

**Sidney Cole:** That's right, The Day of the Jackal.

**Carmen Dillon:** Day of the Jackal, yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Nice actor, very clever actor. But I knew him in several things before that.

**Sidney Cole:** I thought you were about to say something connected with this question of matching location to...?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, I was just thinking of trying to find that location, which we did. Not the same location, but I do agree about this thing, you can't just walk...

**Sidney Cole:** Did you do Day of the Jackal?

**Carmen Dillon:** Hmm?

**Sidney Cole:** You didn't do Day of the Jackal?

**Carmen Dillon:** No I didn't. I didn't because I was on - what was the one before? The Norfolk one that...

**Sidney Cole:** Oh, I know the one you mean, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** ...when they all went to see each other - 'The Visitors' or something.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes I know the one you mean, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** And...

**Unidentified Sound Recordist:** 'Eagle Always Lands'?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, the name's gone. Where they all go across, and the woman sent a message in to the farmer and...

**Sidney Cole:** That's right, yes, yes. I know the one you mean.

**Carmen Dillon:** I forget. I know it though.

**Sidney Cole:** I know Edward Fox. I knew his father James Fox, when he was ten years old he was in a picture I did at Ealing.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Did you know their mother, Angela?

**Carmen Dillon:** No, no.

**Sidney Cole:** Charming lady.

Sound Recordists: Can we just pause and...?

**Carmen Dillon:** Very nice, and very clever.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** OH that's a silly thing I can't remember the name of that film. They were visiting each other. Not 'The Visitors'...

**Sidney Cole:** ...and the boy got into difficulty because he carried the message, and he was the innocent go-between - Was it called The Go-Between?

**Carmen Dillon:** It was called The Go-Between, thank you. [Break in recording resumes with CD in mid-anecdote].... "He's frightfully good. Do you think you might take him to the Jackal?" And he said, "Well I'm going to have a try." And he did, so he got it. So I'm in the Gods' good books!

**Sidney Cole:** Yes. Recording? Yes, well I think it was brilliant because Edward wasn't all that well known at that time. And that was exactly the kind of person that you needed, Fred Zinnemann needed for what was supposed to be an anonymous part, although oddly enough it was the star part. And of course it helped Edward enormously didn't it? I mean that made him, I think, as a lead.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes.

**Sidney Cole:** Well, I think I'm going to leave you probably now to...

**Carmen Dillon:** Well I hope you haven't been too tired?

**Sidney Cole:** No, no. I hope you haven't been too tired, which is more to the point. [laughs]

**Carmen Dillon:** No. I do get tired very quickly. It's - ever since my - I never got my knee-caps right and that sort of thing, and they're so stiff, everything's so stiff.

**Sidney Cole:** Do you get to move around? You use a frame do you?

**Carmen Dillon:** Do you want to use the phone?

**Sidney Cole:** No, no. I say do you use a frame to get around?

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh yes. Oh yes. I don't walk without that. Two sticks I did get to, but I can't do it now, I have to use the Zimmer.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** I have a very patient doctor thank God.

**Sidney Cole:** Good.

**Carmen Dillon:** Who is very nice.

**Sidney Cole:** Well, is there anything you would like to say?

**Carmen Dillon:** No. Thank you for coming. I'm sorry not to be very informative.

**Sidney Cole:** Well it's difficult, as we were saying, it's very difficult to remember dates and things. But there's a lot of very interesting things. And if you should feel that you've remembered things that you'd like to say, just ring up and we'll come down. Happy to come down again and record some more memories.

**Carmen Dillon:** Well I'm very glad to have met you because I had quite a different visual thing of you because I thought you were down in Dorset, up on the Downs!

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs] Well actually that's a psychic thing in a way I suppose, because Dorset is probably my favourite county. It's where my daughter went to school when she was a girl, and I think it's a wonderful county anyhow. All that about Hardy, his poetry I love.

**Carmen Dillon:** Well there's the Leslie Howard connection.

**Sidney Cole:** And the Leslie Howard connections too, yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** As I say, I had your name, and I thought of Leslie lying in his deckchair on the downs. And the spitfire going over the top!

**Sidney Cole:** Well okay then. Thank you very much.

**Carmen Dillon:** Thank you very much.

**Sidney Cole:** It's really a great pleasure.

**Carmen Dillon:** And if I remember the name of that chap...

**Sidney Cole:** ...give me a ring.

**Carmen Dillon:** It'll take me a long time!

**Sidney Cole:** Yes.

**Carmen Dillon:** I'll get the small boy who's been down to Waterloo to find all about...

**Sidney Cole:** You'll remember...

**Carmen Dillon:** When it mentioned [indecipherable] to get out - what do you call it? Losing everything now! Thackeray's book about - which has a lot of...

**Sidney Cole:** Thackeray's book?

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes, Thackeray's book about - the war is in Thackeray's book...'Vanity Fair'.

**Sidney Cole:** Vanity Fair yes, I was going to say Becky Sharp as it's sometimes called.

**Carmen Dillon:** Yes. That's all right, that's made a circle.

**Sidney Cole:** Yes, good. Well I see your memory is getting better even during the course of this interview.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh no! [laughs] Not really. Is yours?

**Sidney Cole:** [laughs] No, mine is...I find that there are the most extraordinarily gaps. I have to do what one does sometimes trying to solve a crossword, which is to say, "Now, is it a, b, c, d..." go right through the alphabet until you hit on the initial letter. That works surprisingly well sometimes.

**Carmen Dillon:** Oh well. I won't today. Do it tomorrow!

**Sidney Cole:** Okay my dear, we're going to leave you.