

Chili Bouchier

Chili Bouchier (1909-1999) was a British film actress, after working as a model for Harrods, she won a *Daily Mail* competition to become a film star. Her films included *Shooting Stars (1927)*, *The Return of Carole Deane (1938)* and *Dead Lucky (1960)*.

I: 29th of May 1996 we are at BECTU headquarters and it's a great honour and pleasure, a privilege to be interviewing Chilli Bouchier. Chilli welcome to, BECTU

CB: Thank you very much...

I: And, let's plunge straight in.

CB: Yes!

I: Now, since this is the centenary here of cinema, you have been interviewed a great deal as an actress, so maybe rather than repeating your view of how things worked in the studios and some of the camera people and the technicians directors you worked with.

CB: Yes

I: your memories of that time

CB: Right

I: I don't know if you've covered them previously, but anyway let's say start

CB: Not really.... Not... I go back to 1927

I: Right

CB: That's when I started in business...

I: Ok, well let's just cover the very beginning of your career which, I've got that you were born in Hammersmith. It's one tiny point, without being ungallant, which is, that the books give two varying dates for your birth year

CB: Oh!

I: 1909 and 1910

CB: 1909

I: 1909

CB: Yes

I: Some give 1910

CB: Yes

I: Right

CB: So, if I live to the end of the century I shall be practically in the century of

I: Yes

CB: Practically, All but nine.

I: Right

CB: For a few years

I: Yes

CB: So it'd have been

I: Yes indeed

CB: Quite a long time

I: Yes you are a true pioneer. You're christened; your given name is Dorothy.

CB: That's right

I: Right? Curious where the Chilli comes from or came from?

CB: It came from a popular song called 'I love my Chili bom bom'

I: Ahah, right, so that was a little later in life, it wasn't a childhood nickname?

CB: No, It was when I was about 15 or 16

I: Right

CB: When I was working at Harrods

I: Ok

CB: That's when I became nicknamed Chili Bom Bom and then Chili.

I: You have written your autobiography which I've got as *For Dogs and Angels*. Right?

In 1968. Do you cover, I haven't read it so do you cover in that?

CB: Oh, that isn't my autobiography...

I: Is it not?

CB: That's a small book I wrote many years ago

I: Ah. Have you?

CB: The recent one was just launched last well, February. Launched in February this year.

I: Oh, I've missed that so far, I must get that

CB: Oh yes, I've got a copy here

I: Right, okay, well, what I was going to ask was whether you cover in that your origins, you know, your parents...

CB: Oh in the recent book yes

I: You do?

CB: Yes

I: Okay, so we don't need to, to go over..

CB: I should forget *For Dogs and Angels*

I: Ok

CB: That was just a whim,

I: Was it?

CB: Yes

I: Ok, so well should we start, you say you worked at Harrods?

CB: Yes

I: As what, what was called a mannequin in those days, yes?

CB: Yes

I: And, how did that come about?

CB: Oh, I don't know I just arrived at Harrods and asked for a job and got one.

I: And you were what? Seventeen or something?

CB: No I was 15, when I joined Harrods

I: Ok. So you left school at what age?

CB:14

I: Yeah. Well most people did, I think, in those days

CB: Well, No, much to the disgust of the headmistress. She said if you don't finish your education you'll get nowhere in life. Well, three year later she was sitting in front of me in the cinema watching one of my films, so, it just goes to show.

I: Was that an ambition?

CB: Oh, right from a child, I knew that

I: You knew what you wanted to do?

CB: Yes because in the First World War mother used to take my brother and myself to the cinema every Saturday and I became enchanted with films, and I saw all the big ones

I: Yes

CB: *Intolerance* and all those wonderful old silents. Fell in love with Rudolph Valentino¹ all and I was determined that that is what I was going to do with my life.

I: So the Harrods job in a way was?

CB: It was a step towards it for me

I: Right

CB: It was a glamorous job and wearing lovely clothes and things

I: How difficult was it to break into films? We are talking now what, the middle to late twenties.

CB: 1927. Yes. I had no difficulty at all. I was terribly, terribly lucky.

I: Right, How did you go about it? You were discovered?

CB: Sort of. Sort of discovered. I left Harrods and was looking for a new job in the evening papers and it said 'we make film stars' 5/3 guineas which was ridiculous. But, I knew it was phoney but I went just the same. And I joined the film stars school and the second day I was there when I came out there was a man sitting at the top of the stairs at a desk and then he was with a very tall young man called Widgey Newman². I don't know if you remember?

I: Oh! Good Lord, well not I but I know the name.

CB: You've heard of his prom? He was making a commercial, a film commercial the following day and he gave me the part. I had to be at Hendon aerodrome at 9 o'clock in the morning in a summer dress and that was the beginning. Mother came as my chaperone and I got 3 guineas, mother got a guinea and we thought "my goodness there's

¹ Rudolph Valentino (1895-1926) was an Italian actor whose films included *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *The Eagle* (1925)

² Widgey Newman (1900-1944) was an English film director whose films included *Heroes of the Mine* (1932) and *Men Without Honour* (1939)

a lot of money in this film business". And Fanny he took me to an agent at Bramint in Shaftesbury Avenue, and from then on I never looked back 'cause unfortunately for him Yagov's partner rather fell for me, or, in fact, I became engaged to him.

I: With your Newman's partner? Do you mean...

CB: Bramble's. There was John Payne and Max Rocha, he was the younger partner and he fell in love with me and, God he worked very hard and in no time at all I was well away and at seventeen.

I: Right. I'm curious about with Newman; do you have any clear memories of him?

CB: Oh Yes! He was very, had these terrifically long legs, enormously long legs and he was very naughty at first because he used to come and bring mother flowers and chocolates and it wasn't mother he was after..

I: He was wooing you too?

CB: He was wooing the two, that's why he said, asked me to go away with him which of course was ridiculous, my parents wouldn't have allowed it and I'd already had a bit of trouble with men at Harrods so. I said, 'yes, I will, might come away with you if you'll introduce me to a film agent'. So, that's how it started. But he did come to my parents to say 'Dorothy, Dorothy will, will never make and actress. Much better for her to become my, my secretary.' So for two weeks I rushed up and down all the streets after these long legs, try to keep up with Widgey Newman and we sat and watched Charlie Chaplin³ shorts and I made copious notes in a book which I'm sure Widgey Newman never used but unfortunately, well fortunately for me he didn't bother me anymore because he broke his neck falling down some stairs or something..

³ Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) was an English actor, whose films included *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940)

I: Well he continued, he didn't die did he?

CB: Oh, later, yes...

I: Of that?

CB: Oh yes!

I: Oh I didn't realise. Yes

CB: Oh, he was killed, yes.

I: I think Roy Boulting⁴'s first job was with Widgey Newman and he is very funny about him...so that would be

CB: Oh he was a funny fellow (laughs).

I: Yes (laughs), so you were much sought after by the sound of it.

CB: Well, you know, I didn't go straight into, into big parts, I mean, but my. I think it's interesting that my first part in front of the camera was not in a silent, it was in what I call a soundy. I couldn't call it a talky because there were little shorts. There were made at a little studio in Clapham

I: Oh yes...

CB: Clapham Junction

I: Right

CB: Run by Vivian Van Damm⁵.

I: Yes...

CB: They were called 'Phonofilms'

I: Yes

⁴ Roy Boulding. The Boulting Brothers were English film makers John (1913-1985) and Roy (1913-2001). Their films included *Brighton Rock* (1947) (Directed by John) and *Thunder Rock* (1942) (Directed by Roy). Their film production company Charter Film Productions was set up in 1937.

⁵ Vivian Van Damm (1889-1960) ran the Windmill Theatre in London from 1932-1960

CB: And an American singer sang the songs ‘Ain’t she sweet’ and ‘Drifting and Dreaming’ and I danced around in the background and I didn’t say anything but I just danced and there were shown in some funny little cinemas, they were on, they were on, they weren’t, weren’t, they were on disks, you know.

I: Right.

CB: My mother and father used to rush all over London to see them and they came back and they didn’t know they weren’t synchronised, that they were out of synch, but they said ‘well, the voice didn’t match the sound’ I thought ‘Oh dear oh dear’ (laughs) but after that of course I went into silence, so I think it’s quite unique that my first was, you know, ‘soundy’

I: Right, indeed, was that a Widgey, before Widgey Newman?

CB: No, that’s after, that was

I: So you’d done the background work?

C: That was the first job that I got as an actress

I: As an actress, right and that predates then *A Woman in Pawn* which is the first one I’ve got for you?

CB: Well, no, there was the second one, that’s interesting, because it was for, Anthony Asquith’s⁶ first production called *Shooting Stars*. He produced it and wrote it but A.V. Bramble⁷ directed it. This was a very, very good story, it could be made again, it was about the inside., about a film being made inside a film and the intrigue that was going on between the leading man and the man in the other film and we were all engaged as sort of

⁶ Anthony Asquith (1902-1969) was a British film director. His directorial credits include *The Browning Version* (1951), *The Way to the Stars* (1945) and *Pygmalion* (1938).

⁷ A. V Bramble (1887-1963) was an English actor and director. His acting credits include *Her Luck in London* (1914) and he directed films including *The Rotters* (1921)

max scenic bathing girls and I was, I was chosen by A.V. Bramble as one and then about half a dozen of us we were all called up Ramlins' office, called, we were all called up to Ramlin's office to see, to see Anthony Asquith and he turned me down (laughs).

Everybody else he chose but he turned me down but I took no notice I mean, at seventeen and as keen as I was to get into pictures I'd completely ignored it and joined the other girls who were sent over to Burman's, costumiers to get fitted for their costumes. I joined them and chatted away and we got to the salon Mr A. V. Bramble was standing at the end and he said "where is that little Chili girl?" I said "Here I am Mr Bramble" and he said "Come along dear, come and get fitted for your costume", so, I was in again and I never knew what Anthony Asquith thought when he saw me on the set but he didn't say anything. So that was really the, a good beginning because Mr Bramble said "Chili, I'll give you some little bits to do with this and when I get a decent reading part you shall have it" and, and although I did one or two things in between when the time came there was a decent part for me. He kept his word and that was in the film of Edgar Wallace's story *Chick*

I: Right, ok. Now, he is, I fear, a rather forgotten name, what, what can you tell us about A. V. Bramble?

CB: Oh he was a very, very much to the fore in those days

I: Yes

CB: He did, he did a lot of films yes, yes. You don't, you don't know him?

I: How did he direct?

CB: He directed.

I: No, how did he direct? Was, was he a meticulous director, did he give actors a great deal of direction?

CB: Yes he did, I was very pleased because apart from, as you say *A Woman in Pawn*, that was a small part which led to, when it was shown, this is before I made *Chick*, the newspapers said ‘this girl resembles Clara Bow⁸. Have we got an English Clara Bow? Have we got an English ‘it girl?’ Well, papers like to put a label on you and they put a label on me and it stuck you see I became England’s ‘it girl’ because I looked a bit saucy I suppose

I: Yes. What, what were your impressions going into a film studio for the first time, was it water off the duck’s back or did you take to it instantly?

CB: Oh Yes

I: You, you were home?

CB: I was home, I was so thrilled. I can’t remember in those days, approaching the studio in the morning, crack of dawn, didn’t matter what the weather was like cold or snow or what, this great excitement to go to what I called my factory of making dreams, that’s how I looked upon it. Anglia’s studios inside - it was fairyland to me.

I: Right, where the film was shot, the A. V. Bramble film shoot. Do you remember? Was it Cricklewood?

CB: Cricklewood for the interiors and Cromer Sands for the exteriors and we, as I say we all rushed around in our bathing costumes freezing cold (laughs) on the Cromer Sands (laughs)

⁸ Clara Bow (1905-1965) was an American actress and “It Girl”. Her films included *Mantrap* (1926) and *Wings* (1927)

I: All right, no, you probably know that Asquith was connected with ACT for many many years as president. What are your memories of him? That was a very young Anthony I suppose?

CB: He was very young Anthony Asquith and he had very little to do with the picture. He used to come on the set sometimes and I had hardly met him. He, he's, I suppose he conducted things from behind the scenes. But I mean he left it to Mr Bramble on the set and I didn't know until recently that he had actually written the story 'cause he showed it at the British Film Institute recently and he's showing it again soon somewhere else. I'm always being asked to go because strangely enough my, my autobiography is called *Shooting Star* and they seem to think that I am the star of *Shooting Stars*. I have to say I'm hardly in it I was only a little girl seventeen fleeting about in the background. You notice me, certainly you notice me, I mean I saw it and then I'd forgotten what we did but definitely I can be seen but I have to explain that to people. They think I was the star of it. I didn't name this, because I didn't know that *Shooting Stars* had been kept, you know renovated.

I: Had survived?

CB: Renovated, renovated

I: Yes

CB: But obviously it's a very popular one now.

I: Whom, whom did you play with? I've got Brian Aherne and...

CB: Brian Ahern⁹ and Donald Calthrop¹⁰

⁹ Brian Aherne (1902-1986) was an English actor whose films included *Sylvia Scarlett* (1935) and *Juarez* (1939)

¹⁰ Donald Calthrop (1888-1940) was an English actor whose films included *Blackmail* (1929) and *Scrooge* (1935)

I: Donald Calthrop and Wally Patch¹¹ also were in it. Did you have scenes with him or

CB: I didn't have any scenes with Brian Ahern but with Donald Calthrop yes. He was playing a sort of max in it funny man and we were the background and, oh yes we had, I had lots of scenes with him. But it was a very good story, a story that I don't think it could be made now because it was really about the Hays office. Do you remember the Hays office?

I: Oh yes

CB: The Hays office who used to clamp down on many things and if somebody got involved in a scandal they were they were out, as you know and this is what it was about. It's a girl what was her name- Annette Benson¹². Annette Benson was married to Brian Ahern, they were actors, and she was having an affair with Donald Calthrop and it all ended up pretty sadly. With her being, you know, left out and it was, a very good story indeed. But as I say it doesn't happen anymore, I mean, if everybody got suspended through being connected with a scandal these days there would be hardly anybody left to make pictures wouldn't be (laughs)

I: The previous year Asquith had spent six months in Hollywood so probably that was

CB: That's it

I: The origin of

CB: Yes

I: Of the script

CB: That's right

¹¹ Wally Patch (1888-1970) was an English actor whose films included *Crime Unlimited* (1935) and *Sparrows Can't Sing* (1963)

¹² Annette Benson (1885-?) was an English actress whose films included *Lovers in Araby* (1924) and *Shooting Stars* (1928)

I: You didn't have a chance to talk to him at all about that

CB: I rather kept out of his way when I saw him (laughs) because I didn't know what; I didn't know what he thought about me being in the film after all. But I mean, really, out of all the girls, I mean, I'm not saying, I'm not being, what's the word, egotistical but, of all the girls that were in that picture I was the only one that ever made it

I: Yes indeed, he missed a bit there didn't he?

CB: Well, he did, yes (laughs)

I: Yes, but, do you recall that interview you had with him, was he imperious or

CB: No, he was.

I: He was a very polite man, wasn't he?

CB: Very polite, yes, very quiet. No, no, he just, we just lined up. But I think it was a half a dozen of us and he didn't say anything but he told my agent that he didn't want me.

I: He did a great deal on *Shooting Stars*, you know, he was a stuntman, he worked on the editing, he worked on the script, he worked on the camera, it's said. I don't know. Do you remember that?

CB: No I don't think he worked on the camera, no

I: Well, as an assistant, I don't mean actually lighting

CB: He was so very rarely on the set. He used to just sit and watch oh, I'm sure he did plenty- a stuntman?

I: It's said he did stunts on it. Now, you know how it is with film history that's (laughs) usually a great deal of fabrication or mis-memory but I'm curious if you had any recollection of that

CB: Oh no, I mean there were lots of stunts to be done down on Cromer beach, Donald Calthrop, I know, had to rush down what, the cliffs, on his bicycle in this funny road and there was a stuntman to that but it wasn't (laughs)

I: It wasn't Puffin?

CB: no, it certainly wasn't a he wasn't even in Cromer with us he didn't come with us.

I: No, no that's interesting that's a correction...

CB: Oh I don't believe it.

I: For his biography.

CB: I don't believe any of the books now, I mean in a way that's another thing. The film books now they don't list half of the films that have been made and it's very embarrassing when people say "Oh, I bought somebody's book about all the films and you're not in it" It's very upsetting. I mean even nice pictures, big pictures, like big Carnival picture that I made with Herbert Wilcox¹³. That's not mentioned these days; it's too far back I suppose...

I: Yes, I suppose one of the problems is there are so few people who saw them at the time and therefore have clear memories, It's just received notions handed down and that's true of even later periods. The great war time films of the forties for example are so often misremembered by people who just hear the stories about them and after all the publicity activity in the film industry is always been a great fabricator of, of anecdotes usually without any basis in reality

CB: Yes, yes, it makes it interesting I suppose

¹³ Herbert Wilcox (1890-1977) was a British producer and director, his films included *Victoria the Great* (1937) and *Odette* (1950)

I: Right, now does that exhaust *Shooting Stars* do you think, from your point of view, I'm sure there is a great deal more in your book but, any other memories? What was Cricklewood like as a studio to work in?

CB: Oh it was all right I think, yes

I: Busy?

CB: Oh dear a busy studio, yes

I: Right,

CB: Yes, yes, and of course fairly, fairly close to London, I mean some of them were so far out there, like Beaconsfield, it was like that, and I lived then at Roehampton and it was a long, long way to go every day

I: Your called would have been at what time?

CB: It would have been at 7.30 in the make up room

I: Yeah, yeah

CB: So I must have been up at 5 o'clock in the morning to get from Roehampton to...

I: By public transport?

CB: Oh, public transport until I saved up enough to buy a car, yes...

I: Mind you, there was an awful lot, a great deal more in the way of public transport; it was more reliable in those days, wasn't it?

CB: I imagine so. I can't remember ever having any trouble.

I: No

CB: Except that the long distances but at 17 you don't care, you know?

I: No, especially if you're dedicated and involved as you clearly were

CB: Yes

I: So, you have an agent, is he, are they active in getting you work, were they very successful? They were pushing you by the sound of it.

CB: Oh, Max was yes, yes. I was very very lucky I had no trouble at all

I: You went from one thing to another

CB: Yes I did

I: Right. Any idea of what you were paid?

CB: Oh, I don't know about weekly, but, I think as it was my first picture, I think it was just a guinea a day.

I: Right

CB: On *Shooting Stars*

I: Was it mostly daily rates in those days or?

CB: Well, it would have been for a small part like that. When you played a bigger part it would be a weekly

I: Right

CB: I can't remember.

I: And, negotiable or would have been more or less the standard payment?

CB: Oh no, it'd be negotiable.

I: Right

CB: Yes

I: So where did one guinea a day figure in, in the scheme of things?

CB: Well I think it was, I think it was more or less extra pay, I think extra staff that got a guinea a day, but of course I loved it, I mean we worked six days a week so I got six guineas (laughs)

I: did you have to be subsidised by your parents at all, are you still living at home presumably?

CB: No, no, no, no, I was making enough money then. Don't forget that, I mean, six guineas in 1927 ...

I: A lot of money...

CB: It was a nice wage that would be probably more than my father was earning and it was certainly more than I earned at Harrods which was 15 shillings a week (laughs)

I: Right

CB: I felt I was in the money

I: How did you spend it?

CB: Well, the expenses started to go up as soon as I, naturally, and of course a lot of times, if we'd worked very late at the studio and I arrived back at one of the London, one of the London stations late at night I'd take a taxi all the way, all the way to, to Roehampton so I was spending a lot of money on transport..

I: Did you have to maintain a considerable wardrobe? A varied wardrobe?

CB: I started to, yes. I started to.

I: Right. Was Harrods any help in that respect? Did you (laughs) did you?

CB: I went back, I went back to Harrods for my clothes, I mean, to buy my own clothes...

I: Yes

CB: And also for the film

I: Did they give you a break? Did they give you a discount at Harrods?

CB: No, because I wasn't paying.

I: Oh, I see.

CB: The studio was paying.

I: Right

CB: The only, only wonderful thing that happened was when, when I got married in 1929 and I went back to the Small Ladies department, that's where I worked and picked a wonderful gown there, it was a Paris model for 80 guineas and my, my buyer who was a lovely lady, Miss Richards, she let me have it for 40 guineas as a wedding present. So that's the only time I really had anything from Harrods.

I: That's still a great deal of money...

CB: 40 guineas was a lot of money

I: It Well I mean, at least 10 times, 20 times

CB: Nowadays yes. But I was fortunate with there, with the Small Ladies because there was one particular size which was just perfect for me, I didn't, didn't have to be altered at all and, so I just ordered everything there and people thought 'Oh, dear, you know, somebody's paying' and the only people that were paying for it was the studio but nobody knew that they thought, they thought that I probably had a sugar daddy or something. (laughs)

I: I have *A Woman in Pawn* as your first film which is clearly wrong so, let's get on to now *A Woman in Pawn* now, was that your second major appearance?

CB: *A Woman in Pawn* was, came between, between *Shooting Stars* and a few little bits and pieces which I did...

I: Right

CB: and *Chick*. That was the one when I was noticed as being like Clara Bow you know.

That was made at Gaumont British.

I: Right and some major names on that: Victor Saville¹⁴ was the producer...

CB: He was. And Edwin Greenwood¹⁵ was the director

I: You're right

CB: Gladys Jennings¹⁶, John Stuart¹⁷. John Stuart was a heartthrob in those days, you know?

I: Yes

CB: and Lauderdale Maitland, I think, those, those were the three leading players.

I: This was shot at Shepherds Bush?

CB: Yes

I: I see your cameraman was Baron Ventimiglia¹⁸ who was a very famous cameraman...

CB: Was he?

I: do you remember him?

CB: No, I don't. No, I don't.

I: Ah, he filmed the original Ben Hur

CB: Did he? What was he doing over here then?

I: He came over. He was I guess under contract at Gaumont British

CB: No I don't remember him. Was nationality was he?

¹⁴ Victor Saville (1895-1979) was an English director, producer and screenwriter. His films included *Dark Journey* (1937) and *The Silver Chalice* (1954)

¹⁵ Edwin Greenwood (1895-1939) was a British screenwriter and film director whose *A Woman in Pawn* (1927) and *Tesha* (1928)

¹⁶ Gladys Jennings (1903-1994) was an English actress whose films included *Rob Roy* (1923) and *The Happy Ending* (1925)

¹⁷ John Stuart (1898-1979) was a Scottish actor whose films included *The School for Scandal* (1923) and *We Women* (1925)

¹⁸ Baron Ventimiglia (1883-1973) was an Italian cinematographer whose films included *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) and *The Mountain Eagle* (1926)

I: Italian

CB: Italian, yes

I: There's a great still of him, on the set of *Sailors Don't Care* with the camera which he photographed Ben Hur, actually with. But the interesting thing, this is purely a sidelight, is that standing off in the corner half hidden is David Lean¹⁹ at the age of 19, that was his first job I think, at, at Shepherds Bush

CB: Yes

I: So, you, you might well have encountered David?

CB: I'm absolutely sure that he was either he or the other big one, who was the other big....

I: Carol

CB: Carol Reed²⁰. I'm absolutely sure. In fact Kevin Brownlow²¹ told me that he was on the picture with me as a tea boy or something.

I: Yes, right

CB: Or assistant cameraman or something, and David Lean, and the other one Carol Reed, I think I got a photograph of at Gainsborough,

I: Yes

CB: Behind the camera.

I: Right.

CB: A very lovely capacity, tall, skinny one, yes...

¹⁹ David Lean (1908-1991) was a British film director. His films included *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Brief Encounter* (1945)

²⁰ Carol Reed (1906-1976) was a British film director. His films include *Odd One Out* (1947), *The Third Man* (1949) and *Oliver!* (1968) for which he won an Academy Award for Best Director.

²¹ Kevin Brownlow (1938-) is an English filmmaker and film historian whose work focuses on the preservation of films from the silent era. He won an Academy Honorary Award in 2010.

I: Yes, he also worked at Ealing so it might have been at Ealing that you

CB: No, it was definitely at Gainsborough

I: At Gainsborough?

CB: At either?

I: Islington Poole Street, yeah, right. Well, now, it's a matter of, let's run down the titles of the films and see what memories you have very specifically of the film. We won't as I say duplicate what you've written about or, get into any kind of redundant activity. There is one of two. I've got *Maria Marten* next

CB: Yes

I: at Ideal, was that out at Elstree?

CB: I can't remember. I've got a feeling that was shot at St. Margaret Studios at Twickenham. These were tiny whiny parts that I did while waiting for Mr Bramble to give me my big brake

I: Oh, I see, what one day, two days? That sort of thing?

CB: Yes, I was the gipsy who was murdered in the red barn, a very small part. I did a small part in a film called *Mumsie*, with Pauline Frederick²² who was a big star at the time...

I: Yes

CB: She came over. Herbert Wilcox directed that. And then I did a tiny part in *Down* with Sybil Thorndike²³.

²² Pauline Frederick (1883-1938) was an American film actress whose credits include *Madame X* (1920) and *This Modern Age* (1931)

²³ Sybil Thorndike (1882-1976) was an English stage and screen actress whose films included *Major Barbara* (1941) and *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957)

I: Aha. I couldn't find, I've got *Down* as a title but I couldn't find any detail of it so maybe you could tell us something about *Down*?

CB: Well, I don't know very much about it except that I believe it was not allowed to be shown once it was filmed. I don't know, would it have been,

I: Suppressed. Who knows?

CB: Something to do with German, Germans you see. *Down* it was about. Cybil Thorndike played the famous nurse, you know, what's her name?

I: Nurse Cavell, then was that Wilcox?

CB: Yes

I: Oh how strange it isn't it isn't?

CB: Kevin told me something that he said that wasn't allowed to be shown. I don't know whether it was anti-German, they thought of, I don't know

I: Yeah

CB: I seem to remember, I played a little nurse. I seem to remember that we were in a ward with soldiers and there was a German soldier behind us so, something...there was something... some controversial something rather that wasn't shown. Those were just the little things that I did but all, all very exciting...

I: This is important in a sense because what, was that the first time you worked with Wilcox? Herbert Wilcox?

CB: It was, yes

I: Right, and did you make an impression on him? Or didn't you

CB: No

I: None at all.

CB: Not then (laughs)

I: No, right, so just a couple of days work and that was that

CB: Yes, yes...

I: Dame Cybil played, I know she wasn't then but Thorndike played Nurse Cavell, did she?

CB: Yes and I was terribly impressed with her and her voice because I, I was home trained, I'd never done any stage work and one day she called across the set to her dresser "Darling bring me my powder" and I thought "What a lovely sound" that is 'powder' and I repeated it and I said 'powder' and I thought 'that sounds a little sin and naughty' and I think she was the one that really showed me the way to use the vowels which were very useful later when talkies came

I: What was your natural accent in those days what?

CB: I should think it had a tinge of Fulham in it, which I tried to eliminate. But by the time talkies came I was talking BBC posh like everybody else

I: Well, one had to I suppose, didn't one, the rather accent or the West End accent. Did you consciously, you must have consciously done it, well, did you have lessons? In elocution?

CB: No I didn't, no.

I: How about acting? Did you have any acting lessons?

CB: No, no

I: All God given...

CB: Just took to it as you say. Just took to it completely and utterly as absolutely shilling it was I found anyway...

I: Now this is the, the end of the silent period more or less?

CB: We are getting towards it yes.

I: Right, how was Wilcox as a silent director? He was a rather what, energetic man, wasn't he? And he's still what in his thirties?

CB: He was young yes, yes. No I don't think I really noticed Wilcox during those two pictures. I wasn't in the studios long enough to really know... it was only later on of course that I had dealings with him, he was a very quiet director.

I: Was he? That surprises me.

CB: Oh yes, yes. I mean, when we made *Carnival*, as I said in my book, he liked to film in the Cathedral like calm and I having used to, the mad days of silence when there was a lot of noise going on there would be, there would be sort of background music and mood music to put you in the mood and the director would be giving his instructions and it was all lovely and noisy and it was so quiet on the set. (Laughs)

I: Did they have music?

CB: Sometimes, yes, we had music. We had a little trio to play our music.

I: Right. Did it help?

CB: Oh yes. Not all the studios did, but nearly all and you were allowed to choose your own music

I: Were you? What?

CB: I chose 'Ain't she sweet' or 'Sweets' one of those jolly numbers for, for the funny scenes and songs my mother taught me, it's a very beautiful melody, for the sad scenes and the love scenes.

I: What with violins?

CB: Violin and piano and

I: Bass?

CB: Yes, yes. I mean, they weren't, they weren't wonderful but they put you in the mood.

I: Absolutely

CB: But I always felt, the next day at the rushes without the music and without the voice of the director whispering in your ear telling you what, the emotions he wanted you to convey I felt it all looked rather flat.

I: Yes. Do you remember the silent were the studios noisy or quiet? Did people go about their other business, the stage ends?

CB: Oh there was a bit of lagging and pulling around the camera of cables and things

I: During the shots?

CB: Yes. They weren't that quiet, no, no. That was one of the things one had to learn.

I: Right

CB: For talkies. Everything was very silent.

I: Well, we'll hear about Wilcox I suppose in a while

CB: Later yes

I: Yes, once you are really working with him. Ehm, I am so please then we have identified *Down*. I had next *Palais de Dance* another Gaumont Picture with Maurice Elvey²⁴

CB: Maurice Elvey

I: Is that your next, do you think?

²⁴ Maurice Elvey (1887-1967) was a British film director, and the most prolific director in history. His films included *Maria Marten* (1913), *School for Scandal* (1930) and *You Lucky People* (1955)

CB: Yes it was, yes.

I: I've got them in order of trade show dates which are, so it wouldn't necessarily have been the order of production.

CB: Yes it would have been 1928 we made that.

I: Yes, it was trade-showing in July of '28

CB: Yes

I: Right now, Maurice Elvey was a ranking director at that time

CB: At the time

I: He was indeed

CB: He was, yes, he was

I: So it was a compliment to be cast by him I would imagine?

CB: Yes, oh yes. I think he was with Gaumont British wasn't he? All the time then, I think, because I did another one directly afterwards with him...

I: Kevin can answer that I can't.

CB: Kevin knows everything I told him, "you are a clever dick, you are" he was never...

I: Well, he is a lovely clever dick

CB: Ohoo, of course he

I: No one I admire more than Kevin

CB: Actually, actually Maurice Elvey's nephew was onto me recently to have a little chat with me about Maurice Elvey, he is writing a biography but I don't think Maurice Elvey's known enough now to sell an autobiography, a biography

I: Well, unfortunately that is true of so many...

CB: Well I had so many people recently asking me to help them with memories of uncles or aunts or

I: Yes, they are being rediscovered ... to what extent people, the reading public will be interested in, I don't know

CB: Right, right, yes

I: And it's heartbreaking that people like Freddy Young²⁵, for example has written his autobiography, but, no one will publish it. Unbelievably Kevin had problems finding a producer, a publisher for the David Lean book

CB: I know, publishing is very difficult. Do what I did, I published my own

I: Did you? Ah, that's lovely. I look forward to getting on to that?

CB: (laughs)

I: We'll talk about that. Right, anything about *Palais de Dance* that you would like to?

CB: Oh, it was interesting. It was the story of Mabel Poulton²⁶ and me. We were dance hall hostesses in the days when you could pay whatever it was, five bobs- oh no it couldn't have been as much surely in those days- to dance with us. And that was the main story. Most of it was shot at the Tachenam Palais de Dance...

I: Ah yes

CB: And John Longden²⁷ he was another heartthrob in those days and little Mabel only died last year and left me alone, you see...

I: Was she a friend or a professional rival?

²⁵ Freddy Young (1902-1998) was an English cinematographer, his films included *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965)

²⁶ Mabel Poulton (1904-1994) was an English actress whose films included *Nothing Else Matters* (1920) and *Bed and Breakfast* (1938)

²⁷ John Longden (1900-1971) was a West Indian born English actor, his films included *Children of Chance* (1930) and *Rose of Tralee* (1942)

CB: Oh no, we were never, we weren't rivals. She was so blonde and quite, quite a different character to me. I mean, I was always cast as the naughty girl, you see and she...it was a tragedy that girl because she was a beautiful face and she made, made lovely pictures and then was dropped because of her accent...

I: The transition to sound, right?

CB: She, she had a cockney accent that could not be eradicated. And they dropped her and it's terribly sad because as we were all, as we says, taught to speak BBC posh, nobody was allowed original accents in those days and of course now it's an asset to have an original accent... and if you remember the Betty Balfour²⁸ pictures of the little cockney girl, cockney flower girl...that Betty Balfour did in the silents. If anybody had any sense they would have given them to Mabel as a talkie, it wouldn't have mattered about her accent then. And she'd have been perfect for it. Oh I didn't, I never saw Mabel again but I, I kept up with things and...I think she was over 90 when she died last year, last December I think. So that, and also at the same time Estelle Brody, she went too, last year. Just left me (laughs)

I: Yes, yes. Kevin asked us to send someone to Malta to record her Estelle Brody and unfortunately, we did, but unfortunately she just didn't remember.

CB: Oh, did she live in Malta?

I: She lived in Malta, yes, yes.

CB: I last saw her in Brighton. She...

I: Really?

²⁸ Betty Balfour (1903-1977) was an English actress whose films included *Somebody's Darling* (1925) and *Cinders* (1926)

CB: Oh, quite... oh quite a few years ago. I was playing at the Theatre Royal. She came to see me and she looked absolutely wonderful. But that was quite a few years ago now...

I: She lived in some sort of..

CB: so her brain had gone, had it?

I: Yes. Her memory...

CB: And I think Mabel had to

I: Ah, that I don't know again, Kevin, Kevin could tell us, as he is the expert on all that, you know. Well, tell us about Maurice Elvey.

CB: Oh, he was a nice man

I: Yes?

CB: I enjoyed working with him

CB: Yes. Very competent. Oh dear (laughs)

I: No, it's ok. I'm desperate for a cup of coffee, how's your coffee?

CB: That was fine I won't have another one at the moment, thanks no.

I: Yes, so

CB: You'll edit this of course won't you?

I: No, no, no, no. Well it all goes just the way it is to the National Film Archive.

CB: Ohoo dear (laughs)

I: No don't, our intention is that people in the future will ...find...

CB: Try and get some idea?

I: Yeah, so, I mean, who is to say what is good and what is bad about an interview, you know, it's for someone in the future, maybe 25, 50 years from now to

CB: Wonderful! (laughs)

I: make a decision. It all goes to the National Film Archive.

CB: Yes

I: For preservation.

CB: Yes, well, Kevin did a long, a long video of me for, for his...they only used a couple of snippets out of it but it was a very long one.

I: The recent series?

CB: Yes

I: *The Other Hollywood*

CB: Yes

I: Marvelous, absolutely marvelous

CB: And that's gone to the, in its entirety. So there is a video of me and it was very interesting to see yourself doing one sort of, stopping and Kevin saying "Chilli you didn't say sentences" "Oh, yes, start again". So, it was interesting. So this would be like that, really...

I: It's, it's archival...

CB: Yes

I: Yeah. I don't know what to ask about Maurice Elvey. He'd been an actor in his time

CB: I didn't know that.

I: Yeah, a very good actor, apparently. And came late to the cinema, well comparatively late, I suppose.

CB: Oh, he wasn't very old at the time; I wouldn't have said, I would have said 45ish

I: Well, like so many turn of the century people, I think he was born in the 90s himself wasn't he? I gathered...

CB: I should think so

I: So he was a young man but nevertheless late in terms of his professional experience..

CB: Yes, yes

I: They had contempt for cinema at the beginning

CB: Right. I know that, yes

I: Yeah, right. So, was he very helpful as a director?

CB: Yes, yes he was. And when we finished, we finished *Palais de Dance* he was going to make a film which was, had the working title of *Rapsies* and had a part for me, I was a Spanish leading lady and he named the part Chili, in the script, after me. He promised me that. It took quite a long time to get going but finally we did it.

I: Was that the first time a part specifically was written for you?

CB: Yes

I: Right, okay. Oh, you must have adored that?

CB: Oh I did, yes.

I: John Longden I see was in it along with Mabel Poulton

CB: Yes

I: Was he at this time already famous, well known, because he was a well known leading man, in the thirties, wasn't he?

CB: Yes, yes. Very handsome, yes.

I: Is he still alive? 'Cause he survived certainly until quite recently I think.

CB: I don't know, I don't know, he, he was interview by Kevin for that recent series but I noticed it was nineteen- something or other. It wasn't recently. It was maybe about 10 years ago.

I: Ah. That is a while ago

CB: He and John Stuart they were both interviewed.

I: He is gone.

CB: I know John is gone, John Stuart. I don't know about John Longden.

I: Which brings us then to *Chick* which is what your first major film...?

CB: Oh no we've passed *Chick* now...

I: Have we passed *Chick*?

CB: Yes.

I: Oh dear, again, now....it's, it's...

CB: Oh wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, *Chick*, .it's '28, yes

I: It's '28 and it was trade-shown in August of '28, so it might have been shot earlier than *Palais de Dance* but it was released later.

CB: Oh dear. I think I've come up. I'm stuck here. No *Chick, Chick, Chick, Chick, Chick*. *Chick* was before *Palais de Dance*, yes

I: It was shot earlier, right?

CB: Yes, it was because on *Chick* I met my future husband who hung around me (laughs) at the set of *Palais de Dance*. He used to come out every day to see me so... as I did say, I met Harry on *Chick* and

I: Okay, well let's talk about *Chick* because that's clearly an important... professionally and personally

CB: Harry was, not an actor, he'd in the navy in the First World War and joined the, the Air Force when it became the Air Force and he had been recently released and he had a

brother Billy Milton²⁹ who was an actor and so he thought he would become one and he was cast as a lounge lizard who I had to vamp in the picture and I took one look at him and fell in love with him.

I: He sounds...

CB: Tall, dark and handsome...

I: He was dashing, was he?

CB: Very dashing and Bramble said 'now, you dance now with the lounge lizard and you are flirting with him', well I was so madly in love with by this time that I couldn't flirt with him and (laughs) and A.V. Bramble was getting very, very cross with me, re-shooting and re-shooting. He'd say "what's the matter with you Chili?", you know I wasn't giving my flirty bits and...we finally got it but that was the beginning of my, my first, first marriage and he started to do very well after that. I don't know how it happened but he seemed to be a natural for art, and singing and dancing although he never had any tuition at all but if some things that happened to our lives hadn't happened he would have been a second Jack Buchanan. That was what he was like, an easy, easy easy, performer and very handsome...

I: How about his brother. Did they come from a theatrical family or did they just get into it?

CB: No

END OF TAPE ONE

Chili Bouchier

²⁹ Billy Milton (1905-1989) was an English actor whose films included *No Escape* (1936) and *Licensed to Kill* (1965)

Tape 1 part 2

I: Here we go, side 2, yes so, what was the, was that his first film, do you remember?

CB: Yes, it was, yes, yes it was, he made another film after that called *To Brighton with a Bird* (it is *To Brighton with Gladys*) but the bird was a (laughs) was a... penguin (laughs)

I: Mmmm, right.

CB: He was very funny in that but he, he didn't do many. I made a picture with him later on, a flying picture, which he was given the leading part because he was an aviator.

I: Yes

CB: Called *The King's Cup*

I: It was a great time for flying pictures wasn't it, both in this country and the States?

CB: Yep

I: That's when they were making wings and you know, anything to do with that

CB: Yes, that's right, yes. This was a talkie later on

I: Right. Right. Though that reminds me, we are now at the cusp of the silent into the transition into sound

CB: Yes

I: I presume *The Jazz Singer* was already playing downtown London, so, what was the feeling in the studios about talkies?

CB: Well, this is very interesting because we were making a film called *A City of Play* made at Gainsborough with an American director called Denison Clift³⁰ and I was playing a little circus girl who made terrifying leaps off high building under hypnosis by

³⁰ Denison Clift (1885-1961) was an American film director. His films included *A Woman of No Importance* (1921) and *Taxi for Two* (1929). He was also a screenwriter whose work included *All that Glitters* (1936)

the villain who was Lawson Butt³¹ and, all sorts of terrible things they made me do. They wanted me to do a trapeze thing across the top of the studio that I was terrified of doing it and I didn't do it. They finally got a double because they didn't, didn't think of having a double for you in those days. If were willing to do it, then you'd do it. So, then we went to Paris for me to take a leap off the top of the Eiffel Tower. But with a parachute on my back. Now, the police, Gendarme, used to come every morning and inspect my backpack on my back because they frightened I was going to take a leap off the towers which I wasn't. I had no intention of doing... and it was just a little costume in my pack, but when we got to the top of the Eiffel Tower right on the very top where the public don't go, it was very, very high and I was determined to do this thing myself, not to leap off the tower because we weren't allowed to anyway by the police, but I was determined to do this, this jump. Because the camera was set behind me and I was on a ledge and below me it was another narrow ledge of two or three feet wide with one single rail between me and the boulevards if I should slip in my nervousness and I was terribly nervous so, it looked as I jumped off this, to the....off the ledge to ledge below, that I was going into space. And the very fact that ledge below was only a few feet wide and that I was nervous...if I'd slipped it would have been a... nasty, and in the film you could see it, I've seen it recently, (laughs) you can see I don't really jump, I slither down (laughs)

I: Yes

CB: But I go, I go

I: Right

³¹ Lawson Butt (1880-1956) was an English actor, his films included *Romeo and Juliet* (1916) and *The Ringer* (1928)

CB: Then is a long shot of the, of the parachute coming down and when we did *This is your Life* recently they showed this clip and my sister was sitting next to me and she went ‘Ohhhh’ – she thought I’d actually taken the leap and so did half the audience. But I was determined to do it because I felt I let them down because I hadn’t done the other stunts they wanted. So, we returned from, from Paris only to find Al Jolson singing ‘The Jazz Singer’ and everybody was going to make talkies so we decided - I didn’t – the power at the time was decided that we make ours into a talkie half way through (laughs) We were given a couple of weeks off and they wrote the script and then we were called in again and were making talkies. And it was all very strange, you know, there was the sound man, Ben Aumonries the first sound man in the studio, he was installed at the end of the studio. We had the microphones hanging over our heads and Ben Aumonries voice used to be relayed through, a, a loud hailer on the roof of the studio and it was forever saying “Speak up, miss Bouchier, speak up!” and, actually Kevin got the whole film, we haven’t got in London, he found it in Holland, and had it sent over for him to get to the bits he wanted, and he, he invited me to see it and sat watching me while I sat and my voice, when I heard it, oh, it was terrible tiny little wee voice?

I: Yes

CB: Little girl’s voice it was, with a tiny voice “Oh I’m terribly happy” it was my first line of all (laughs) and because they’d have to use us because we had done half the picture. They didn’t realise the different voices, they didn’t take into consideration that mine was a little squeak and that Lawson Butt’s was a very dark brown voice, because he was stage trained you know, he was a brother of dame Clara Butt he had a deep voice

too and leading man was not Brian Aherne but his brother Pat Aherne³² and he had, I think, a slight, a slightly original accent or something so it really wasn't... and it was such a pity because the first part, the silent part of the film, was very good and dark and rather Germanic, and a lot of atmosphere in the circus but the moment we started speaking it all went, you see, we were all so English, so I don't think it had a very great success (laughs) one of the first talkies...

I: Was it your natural speaking voice at that time or was it the characteristics of the recording system do you think?

CB: Oh that might have had something to do with it. Yes.

I: Right, because it was a very thin sound anyway wasn't it

CB: Yes, yes

I: Which studio was it?

CB: That was, at Gainsborough.

I: At Poole Street in Islington

CB: Islington

I: Right, so

CB: Yes

I: That was one of the early ones to be converted to sound, I suppose?

CB: It was one of the first

I: Yes, yes

³² Pat Aherne (1901-1970) was an English film actor whose films included *Lorna Doone* (1951) and *The Court Jester* (1956)

CB: I wanted to say it was the first in my book but of course it wasn't, I phoned Kevin to find out and he said 'No' he thought that *Kitty* was the very first to go sound half way through because they did that in New York

I: Ah,

CB: With Esther Brody and John Stuart

I: Right

CB: I think it was, so I just said 'one' of the first, first films to be converted.

I: I think Freddie Young also worked on *White Cargo* which I think they did a week of sound shooting at Elstree that seems to have been the first sound recording for a talkie in this country

CB: Oh completely, a complete talkie.

I: Well, no it was part talkie I think just as...

CB: Oh, who played that one I wonder?

I: Oh God I'd have to look it up, or will have to call Kevin

CB: (laughs)

I: It was the week before *Blackmail*, before they shot sound on *Blackmail* which is usually counted to be the first talkie that...

CB: That is counted to be the first talkie, yes, the first successful one...

I: Yes, was the camera in a box, in a huge?

CB: Not by then

I: No?

CB: No

I: No I don't mean a blimp, I mean actually in a box with a plain glass window

CB: Not then, no, no

I: How did they do it?

CB: No, it was all round, round with lots and lots of blankets.

I: Ah!

CB: It was all very makeshift you see

I: Yes

CB: It was only later when it was properly built so that you couldn't hear the?(7:53)

Of the camera, but I was, I was so upset to see the camera (laughs) wrapped, wrapped in blankets, thick blankets... oh it was terribly exciting really to be doing something...

I: Were you nervous?

CB: No, no, not a bit

I: Were any colleagues that you remember, were they upset or concerned or worried that they might not get into talkies properly?

CB: No because practically everybody did but little Mabel...everybody carried on...

I: Yeah

CB: All the leading players of the time, yes.

I: Didn't most of them have any stage experience that you remember? I mean, where, how were they recruited, were they like you, determined to get into the business? Or had they been found on the West End stage?

CB: No, I don't, No I don't think so. I'd, I don't think many of them I don't know about Henry Edwards³³ and Christie White. I don't know if they came from the theatre.

I: Henry Edwards – I think he did, didn't he?

³³ Henry Edwards (1882-1952) was an English film director, whose films included *East is East* (1916) and *In the Soup* (1936)

CB: I think he did, yes, yes. No, I think we were just discovered one way or another... there didn't seem to be any, there was no school for acting for, for, for films in those days

I: But a little later on in the thirties it seemed to be that an awful lot of people had come off the West End stage and

CB: Oh, they'd deliberately. Wanted them and they were very snooty about it, they thought it was a very nasty thing to do to make film but they did it just the same

I: For the money?

CB: Oh yes and. The great mistake that was made I think was with the early pictures, early talkies, was that they practically adjusted nothing but photograph for stage play with the stage player as you say, all terribly West End and that was why I think *Blackmail* was such a success because it didn't use voice for the sake of using voice, it just used it when it was necessary therefore this picture was very, very, very good and so was *Carnival*, in the same way. They treated us all who were in pictures (laughs) they looked down upon us but they changed their minds when they found out how lucrative making pictures was and a lot of them became big stars, of course, from the West End stage.

I: well, that brings us then to another Elvey picture, *You Know What Sailors Are*.

CB: That was a silent

I: Still a silent?

CB: Yes

I: Right, ok.

CB: That was the one which was given the working title or *Rapsies* and the way they wrote the part for me.

I: Aha, right, what, what memories do you have of that?

CB: Oh we went...that was Gaumont British interiors and then went to Falmouth for the exteriors. It was a story of an English cargo boat and a Spanish cargo boat, in, they were both in Falmouth harbor and a rivalry started between Cyril McLaglen³⁴, brother and Alf Goddard³⁵ who was, I think, he was an ex boxer but I also think he was a champion and they were vying for my, my hand, you see, and it started a rivalry and it was, they were always chucking things at each other from boat to boat (laughs) and, Elvey said to me “You are going to get a cabbage in your face and you are going to be knocked off the ship”, I said “Mr. Elvey I don’t swim”, he said “Doesn’t mind dear, never mind dear” he said “we’ll knock you off the ship and Alf Goddard will jump in immediately and save you”. You see, silly, we were silly, weren’t we, it was deep water and I couldn’t swim. My mother on this quayside going green because she knew I couldn’t swim and I thought “How immediate is immediate? Please may immediate be immediate”. And so I jumped into the water, or I was knocked into the water and fortunately Alf Goddard did jump in immediately but it still was Harry...

I: Madness, absolute madness

CB: He still had to take me to the shore with me laughing, laughing gaily as the script demanded (laughs)

I: Outrageous, absolutely I’m sure Equity would have something to say about it these days.

CB: They, they would yes, yes

³⁴ Cyril McLaglen (1889-1987) was an English film actor, his films included *Balaclava* (1928) and *The Black Swan* (1942).

³⁵ Alf Goddard (1897-1981) was an English actor, his films included *High Treason* (1929), *The Drum* (1938) and *I’ll Be Your Sweetheart* (1945)

I: Yeah. You said Mr. Elvey a moment ago. Was there a great deal of formality on the set in that respect?

CB: Oh yes,

I: Yes

CB: There was, I never called the director by his first name

I: No first names. How did they refer to you, Miss Bouchier or...

CB: Mostly, yes. It was a terrible shock to me when I first, I think it happened around the end of the fifties into the sixties when it was just a normal thing for an ASM however young she was to use your first name

I: Instant first names, yes

CB: Yes, I would never have spoken to an older actress by her first name, unless she asked me. Oh yes it was Mr. Elvey, and it was always Mr. Wilcox never Herbert, never Herbert.

I: How about the rest of the crew, the stage crew and camera crew. Was there a great deal of formality among them? I know Freddy was always Mr. Young to...

CB: Oh yes, yes

I: to the people, yes

CB: Yes, yes he would have been, yes. Oh, there was amongst themselves. There was always a lot of laughter going on, a lot of silly, silly jokes and a lot of silly flirtations. It didn't mean anything but it just passed the time, as you know; there is an awful lot of waiting about in pictures. And that's what started me to be a smoker, I think, because people handed around their cigarettes all the time, they were so cheap anyway (laughs) and I think I just got hooked on it...

I: And you smoked ever since?

CB: I smoked ever since (laughs)

I: Yeah, yeah. You'll, you'll disappoint all the health freaks

CB: Oh, I'm sorry, but look at me, I'm 86 and nothing awful has happened to me
(laughs)

I: Well, delighted to hear that, already now, was that your last silent? *You Know What Sailors Are?*

CB: I think there was another one called *Downstream*, have you got that down?

I: Well, *Downstream* again is the, is the second picture about which I couldn't find any information so you must tell me

CB: No, I can't remember very much about it, except that it was a very, very, very nice picture. We shot it all on a barge up and down the Thames which is absolutely beautiful in the summer. It was directed by an Italian and his assistant was an Italian and they could hardly speak a word of English so it was all very difficult. But the assistant stayed on and became very well known in English pictures later on and I can't remember his name, I can't remember his name but he was... He made quite a few pictures. So I can't...

I: As a director?

CB: Yes

I: Yes

CB: I can't remember, we must have done some interior but I can't remember where they were shot. Have they registered that picture?

I: Well: I supposed it probably got caught in the transition

CB: Yes, yes.

I: They didn't even try to make a part talkie out of it?

CB: No, no.

I: Yeah, yeah. I noticed *City of Play* is produced by Michael Balcon³⁶. Do you remember him in that picture at all?

CB: No

I: No?

CB: No

I: That was at Gainsborough

CB: No, no, I thought it was produced by...of course, you see, I'm starting to forget things now...ehm, the man who married....it's no good I can't think. No. I didn't think he was boss of Gainsborough then, I thought that he was boss at Gainsborough when it became Gainsborough Pictures with all the Gainsborough's beauties and then they started, started to make all those lovely with...

I: Well, he formed Gainsborough Pictures, I think...

CB: Well I always say Gainsborough but I don't mean when I say it, I really mean it was shot at Islington Studios.

I: Yes

CB: I say Gainsborough because they are connected with Islington, so I don't think he was around at the time

I: Oh! Right. Well the listing I took this from says Gainsborough, trade-shown November of 1929.

³⁶ Michael Balcon Balcon (1896-1977) was an English film producer best known for his work with Ealing studios.

CB: Yes

I: Producer Michael Balcon, director Denison Cliff.

CB: Yes

I: Part...part talkie

CB: Yes (laughs) Right

I: Yes, so, now there's another one we seem to have skipped over: *The Silver King*.

CB: Yes. Where did that come ...?

I: Well, it was shown in the middle of 1929. T. Hayes Hunter.

CB: Yes

I: And I notice that Bernie Knowles was on the camera

CB: That's right, yes.

I: Ehmm... was that now talkie or was that sound

CB: No, that was silent, that was silent. I think it's rather interesting that when I was at Harrods and I was called Chili Bom Bom, they..., somebody came and said 'Have you seen the film at the Plaza called the *Mantrap* with a girl called Clara Bow who you look just like'. So I went along to the Plaza to see it and thought "Oh yes, I can see the resemblance...Oh, how I'd love to be doing that" up then with bumping (?) (17:26 check!) Percy Marmont³⁷...well it was only about 2 years later that I was... Percy Marmont was in *The Silver King*, you know, so it was really, it really was fantastic.

I: Absolutely.

³⁷ Percy Marmont (1883-1977) was an English actor, his films included *The Lie* (1918), *Vanity* (1935) and *Hostile Witness* (1968)

CB: And that was T. Hayes Hunter³⁸, he was an American director. He was a great bluff lovely man and he taught me an awful lot.

I: He worked a lot over here, didn't he? I guess he was permanently resident here. Yes?

CB: Yes, yes

I: What were his strengths as a director? Do you remember?

CB: He was a very, very jolly man and but he taught me techniques that nobody else had bothered to tell me about for film

I: Such as?

CB: Such as "let it all come from the eyes, don't worry about the rest of the face just bring it through the eyes" and getting up without jumping...jumping...getting up close, slowly and easily into the camera...all useful stuff you know...Oh, he was lovely.

I: Did they pay much attention to performance, to characterization...Or, or was it a very mechanical shoot...or was it just a matter of directing traffic, moving actors around...

CB: Oh no, no, no, no there was a lot of time taken to, to explain, explain your character and what you were going to do in the next shot. Oh yes, oh no, no, no, no...

I: How did you approach characterization? How did you work out what you were playing?

CB: I just felt it

I: Yes

CB: I think, just felt it naturally... I didn't.... I was never, what do they call them actors...

I: Method

³⁸ T Hayes Hunter (1884- 1944) was an American film director of the silent era. His films included *Wildfire* (1925) and *The Ghoul* (1933)

CB: (laughs) method actor... I think I was very natural

I: Yes. I was wondering if you worked out a back story for the character you were playing: who they were, where they came from?

CB: No, no

I: You just felt it

CB: Just felt it. And I think that is one of the thing, one of the... that's the joy of films. That, that you are... you don't delve too deeply into what, what you had for breakfast, and things like method actors do, and say. I heard an actor say to the director 'what did I have for breakfast?', now what sense does that make, I mean, you either feel in the part or you don't, you don't.

I: But you, you must have relied then on your director a great deal to...pace the development of the character as, as?

CB: I did, I did, I had a great respect for, for directors.

I: You expected them to know

CB: Yes

I: where the character was at that point in the film?

CB: Oh yes,

I: Yes, right

CB: That's most important

I: Yeah, well as you know there are good directors and bad directors (laughs)

CB: Yes

I: some are able to do it and some are not. But I imagine....did T. Hayes Hunter...did he have theatrical experience, do you know?

CB: I don't know, I don't know...

I: 'Cause that always helps I think in terms of directing actors.

CB: Yes

I: And being an actor oneself is again very useful

CB: I wouldn't be surprised he was...yes...as I say, very bluff and a hearty man...

I: So, what a happy set...

CB: Yes, yes...

I: Mmm, well, now we are coming to, again, I suppose an important...Let me just reel off the titles to make sure that we've covered them *The Silver King*...George Pearson³⁹ was one of the producers, does that ring any kind of bell, George Pearson?

CB: Yes...

I: Yes? Right.

CB: Welsh-Pearson-Elder wasn't it?

I: That's right, yeah... you do have a fabulous memory...

CB: Well it's only because I have been ... writing about it

I: Your research, right...ehm, what do you remember of George Pearson because he was another British film pioneer?

CB: He was, but they weren't, they weren't at the Studio. They were in London, the offices in London.

I: Ok

CB: I remember him, yes I remember him. I don't remember Welsh or Elder but I do remember Pearson, yes

³⁹ George Pearson (1875-1973) was an English film maker, whose films included *Nothing Else Matters* (1920) and *The Ace of Spades* (1935)

I: Well, he was the filmmaker, I think, out of the group. Who did the casting? Was it always the director or did the producer get involved in that?

CB: Sometimes the producer sometime both of them.

I: What's your billing now at this stage, Chili? Are you...

CB: I'm tops

I: You are as tops, right,

CB: Near tops

I: Right, name above the title.

CB: Yes

I: Yeah. Would you have any idea of what they were paying you? And it was per picture, at this, still at this stage wasn't it? You weren't on a contract. Right...

CB: No, it was getting better all the time, of course...

I: Are you still living at home or have you moved....?

CB: Yes, I wasn't allowed to move out. My parents wouldn't allow me to move out

I: Were you not? They were strict were they?

CB: Yes very.

I: Right. Well, although... you have married Henry Milton by this time?

CB: We married in September 1929

I: 29 so, again, this is an important period for you both professionally and, and in personal terms well now, *Warned off?* I've got that as December '29...

CB: Yes

I: Herbert Wilcox was the producer and Walter West⁴⁰ was the director and that was shot at B and D, right, at Elstree.

CB: Was it?

I: Well, it says B & D so I assume it was shot out at...

CB: Well he didn't always shoot at B and.... I didn't know about the British and Dominion Studios until *Carnival* ...

I: Ah, well, I mean you were there and I wasn't so don't...

CB: I think it was Cricklewood...

I: Right, ok, useful to know that. That goes to show one shouldn't make unwarranted assumptions. Now, you made one previous picture with Wilcox but this is, is this the beginning of a longer professional relationship or, is it still a one off?

CB: No, no, no that was a one off..

I: Right

CB: *Warned Off*, yes...

I: Has it put you under contract?

CB: Not yet.

I: Not yet, no, ok. Any particular memories of them?

CB: Not very, not many no. I think we did a lot of... It was a racing picture, wasn't it?

I: I don't know

CB: Yes it was, *Warned Off*, yes it was a racing picture. Who was a director, he was a big..?

I: Walter West.

⁴⁰ Walter West (1885-1958) was a British director whose films included *The Great Coup* (1919) and *Sweeney Todd* (1928)

CB: Walter W... Yes, yes... and it was a story written by a famous writer of, of horsey stories. I would, I can't remember his name but.

I: Oh, I don't know who that was...not Edgar Wallace?

CB: No, no, no, no. Edgar Wallace was *Chick*, wasn't he, was *Chick*. I can't remember much about that one but I'm, I don't think I even met Herbert on that one.

I: Oh. Was Freddy Young on the camera at this time?

CB: No, no, no, not...

I: Ok, well have we...we have more or less covered *City of Play* haven't we?

CB: I think so yes.

I: I think we have and *Downstream*. Now we are into the sound era well and truly by this time are we? I've got next *Enter the Queen*. Is that...

CB: That was, that was at Twickenham...

I: Yes, a company called Starcraft. Producer Harry Cohen and a director called Arthur Varney Serrao.

CB: Oh yes. But I thought, I thought it was Julius Hagan.

I: Well, he would have been the executive producer.

CB: Yes

I: Wouldn't he?

CB: Yes.

I: I think the fact it was called Starcraft indicates it was an independent production because...

CB: Oh yes...

I: They were starting up at that time because of the 'quota act' so...

CB: That's right yes..

I: So this was the time of the, the sixty minutes pound a foot..

CB: Right, right...

I: Production...

CB: Yes, I think that, I think that was made either to star his wife or his girlfriend.

What's his name?

I: The director or the producer?

CB: The director

I: Arthur Varney Serrao.

CB: Yes I think so.

I: And with you were Richard Cooper⁴¹ and Doria March⁴². Was that the wife, Doria March?

CB: No I think her name was Varney. I'm almost sure that it was one of the... it was rather disgraceful to make your whole picture for your wife or your girlfriend. But to that, from then one I did quite a few more, didn't I, for Julius Hagan.

I: You did indeed, the next one is *Call of the Sea* and that is Twickenham and Julius Hagan is the producer and Leslie Hiscott⁴³ is the director, Chrissie White is in it. And Henry Edwards is listed....

CB: Henry Edwards, yes

I: Right, also as executive producer, so that means he probably put the film together, he was the packager, right?

⁴¹ Richard Cooper (1893-1947) was an English actor, whose films included *Bed and Breakfast* (1930) and *The Ace of Spades* (1935)

⁴² Doria March (1893-?) was a Canadian actress whose films included *The Eternal Feminine* (1931)

⁴³ Leslie Hiscott (1894-1968) was an English director and screenwriter. His films included *The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes* (1935)

CB: Right, yes and Bernard Nedell⁴⁴, an American, he was in it, and my brother-in-law Billy Milton, he was also in it.

I: Tell us about Julius Hagan, first of all

CB: (laughs) He was a terror?

I: Was he?

CB: Yes, well, he put me under a ridiculous contract at the time but I think he paid me five pounds a week and then, paid me daily when I worked at the studio and... this would have been 1930 by now wouldn't it?

I: Yes it is right

CB: I was in *the show, with my husband, The Show's the Thing*, and not *The Show's the Thing*.... I was in the show at the Piccadilly with Harry and working during the day in the studios...and, and one day we were on the film and it had to be finished that day or else, according to, to the studio. So I worked all day in the studio, I went to the theatre and did my show at night, I went back to the studio and worked all night and, to early morning and when my cheque came through I was paid one day. So I said to Julius Hagan, I said "Only one day...?" he said "You only worked one day, well 24 hours" (laughs)

I: Ohh, naughty..

CB: But, Herbert Wilcox was very clever when I told him that I was under some horrible contract with Julius Hagan...he said "we'll ring him up and say you are not very happy and you'd like to leave" because he wanted me and if Julius Hagan had known that Herbert wanted me up would have gone the money you know... and of course eventually the studio was burnt down, wasn't it?

⁴⁴ Bernard Nedell (1898-1972) was an American actor whose films included *Slightly Honourable* (1940) and *Northern Pursuit* (1943)

I: We were talking about Julius Hagan for whom you made several films....one or two, three, four, something like that....

CB: Yes I did...

I: *Brown Sugar* I see was at Twickenham, then we get on to the Wilcox era very shortly, I see a couple of others, so yes, as much as you can remember about Julius Hagan because he was a very active producer in the, in the thirties. Was he a bit of a rogue?

CB: Oh I think so, yes, I do, yes I do it was his appearance you know, he looked just like you would imagine with the name of Julius Hagan look like and I got ticked off by Kevin for spelling his name wrong in my book. I didn't do it, I put Julian Hagan, I didn't do that has something to do with, however, actually he had a very, very nice, intelligent wife, non Jewish I'm quite sure. She used to run the studio more than he did. She was a very competent lady. So I didn't see very much of him.

I: No clear memories rather than he try to swindle you.

CB: That's right (laughs)

I: How about Hiscott, Leslie Hiscott again that was a quite well known...

CB: He was quite well known, yes, how, which film was that?

I: Is still on *Call of the Sea*

CB: Ah, *Call of the Sea*. Yes he was nice, yes

I: Right and he also directed you in *Brown Sugar* which comes the following year I think.

CB: Right..

I: *Kissing Cup's Race for Butcher's*, it was shot at Walton with Castleton Knight⁴⁵ as the director

⁴⁵ Castleton Knight (1894-1970) was an English film producer and director, whose films included *The Plaything* (1929) and *For Freedom* (1940)

CB: That's right, yes...

I: And I see Miss Madeleine Carroll⁴⁶ was in the cast

CB: Yes

I: With Stuart Rome.

CB: Yes, and John Stuart I think, as well?

I: Well I just got those two; they were very thin cast lists that I got most of this from the Rachel Lowe books. Any particular memories?

CB: No, that again was a racing film. We shot it out at Derby racecourse I think, it was a bit cold I remember but don't remember an awful lot about it.

I: Do they have sound on location or?

CB: Oh yes...

I: Yes? Right. You didn't there wasn't any post-synch?

CB: No, no. Yes I don't remember an awful lot about that picture only that Castleton Knight was very, very pleasant, of course. I became very friendly with him later on. He became a great friend and of course he was, he discovered what's his name (laughs) oh dear, I'm sorry, I'm beginning to forget names.

I: Give me a clue

CB: Oh, Welsh actor who went to Hollywood...

I: Richard B

CB: Not Richard Burton, long before his time

I: Ah Ray Milland

⁴⁶ Madeline Carroll (1906-1987) was an English actress whose films included *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *My Favourite Blonde* (1942)

CB: Ray Milland, he discovered Ray Milland⁴⁷ but then he stopped being a director and became the boss of Gaumont British

I: Gaumont British, that's right, yes. Are you going from picture to picture more or less at this stage, continuous employment as it were, so the studios were very busy, it was

CB: They were very busy, yes. I really, it was a wonderful time for pictures in the thirties, or the beginning of the thirties

I: That's right, yeah, because of the 'quota act'?

CB: Oh yes! I did a couple of those at Paramount, a couple of quota quickies. They sometimes turned out better than a picture that had taken a long time to make

I: Indeed

CB: Because they were so spontaneous, you were only allowed one take, if you didn't get it right that was just too bad, I always think sometimes the first take is the best. Because it's spontaneous.

I: What are your memories of Miss Carroll? Madame Carroll

CB: Oh, very, very nice, yes, very nice lady

I: You played with her

CB: Yes, very nice lady, very beautiful

I: Yeah, oh yes. *Brown Sugar* then, Francis Lister⁴⁸ and Constance Carpenter⁴⁹. And again is Hagan and Hiscott at Twickenham.

CB: That's right, yes.

⁴⁷ Ray Milland (1907-1986) was a Welsh actor and director whose films included *The Lost Weekend* (1945) and *Dial M for Murder* (1954)

⁴⁸ Francis Lister (1899-1951) was an English film actor whose films included *Home to Danger* (1951) and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)

⁴⁹ Constance Carpenter (1904-1992) was an English born American actress. Her films included *Just a Song* (1929). She was also a musical theatre actress, in shows including *The King and I* on Broadway.

I: Anything particular about those?

CB: No.

I: All right. So, really, we are coming on now to a very important period in your career which is with Herbert Wilcox. Right? Tell us how you came to be under contract to, to Wilcox.

CB: Well, it was a very, very strange thing that happened to me when I was about 12 years old. I'd been to the cinema as always and I was standing in the Hammersmith Broadway, outside the little cinema there and I'd just seen the silent version of *Carnival* with Matheson Lang⁵⁰ and Ivor Novello⁵¹ and Hilda Bayley⁵² and I was just overwhelmed by it, I thought it was the most wonderful picture I'd ever seen and I had a funny voice in my head said "You are going to play in that picture one day" and I said "Don't be silly how can I it's already been made". Well, I'd been on tour with my husband in 1930 and we just got back and we hated touring. I picked up the Daily Film Renter and the headline said "Wilcox seeking leading lady for *Carnival*". That was it. I, I wasn't really the sort of person who gets onto directors and asks them for work but I rang Wilcox and said "I want to be in *Carnival*, I want to play Simonetta in *Carnival*". He said "Oh, you do, do you? Well you'd better send me some photographs." So, from *The Call of the Sea*, I had been playing a Spanish dancer in that, a Spanish gipsy dancer and I looked rather Mediterranean and as Simonetta in *Carnival* is Italian I sent those pictures and the moment he got them he invited me to lunch at the Barkley and we talked about it

⁵⁰ Matheson Lang (1879-1948) was a Canadian actor whose films included *The Merchant of Venice* (1916) and *The Great Defender* (1934)

⁵¹ Ivor Novello (1893-1951) was a Welsh actor and composer, now best known for the annual music award that bears his name and was established in his honour

⁵² Hilda Bayley (1888-1971) was an English film actress, her films included *Home Sweet Home* (1945) and *Golden Arrow* (1949)

and did extensive things. we did a lot of tests, mostly make-up tests and one acting test with, with Matheson Lang and doing that one I heard, I think it was Freddy Young whisper 'is she going to play the part?' and Herbert Wilcox said 'Yes, but I don't want her to know yet' and I knew from the start that all these tests were...no, I knew I was going to play it...absolutely. But of course Doris Zinkeisen⁵³ was brought in to, it was a famous artist, to do the costumes and she took one look at me because I don't think I have explained that in my it girl days I had this mad mop of dark curly hair which would not lie down, it'd just stuck up all over the place and it was, everybody knew me by my hair. She said "We've got to take that hair away from her face, we can't see her eyes". So that was another test we had to do to get the hair off my face: it parted it down the middle, took it round to the back and put into a bun, stuck a lot of hair pins in it and I look very soulful because I hadn't got my hair anymore (laughs). But that was how the part should have been played, she, she was sophisticated, young actress...'cause we played an actress in the film, both husband and wife were actors in Venice and....so that's how it started and then, half way through the film Wilcox said 'Well, we've created a new, a new actress' because I was now quite different to the one that I had been as a It girl, I was more sleek, more sophisticated and more slim, that's right, I lost a lot of weight. And he said 'Now we've got to find a new name for you' and I said 'Oh no, Herbert, no I didn't say Herbert "No Mr. Wilcox, please don't change my name, I like the name of Chili"' because in those days people didn't eat chili con carne you know, it was nothing to do with eating. I just like the feel of it, I, when people call me Chili I just feel happy but Dorothy, my real name, was what my mother called me when she was cross with me and...anyway, he didn't know, he thought of a lot of names and finally as we

⁵³ Doris Zinkeisen (1898-1991) was a Scottish stage and costume designer and artist.

were going to Venice to do some exteriors he saw my, my passport on the table and he said “Oh, your real name is Dorothy, that’s it, so Dorothy” I became Dorothy. And it was a silly thing to do really, half way through your, your career because I was already known as Chili.

I: Did you get any feedback from the fans on that?

CB: Oh terrific.

I: Were they confused or disapproving?

CB: Disapproving, most of them. It was the press who was the most disapproving. They said ‘Oh no, no, no Chili is hot stuff however many “I”s you spell it with.

I: Well yes.

CB: We want our Chili back so and they said “We’ve got Dorothy Boyd we’ve got Dorothy Bartlam with don’t want another Dorothy B”. Oh, they were dead against and of course although there was a terrific amount of publicity went out about it, it didn’t reach everybody and even today some people say “What happen to your sister Dorothy Bouchier?”

I: Yeah. I’ve got this which I thought it would interest you, 1934 and you are listed as Dorothy in there.

CB: Oh yes

I: “Her name was then Chili, it was a very different Dorothy Bouchier, her name was then Chili, who in 1927 made her appearance” But, so it must have been very confusing, I don’t think anyone would countenance it now, would they, in terms of....

CB: Not in the middle of a career

I: A career, no,

CB: I mean even Kevin, even the old knowledgeable Kevin rung me up one day and said “Who’s Dorothy Bouchier?”

I: Really?

CB: I said “Oh, you must know” because he’d got a copy of *The King’s Cup*.

I: And that was all, it was a very bad move on Wilcox’s part, wasn’t it?

CB: Well, I don’t know, if it had worked out as he’d hoped that I would stay with him and

I: Yes, you would have stayed being Dorothy

CB: I would have stayed but as it happened all sort of things happened over the next few years and I left him and then the papers started to write and say “What happened to the Dorothy Bouchier, the Dorothy Bouchier mystery, when are we going to know what happened between her and Wilcox and why she didn’t, show, continue with him?”. So, as you know in those days one didn’t discuss one’s private life as one does today. I tried to answer these men who obviously were asking me for an explanation. Oh I think it was *The Film Pictorial* or *The Film Weekly*, they had written a huge article. So I tried to explain to them that I’d tried to save my marriage, I’d tried to this and tried that. I didn’t mention anything about Wilcox and Anna and things like that and so at the end they said “Nothing seems to have gone right for her since she changed her name to Dorothy. Do you want Chili back?” And they came in their thousand “Yes let’s have Chili back.” So my next picture was called *Lucky Days* and I became Chili again.

I: Right you are being, as it were, cryptic about the events. Are they covered in your book or?

CB: Yes

I: Yes, right so we don't need to go. But this was a personal matter between you and Wilcox and your marriage was breaking up in the meantime?

CB: Yes it was. It was all a very, very sad time for me. After the excitement of *Carnival* which was a great success. And then I did a couple more films, of course, I did *The Blue Danube*. It was for Wilcox with Joseph Schildkraut⁵⁴ and Brigitte Helm⁵⁵ and then *The King's Cup* with my husband but at the time everything was going wrong and my marriage broke up at the same time as leaving Wilcox. So we won't go into that (laughs) it's all over and done with

I: Well, it's of historic interest but you say you have written about it so

CB: Yes I have. at great detail

I: At great length. It would be interesting to hear something about some of those people you played with, Peppy Schildkraut for example and, Matheson Lang and Brigitte Helm. They are all great names, aren't they at the time

CB: Yes they are...

I: And Massine is, is...he and Nikitina who I hadn't heard of ...they're in *Blue Danube*. Was there a ballet in *Blue Danube*?

CB: Who was in it? I don't remember it

I: Massine, Leonide Massine⁵⁶ I presume, the ballet dancer. You don't remember that. Probably a separate scene.

CB: Yes

⁵⁴ Joseph Schildkraut (1896-1964) was an Austrian American actor. He was in films including *The King of Kings* (1927) and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1969)

⁵⁵ Brigitte Helm (1906-1996) was a German film actress whose films included *Metropolis* (1927) and *An Ideal Husband* (1935)

⁵⁶ Leonide Massine (1896-1979) was a Russian ballet dancer and choreographer. One of his most famous ballets was *The Three Cornered Hat* (1919)

I: Yes, right

CB: Just a separate scene I imagine if it was a ballet

I: Yeah. Well, I'm not, I'm assuming it was a ballet only because of the two of them.

Right, so, we are with Wilcox from what '31 to thirty...

CB: Four I think..

I: Four?

CB: I think so.

I: That's quite a long time isn't it?

CB: Oh yes...

I: and one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight films I've got you listed as...

CB: They weren't all for Wilcox so...

I: Would Herbert be in the films?

CB: Yes but he

I: Right, but not as director?

CB: He didn't direct all of them, no

I: No, no, I see Arthur Rosson⁵⁷, oh, that's a Paramount British one

CB: Yes

I: *Ebb Tide*. Arthur Rosson, that's a forgotten name too. There were three of them, weren't they, three Rosson

CB: He was the brother of Hal Rosson

I: Hal Rosson

CB: who married the Blonde Bombshell?

⁵⁷ Arthur Rosson (1886- 1960) was an English film director whose films included *The Lie* (1914) and *The Ten Commandments* (1956) (as unit director)

I: Yes

CB: He married the Blonde Bombshell in Hollywood. What's her name?

I: I've forgotten

CB: (laughs)

I: Harlow.

CB: Jean Harlow⁵⁸, yes.

I: And they also had another brother, third brother. Was it Richard Rosson? There were three of them

CB: Yes

I: Right. They all worked in pictures

CB: That's right, yes.

I: What are your memories of him, Arthur?

CB: Nice, he was nice, yes

I: Yes? Right.

CB: I liked all the American directors I worked with apart from Denison Clift

I: Oh, you didn't say that before. Why, why didn't you like Denison Clift?

CB: Oh, no, no. No, nothing he just wasn't my ideal of, of an American director. He ... he was a very quiet, quiet man, rather humorless. No, I didn't dislike him but I, couldn't say...

I: But the chemistry was a little off was it?

CB: Yes, yes it was, yes.

⁵⁸ Jean Harlow (1911-1937) was an American film actress. Her films included *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *Bombshell* (1933).

I: Well, I mean in some ways it's a bit pointless to talk in detail about this picture it's... I'll go with the titles and we'll see what your memories are if anything comes to mind and some of the people you played with, Joan Barry⁵⁹ I see was in *Ebb Tide*, that it must have been again a quota quickie, for Paramount

CB: It wasn't a quota quickie

I: Was it not?

CB: No, no. It was quite a long, quite a long picture. She was absolutely beautiful. She was really beautiful that girl. And she'd started very young in films as I did but of course she'd been in pictures longer than I had and I use to sort of, sit and watch her as she was being made up because the rumor it was around the people, they were saying "you know she is 50 and she is a dame" And a beautiful face "she can't be". And of course it happened to me as well as I had been in picture for ten or fifteen years 'Oh, she's fifty she's a dame' Become 50 is a nice round sound (laughs) and of course she wasn't anywhere near it. She later married Henry Tiarks, the banker and had a beautiful daughter name Henrietta Tiarks who is now the Marquise of Tavistock...

I: We'll come on to that, I've got to change tape...

Chilli Bouchier Tape 2 part 1

I: It's Chilli Bouchier Tape two. Her, yes you were saying about Joan Barry and her subsequent elevation to the aristocracy. It happened quite a lot didn't it in those days.

CB: Well, she didn't go into the aristocracy...

⁵⁹ Joan Barry (1903-1989) was an English film actress whose credits included *Atlantic* (1929) and *The Outsider* (1931).

I: Oh, her daughter, her daughter, her daughter, yes

CB: Her daughter, yes who was just as beautiful, I believe, but there was another very interesting face in that picture. We were doing a scene around the dock side and there was a lovely, dark, exotic looking girl playing, dressed as a Chinese girl and I said to the director “Look at that lovely girl”. And he hadn’t really noticed her because it was quite a big scene. And he gave her little bits to do and I made a friend of her, took her around to meet the right people and she finished up as Lady Korda. It was Merle Oberon⁶⁰. And...I got a picture in my book of me in, in the film with, with Merle Oberon and Anna Lee⁶¹, both of them in the crowd...

I: Yeah...

CB: So, as I say, I don’t, I didn’t. I just helped her along at the beginning because she would have been, eventually she would have been discovered and of course she was, and then finally married Korda.

I: What was her reputation in those days? Was she thought to be fast?

CB: One didn’t quite know because we didn’t have the truth. Her name was Estelle, she called herself Estelle Thompson

I: Not Queenie?

CB: No, but some people knew that she was friends of mine in Calcutta knew her as Queenie. No, Estelle. Estelle O’Brien she called herself. Estelle O’Brien but she was Queenie Thompson, but she’d already been known in Australia and she’d already come to London and appeared as, as worked as a hostess at the Café du Paris and then came as

⁶⁰ Merle Oberon (1911-1979) was an Anglo- Indian actress whose films included *Over the Moon* (1939) and *Hotel* (1967)

⁶¹ Anna Lee (1913-2004) was an English actress whose films included *Bedlam* (1946) and *The Sound of Music* (1965)

an extra into pictures and when they made the documentary 'Queenie' they, they started it as her, as quite a nice middle class school girl in Calcutta in 1931 and her story wasn't a bit like Merle story at all and because in 1931 she was in the crowd with me and I've got the picture to prove it, you see (laughs)

I: Yeah

CB: So they are trying to make a picture of my story and I'm going to be there and say "Look I have seen what they could do with actresses' lives I'm going to have a final say in mine"

I: Well, she created her own legend didn't she? Quite earlier on

CB: Yes, wherever I took her she, well, as a matter of fact I took her to the first night of Harry's big show, it was called the.. 'Hold my hand' in which he appeared with Jesse Matthews and we took...we had a party afterwards and, I looked at Merle, I don't know why and she was telling my husband "I want to kiss you" naughty girl but Harry was so drunk by then, he'd just done his big West End first night and he was so drunk that he didn't even notice her. But she was, she was a naughty girl, sometimes.

I: Yeah.

CB: But she finished up the way she wanted to...

I: Oh, yes, very grand and very rich.

CB: Yes, I know.

I: Well, were these fairly flighty times?

CB: Yes.

I: A great deal of promiscuity and...

CB: Oh, just the same as it is today but...more elegantly done.

I: Theatrical...

CB: (laughs) More elegant. It's so nice to talk to you, I mean, you are not 25 years old, that's it, face it. But younger people of the day can't imagine that we used to play around, or that anybody played around and there was any scandal at all... terrific scandal...I mean you know ...

I: Oh yes

CB: Ivor Novello and Tallulah Bankhead⁶² she was a wild one, oh yes they were great, great days (laughs).

I: Well, as you say, it's the same today but a little less elegant and, I meant also to ask you about here you are you and your husband and are what on, on the stage, how did that come about?

CB: Harry was on the stage I wasn't.

I: I thought you said you were on the stage

CB: Oh, I was. That was in 1930 yes, we did, no he was in this, this play and he went out to do a pre-London tour and I went out to see him and the management. He was doing, he was playing the leading part, and there was another girl who was playing with him and they said, as I was quite well known in pictures I think I would have been an asset. So they said "Would you take over the part when we get to London?" and I was delighted to be working with Harry. That's how it happened.

I: Right

CB: And it never occurred to me that I was being unkind to the girl who already was in it. I mean, you don't think, you don't really think...

⁶² Tallulah Bankhead (1902-1968) was an American film actress, known for films including *Devil and the Deep* (1932) and *Lifeboat* (1944)

I: No. Well, especially when one is that age.

CB: Right, right

I: Did you approach the stage with any trepidation?

CB: No, no, I'd been trained as a dancer as a child.

I: Right, so

CB: A ballet dancer

I: Audiences were no problem?

CB: No, and I had taken musical comedy dancing lessons, between films

I: Right

CB: And, I mean, Harry was much more frightened on our first night than I was. I sailed through it...

I: And what about the difference in technique between theatre and films...

CB: Yes I was a bit on the quiet side, yes, because I was used to talking into mikes and not given any voice, so I had to learn to project a bit because there were no things such as microphones in those days and it's a joy now

I: Oh yes

CB: Because you can talk like this and the whole house can hear you

I: It's too easy thought because very often it covers up a lack of talent, I think, doesn't it.

CB: Yes, yes it does, yes it does.

I: And in those days as you were saying much earlier it was necessary to lean one's craft/

CB: Yes, yes

I: A technique, well, you are consistently working at B & D at Elstree and, have you moved up there? Where do you live at this stage?

CB: I moved to a flat in Finchley to be nearer to the studios but during that time I bought my own. I didn't buy the flat, you didn't buy flats I those days, I took a flat I Knightsbridge and for the first time in my life I had enough money to absolutely furnish it completely, it was a great and wonderful fun to do that. My own money, my own flat, everything mine and...

I: So what a fairly high income and low income tax

CB: That's right. Yes

I: Happy days!

CB: Yes, yes. So that was exciting, to have my own place

I: And you are still with Harry at this stage?

CB: No, we are beginning...

I: You are breaking up?

CB: Things are beginning to go wrong, yes...

I: Right, in view of what we are going to tomorrow – the unveiling of a memorial plaque to both Wilcox and Anna Neagle. Anna Neagle is, is now on the scene, is she, with Herbert?

CB: I think she came on the scene while I was making *Ebb Tide*; I seem to remember Herbert rushing into my dressing room and saying "I found a lovely new actress. She's playing with Jack Buchanan in Stand up and Sing" and I said "Tell you what, I was just sliding over this" (? Unclear, I'm not sure what she says here) I'd been having a bit of trouble with Herbert so I thought "Jolly good! if she found another actress and she's blond and we shan't clash, I think it's a good idea", I said "I'm very pleased for you Herbert." And then he put her under contract and she made, she made *Good Night*

Vienna, I think, her first picture with, with Jack Buchanan and, and at that time... then we did *King's Cup* didn't we, *The King's Cup* and that took a whole year to make.

I: Yes

CB: Because he was very, much more interested in Anna than me, although he had spent such a lot of money and time and building me up and things, and sometimes he'd come and direct a bit of *The King's Cup* and he'd go away and then he'd send another director to do a bit of *King's Cup*. It took a whole year and it was a very, very sad year for me because Harry, I'm afraid was drinking a lot, because he had left the Air Force, he told me, because of vertigo but one day he told me it was really because he'd lost his nerve, so he had to fly the Moth, the Gipsy Moth by himself and with me sometimes and he wasn't always sober and it was very frightening.

I: He'd been in Flying Corps during the War, had he?

CB: Yes

I: So that?

CB: And he'd staying on in the Royal Air Force

I: But he, he had been, a combat pilot so...

CB: Oh yes

I: So that probably accounted for

CB: For him loosing his nerves...

I: Some of the problems

CB: Yes

I: Can't blame him

CB: So it was a very, very trying time for me for I dare not tell anybody that he was drinking and also other things were happening with Jessie

I: Ah, right.

CB: and so that's that and don't, better not talk about that (laughs)

I: Well, you can if you want to but you'd rather not, I don't want to intrude.

CB: No, no it's all right.

I: It's a matter of history. It's a long time ago now, isn't it, 60 years on?

CB: Oh yes, it is, it is. Well, there it is: he had an affair with Jessie and I didn't know anything about it all through the making of *The King's Cup*. Everybody else in London knew but me.

I: One of those

CB: One of those and people tried to tell me and I was such a silly thing that I didn't realise what was happening and of course in the studio I was being put further and further into the background. I ... I played a, played a second lead to Winifred Shotter⁶³ in a film and I remembered on the first night of *On The Blue Danube*, which was a terrific night in London, shown at the Tivoli Theatre, we, we had awnings and cameras and things and all them and the truck was snarled up because there was crowds and crowds of people. It was a wonderful night for me, after Carnival, which was another big picture... and after, at the party afterwards Wilcox said "Dorothy you are now drawing a mind" which was a lovely thing to hear. He said "What picture would you like to make now?" I thought "Oh dear, dare I say it?" I said "Oh, Mr Wilcox I'd like to make the picture you made as silent with Dorothy Gish like Nell Gwyn and Madame Pompadour." He said "That's a great

⁶³ Winifred Shotter (1904-1996) was an English actress. Her films included *Just my Luck* (1933) and *Candles at Nine* (1944)

idea; we'll start on the scripts". However time went by and Anna did one or two other pictures *The Little Damozel* and others and then one day I read in one of the papers that Anna was to make *Nell Gwyn* and that was when I realised what had happened – that I was out and she was in...

I: Yes

CB: If she was going to make *Nell Gwyn*. Then he was going to make a picture called *The Queen* with Anna in it. And he said "You, we are casting you as a lady in waiting" and I said "No, no more humiliation, thank you very much, I'm not playing the lady in waiting to Anna's Queen" I said "Will you please let me go Mr Wilcox? I'm not happy" He said "Yes, but you are going to find it very difficult, Dorothy" I didn't know what he meant and I didn't see why – I was already playing everywhere in the, in the cinemas- but it was difficult and my old agent John Payne after a little while he said "Do you know why you are finding it difficult?" He said "Because when you were with Wilcox you got a reputation of being very expensive, take my advice and start all over again". So I did. I supposed people had asked for me, from Wilcox, and he put up the price to an exorbitant amount

I: To make his profit

CB: Oh yes

I: Yes? Had you worked outside, out of side of the 'in deed' ring at that time? When you were on a contract to him?

CB: No, no, no.

I: So he was just putting people off in effect.

CB: Yes, well, perhaps he didn't want me to go

I: That's what I mean. Yeah, yeah, right. Did he always pay you on time because he had quite a reputation for always sailing close to the wind financially?

CB: I know (laughs). No, I was always paid on time but I believe poor old Freddie Young...I think he still owes him money (laughs) as far as I know.

I: Yes! I think that came a little later. There is a very famous 3000 pound story

CB: I think he had something to do with it, yes

I: That's right. I think that was when they were at RKO

CB: Matter of course if it isn't Dominions it was burnt down.

CB: Yeah, I was going to ask you about the studio....your memories of the studio. Was it a happy little place?

CB: Very happy. Very small

I: Yes, right

CB: I think there were only two stages – the one we used and the one that Paramount used when they wanted to make a film and I think Korda used it. Yes he did.

I: Yes, I think

CB: I think, I think he did *Henry VIII* on it

I: Yes, that's right. Yes. And were you there at the time of the fire?

CB: No, it was after I'd left, yes

I: Still of undetermined origin I think (laughs)

CB: Well, the same, the same as the studio here. It happened around the same time I think (laughs). There was a lot of laughter about it of course. Oh yes, I mean, Herbert did, I think on *Carnival* we had to lay off for a few weeks when he went off to the City to get some more money. Yes

I: But the pictures I would have thought, generally turned a profit... so

CB: I would have thought so.

I: It was being siphoned off, I would have thought.

CB: Yes. Yes.

I: Freddy Young tells a very funny story about the fire, because he was somewhere else and they telephoned him to, one of his assistants telephoned to say there had been a fire at the studio but he had rushed in and at great risk of life and limb he had saved the camera and Freddy said 'You bloody fool'

CB: (laughs)

I: True or not I don't know. So, one curious little thing there is – well not curious but interesting –with Ralph Lynn and Winifred Shotter, a Wodehouse story

CB: That's right

I: One of the things that strikes me, Chilli, is your considerable range at this time. You are doing melodrama, adventure and this presumably is farce?

CB: Yes, it's a farce, yes, yes

I: And also comedy, so you are a very versatile player

CB: Oh.... Yes I think so

I: Yeah

CB: I think so, yes. Yes. I preferred comedy

I: Yes

CB: Although, of course, *Carnival* was a lovely part, it was a lovely part to play.

I: Mmm

CB: Unfortunately, we can't find all of it.

I: Really, is that so?

CB: No, we've...I've got about two thirds of it

I: Yes

CB: Which I hadn't seen since, since it was first shown

I: Yeah

CB: They showed it, they showed a bit at *This is Your Life* and the BBC lent what they've got of it. And they made a copy of it and it really is a very, very strong story, it really is. I mean Matheson Lang is magnificent. It's the story of, of the two actors, Italian actors, and at the time they are playing Othello, she is, I, Simonetta is playing Desdemona and he is playing Othello and, and of course the story follows that I'm with Othello, he is the villain, which is Joseph Schildkraut, a villain who is after his wife, Lang's wife and of course the last scene was set on the stage, when he comes on as Othello and speaks the words as they are, and he doesn't kill her as he does in Othello. It's very strong stuff. France has got it, Paris has got the whole film but it's dubbed in, in French.

I: So, your voice is missing

CB: And we are dying to get it because the British Film Institute is going to renovate it.

At the moment it's still on the old stock, you see.

I: Yes, on nitro...

CB: Yes

I: Right

CB: Because, I don't know whether it'll be ever found at all, if somebody might have a copy somewhere

I: Well, it's wonderful the way things turn up but increasingly it's more and more unlikely as time passes.

CB: Yes, I mean, they've lost a hundred British films

I: Oh yes, yes. More than a hundred.

CB: Well, we did a documentary on it...

I: Yeah

CB: A couple of years ago

I: That's right, the... but...

CB: And all of my Warner's, my middle Warner's ones...

I: They've all gone?

CB: All gone. About eight, all in a block that I did one after the other, including my favourite which is *Dipsie*

I: Well, that's inexcusable that Warner's...because Warner's were that good about preserving material in the States

CB: They probably didn't think it was worth it

I: No, I fear that that's true, a lot of the Max Millers⁶⁴ have gone, haven't they, for that reason.

CB: Yes, I did work with Max Millers

I: Almost nothing survived

CB: I did two with Max Millers, for Warner's.

I: Yeah. Before we get onto Warner's, Chilli, we mention Peppi Shildkraut twice. He had a bit of a naughty reputation as a, a selfish actor, I believe, wasn't he, very vain.

⁶⁴ Max Miller (1894-1963) was a British comedian and comic actor. His films included *Get off my Foot* (1935) and *Take it from Me* (1937)

CB: He was a very vain man. Yes, he was vain but he had the right to be, I think.

I: Yes? He was very pretty

CB: No, no, no, no...seeing going into the studios in the morning you wouldn't, wouldn't look at him twice. He had a sallow face; he had a bold head, had a bit of a tam tam.

I: Did he?

CB: He was quite short. Given two hours in the make up room he came out looking magnificent, magnificent...

I: Well, that's an encouragement to us all...

CB: Ah, but he was...He was Austrian of course, and he was inclined to eat up the scenery if he was allowed to, he could have gone overboard, but Wilcox kept him, kept him under control. But I have a rather naughty story to tell you about him if you like.

I: Please

CB: Well, he, he went, he talked to Jamie Kelly who was a lovely assistant director, he said "I can't get anywhere with Chilli, I... she won't take any notice of me" he said 'but, wait until, until the bedroom scene (whispers something maybe 'I will fetch you later, in the scene') So came the bedroom scene, I'm already dressed in my beautiful *Carnival* costume and my husband's gone away, because somebody's dying and left me all alone on the big Carnival night. So this is Shildkrauts, this where he can get me and take me off and try to seduce me on this night. So Wilcox said "We are going to put on your Carnival costume" which was a magnificent black sequined costume and, oh it looked great and I'm sitting waiting on the set for, for Joseph and I saw Wilcox laughing. Now, he never laughed, he didn't even smile much but he never laughed out loud and he was really laughing and so was everybody else on the set so I said "Look, what's the joke? What are

you all laughing at?" And apparently poor Joseph as he was changing he caught a very tender part of his anatomy in the dressing room drawer and he was in agony. Now I don't see why it made everybody laugh but it did (laughs) However he finally got dressed and comes into my, into my bedroom through an open window and sort of stands there and then collapse at the heat and in agony, he had to be sent home so we couldn't shoot it that day. But he did fascinate me in the bedroom scene because I'd got the inside giggle

I: I can imagine, oh, lovely...

CB: (laughs) An enormous influx of not just actors, in fact, compared with, a few actors, I suppose. But a lot technical talent came from Germany at that time, did it not? Do you remember those? Maybe B & D didn't have them

CB: No, I don't think...

I: A lot of them went to BIP,

CB: Yes

I: The cameramen and such

CB: Yes

I: There were some great, great film people. Technically competent

CB: E.A. Dupont of course

I: E. A. Dupont and there were cameramen and there was one of the great, great art directors Alfred Junge, came, came over. I wonder if you'd encountered

CB: No, they didn't come to British and Dominion

I: No

CB: No

I: B & D was what? A very British little outfit, was it? Or Anglo-Irish I suppose with Wilcox.

CB: Was he Irish?

I: Yes, he was Irish

CB: Yes, yes it was mostly British, I think yes, yes. It was a compact, cosy little studio and there weren't a lot of people working there and it would have been very happy if it had all worked out as we'd hoped

I: Yeah

CB: But I'm glad it'd happened. I'm glad I made wonderful pictures

I: Well, absolutely, yes. Then, you know it's a tragedy that it hasn't survived intact.

CB: And neither has *The Blue Danube*, which, of course, to me, that was so wonderful. It was Alfred Rode⁶⁵ and his Gipsy orchestra. It was a magnificent orchestra. It was called *The Blue Danube* and they played *The Blue Danube* but I'd never heard it play before. There were nearly all Hungarian gipsies from the woods –these wild looking gipsies- and I'd never heard before in a studio, whenever they played a number, particularly *The Blue Danube*, everybody applauded, even the crew, you know, even the tough crew. It was wonderful. And there was this gorgeous Brigitte Helm; she was a magnificent looking woman. Very tall, very big lady. Not a big lady, she was slender but very wide shoulders, this tiny little head, you know. She was beautiful and Shildkraut as well. But that's gone. That's gone. They've got the fire picture, they've got *The King's Cup*, they've kept that but the other two have disappeared. I mean, *The Blue Danube*, I don't think they've got any footage of it at all.

⁶⁵ Alfred Rode (1905-1979) was an Italian born French actor, composer and director. He directed and acted in the film *The Blue Danube* (1931)

I: Well, it's heart breaking

CB: It is. But I'm sure there are some people that are hoarding these things....

I: Well, it may be but the problem of course is it's on nitrate which is, is deteriorating all the time

CB: Right

I: It will just vanish...yeah.

CB: I do, I do know a man who's got one of mine and he invited me to see. It was called *Southern Roses* and he got it, he's got a house full of...they're good ones, I mean, he shows them all the time. And I asked him, I said 'Could you make me a copy of *Southern Roses*. Wouldn't let it out of his house, you see, that's what's happening

I: Well, that's happened

CB: People have got them and they will not let them go...

I: But these.

CB: And maybe people who got *Carnival* and *Gipsy*, those are the two I'm after...and they won't let them go.

I: That's very unfair, isn't it? It's a selfish and....

CB: Yes

I: A kind of miserable attitude.

CB: I got one anyway in the end....of *Southern Roses*. I've got that.

I: You have it on tape, do you, or as a film?

CB: The Film Institute gave it to me.

I: Yes. But it's on a film, a video cassette....

CB: A video cassette, yes.

I: Yeah, right. Well, I don't know, if we just run down these titles I see *Summer Lightning*, I mentioned that before as a Wodehouse story, with Ralph Lynn and Winifred Shotter, so that, that was high farce... Ralph Lyn was, what, the proverbial 'Silly ass' wasn't he?

CB: Yes (laughs)

I: How did you enjoy working with him?

CB: Very much, yes, he was nice.

I: and Maclean Rogers⁶⁶ was the director?

CB: Yes

I: Anything in particular about him?

CB: He was a lovely man Maclean Rogers

I: Yes?

CB: As a matter of fact, I'm writing another book at the moment and just wrote yesterday about Maclean Rogers, because I'm saying in the book about how, when I first met my third husband, who was an assistant director, you know, we were asked to stay at the studio during the duration of the film because the bombers were dropping, this is now 1941, just in case one of us got bumped off and they'd have to start the film all over again so, I tell the story of *Summer Lightning* with Maclean Rogers because one of the actors did die in the middle of the film so, it all had to be shot again, all...his part, which drove Maclean Rogers mad because he was very budget conscious and I think he had to stay within a budget, probably to get a bonus at the end of the film. He had a mop of black, or

⁶⁶ Maclean Rogers (1889-1962) was an English director and screenwriter, whose films included *Easy Riches* (1938) as director and *Glorious Youth* (1929) as screenwriter

dark brown thick hair and one day he was saying “Oh my God!” he said and brought his head down and brought his hair with it. (laughs)

I: How sweet

CB: And he, he lost all his hair completely but it all grew back, just as thick, but grey. And that’s the story I have about him because I wrote it yesterday morning. (laughs)

I: Lovely. Ehm...I’m going to rattle out some titles now and see what you say...*Purse Strings?*

CB: That was a Paramount quota quickie. Lots of fun, great fun.

I: *It’s a Cop?*

CB: *It’s a Cop*

I: Sidney Rogers, Sidney Howard!

CB: Sidney Howard, yes

I: And again Maclean Rogers directed you?

Ch That’s right yes.

I: *To Be a Lady*... I see George King directed that.

CB: Yes

I: He was a great quota quickie man, wasn’t he?

CB: Yes, yes that was a quota quickie yes

I: And the... well, the next one I have is Warner Brothers, so tell us now of the transition, you left B & D, , not too well disposed towards Mr Wilcox by the sound of it, and...that’s in ’34 but you’re, you are soon over at Teddington for Warner’s so..

CB: Yes

I: Mr Wilcox's prediction that you would find it difficult doesn't seem to be necessarily true... you are still working

CB: Wee, I did, but only two quota quickies and they probably didn't take more than four months

I: I see, ok, and what, did you have to drop your rate?

CB: Oh, Yes

I: Yes

CB: Considerably, yes. No, I, yes... Warner Brothers with *The Office Wife*

I: *The Office Wife*

CB: Yes

I: Irving Asher⁶⁷ produced?

CB: Yes

I: And Nora Swinburne and Cecil Parker, nice, nice cast

CB: Yes, very nice, yes. Nice little picture that was, yes.

I: Is that gone?

CB: Yes, I think so, yes

I: Now, well, there's one, or there are several one now before we come back to a sustain period at Warner's, looks you are all over the place, you are at Ealing next on Death Drive through

CB: Yes

I: Well, the story's by John Huston, was he over here doing that?

CB: John... was it a John Huston?

⁶⁷ Irving Asher (1903-1985) was an American film producer whose films included *Irish for Luck* (1936) and *Mayfair Melody* (1937)

I: A story by John Huston

CB: Was it?

I: Yes, I know he was here at some point in the thirties. He was a bit of a bum, you know in the thirties

CB: Oh dear

I: Yeah... Robert Douglas another name I'm familiar with Miles Mander...

CB: Well, Robert Douglas went to Hollywood and became a director

I: Did he?

CB: He wasn't a very good actor but he was a good director.

I: Then you turn up a BIP for an extravaganza called *Royal Cavalcade*...which was...

CB: Oh yeah, everybody was in that.

I: That was the Jubilee film...was it?

CB: Yes, everybody just did a tiny bit in that

I: Now, the whole series of director. I see Mycroft, Walter Mycroft produced, it says, and supervising director was Thomas Bentley. Which director worked on your scene? What did you do?

CB: I don't know

I: You don't remember? I'll read off the names: it's Herbert Brenon, Norman Lee, Walter Summers, Will Kellino and Marcel Varnel...

CB: I think it might have been Walter Brenon

I: Yeah? Herbert Brenon

Ch; Herbert Brenon, yes

I: A very good director, Herbert Brenon

CB: Yes

I: What did you do, do you remember?

CB: Two of us, there were two of us; we played land girls...the Land Army

I: First World War?

CB: Yes, it was the First World War; it couldn't have been the Second

I: No, no indeed, I'm just been silly

CB: No, I was thinking, it was the First World War There was just (unclear section (30:50) just to show we were land girls. Everybody did just a little tiny bit.

I: I didn't know there were land girls in the First World War, which is why I ask my dumb questions

CB: (laughs)

I: You are back to being Chilli in The Mad Hatters at... it says B & D, I don't know if is still B & D, is it?

CB: No, no, no, that was, that was Paramount again.

I: That was Paramount. Presumably B & D were making them for Paramount.

CB: Maybe

I: Yes, 'cause, yeah.

CB: Nothing to do with Herbert

I: No, right, and Ivar Campbell was the director. So, you reverted instantly to Chilli. And there's a film called *Honours Easy* at Welling for BIP

CB: At Welling was it? I thought it was made at BIP.

I: Well, I took this from Rachel Lowes

CB: No, it was made at BIP.

I: BIP, she gives it as Welling but there you are, she's not totally accurate.

CB: I don't find any of them accurate

I: No. Again Brenon was your director

CB: Yes

I: and Ronald Neame was on camera

CB: Yes

I: Now, that's interesting. Do you remember Ronnie at that time?

CB: Yes

I: Yeah, dappy young man, was he?

CB: He was yes

I: I bet. And an interesting cast: Greta Nissen, Patrick Knowles who also went to Hollywood

CB: That's right

I: and Margaret Lockwood⁶⁸

CB: Yes

I: She...that was quite early in her career presumably wasn't it?

CB: Yes it was. She was playing quite, quite a small part and I, I was terribly struck with her. I said, I did say, one of the silly things I say to myself 'That's a star of the future'. There was something about her...She didn't look very beautiful in those days, because she look madly glamorous later on, but there was something about her – her voice, the way she delivered her lines. She had a very definite way of speaking, if you may

⁶⁸ Margaret Lockwood (1916-1990) was an English actress whose work includes *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) and *Love Story* (1944).

remember. Everything she said she meant. I was very struck with her and I wasn't at all surprised that she did become the big star she did.

I: I never rated her, to tell you the truth. I didn't think she was a very good actress. That was just my reaction to her

CB: Well, I think she wanted very much to be a glamour girl and she wasn't naturally a glamour girl and she was probably just playing the wrong parts

I: Yes

CB: I think, I think if she'd played the more dramatic parts, not all those mad ones... you know, from Gainsborough ...there were a lot of... silly stories weren't they. She was the high way woman

I: Well, that was Gainsborough during the war, wasn't it

CB: Yes

I: But at this stage I think she was an (? 33:40) wasn't she?

CB: She would have been about 19 then, I was about 24, what 25 at that time

I: But the one thing I remember more or less from this period, maybe a couple of years later was Bank Holiday, do you remember Bank Holiday, which Carol Reed directed.

CB: No, no, was she in that?

I: She's in that, oh yes. *Lucky Days* directed by Reggie Denham.

CB: Oh! *Lucky Days* was the first time I used Chilli

I: Was it?

CB: Yes! Because there was a sort of hint in the paper. Lucky days for Chili again, or something, yes.

I: Well, I, yes, I see your point, again we are going by tradeshows and *Mad Hatters* was trade shown in July of 1935 and *Lucky Days* was trade-shown the following month, so, it could well be that...

CB: Yes it definitely was *Lucky Days*.

I: Yeah? Shot earlier but released later.

CB: Yes

I: And Reggie Denham as director. Was he a fun director?

CB: Oh, yeah, he was nice. Yes

I: And Whitmore Humphries. He's a lovely name...

CB: No, he didn't sort of appear anymore, I don't think. I never met him again. (laughs)

I: It's almost a Peter Seller name, isn't it, Whitmore Humphries, isn't it. 'Hello Lady!'

CB: (laughs)

I: And then you start off at Warner's by the look of it....with a Max Miller film called *Get Off My Foot*, directed by William Beaudine⁶⁹, he was a lovely old director, comedy director, wasn't he?

CB: Oh, he was lovely, yes. He.... one of the very few people who – not one of the very few – one of the quite a few people who invited me to Hollywood to go under their personal contract.

I: Really?

CB: Mmmm. But I didn't at first.

I: Well, while you raised that, let's talk about it. What were your desires

CB: I didn't want to go to Hollywood.

I: No, why was that?

CB: I don't know. I just didn't fancy going to Hollywood. I can't explain it why, I've never been able to explain why.

I: Was it possibly a fear of a seven year contract, being tied up and being ...tied up

CB: Oh no I would have liked all that.

I: yeah

CB: No it wasn't that. I just didn't like the idea. Something said to me 'You'll never be happy in Hollywood'

I: Right

CB: 'Don't go'. I mean I had lots of lots of times, lots of offers.

I: Family was here of course. Was that a consideration?

CB: No it was nothing to do with that. Nothing to do with family... Nothing to do with my marriages or my lovers or anything like that. It's just that...Everybody else was doing to go to Hollywood in the thirties. All actors...it was their Mecca, but it wasn't mine.

And when I did go – I had to go because I was under contract.

I: Yes

CB: And if I'd refused I would have been suspended.

I: You did go, did you?

CB: Oh yes.

I: Ahah

CB: Oh yes

I: To work

CB: I went with Warner's. After we'd finished *Gipsy* we sent it over to Hollywood for them to have a look at me, because they had already sent Errol Flynn, he started at Warner Studios

I: Yes

CB: At Teddington, he'd been put under contract by Warner's and...the...two of the Warner Brothers came over, Harry and Jack, and Irvin Asher invited us down to meet them at his house one Sunday and...Jack said "How would you like to go to Hollywood" – No he didn't, no he didn't, no he didn't – he didn't say it much, he just said "Keep your weight down –he said- nobody likes to see fat girls on films", that's what he said (laughs).

I: Did you have a tendency to plumpness?

CB: Between films I sort of put on a few pounds but take it off again before we started because, as you know, the camera puts on weight on your normal weight so I kept under weight but at that time I might have been perhaps a little plumper... anyway, I had to go...the ticket was bought for me and I was still under contract to English Warner's and then under contract to American Warner's for 7 years.

I: I didn't know that. Right. And what did you shoot in the States?

CB: Nothing

I: Nothing at all

CB: Nothing

I: As I can see, it doesn't show up on the list.

CB: No, I run away

I: Ah, right. Well , now that comes in sequence then, for the moment you are starting out at Teddington, ehm, and.... I suppose I have to ask you about Max Miller, was he all-right to work with?

CB: Oh no (laughs) he was horrible then...

I: Tell us how

CB: Miserable and mean (laughs)

I: Was he? I know he was mean but....tell us about him

CB: He was much more interested in how much money he was going to make, I think there was more money in film for him you know? There was no fun, no laughter, no giggles, nothing...flirtation, you know like you do, all those flirting and fooling around...no he was very serious, he said "I've made my twenty thousand, that's what I intended to do" which was a lot of money I suppose in the thirties, twenty thousand pounds...and he went on to make a lot more after that of course but the favourite star in the studio was, he was making the film but he also had a date in the, not Peterborough, somewhere fairly close to London, in Variety, for one week which he wouldn't give up, he wanted to play it. So a studio car used to drive him up after we finished shooting to the theatre and he'd do his evening and drive him back for the mornings. So he did this for a week and on the way back on the Saturday night he said to the chauffeur I'm going to treat you tonight I'm going to buy you supper. And he stopped at a fish and chip shop (laughs)

I: I'd forgotten that he had a reputation for being very tight

CB: Oh yes

I: He was still a misery, was he?

CB: He was quite a misery. He was no laughs at all...

I: I've only recently been talking with Peter Newbrook, who was an old mate. Do you remember Peter from Teddington?

CB: Peter...

I: Newbrook his name is. He begun in the front office there as a clerk and then he went on the camera, he was a clapper loader in the mid thirties. I imagined you must have met him as a clapper loader

CB: Oh, I must have done, yes, but I probably didn't know his surname.

I: No, well he went on to be one of Lean's cameramen, camera operator, and he was at Bafta that night too?

CB: Oh was he?

I: Yeah, but, Peter says it was a very happy little studio, was it? Yes

CB: Oh, it was lovely, Oh, it was lovely. It was all I wanted to do when I was in Hollywood, go back to Teddington...go on making films. (laughs) As I had been.

I: Yes, it's difficult to talk about a studio because it become routine, doesn't it in a way and it feels it either comfortable or not, you either enjoy being there or not but there isn't that much difference there today, is there? It's almost a factory process, you turn up, and you do the work and you go home. I mean, was that the way you found it?

CB: Oh, with great delight, I mean...

I: Yes, of course, yes

CB: I was always very please to arrive at the studio in the mornings

I: Yes?

CB: Yes, it was a lovely and Irving Asher was a very, very nice man, our boss. He was married to Laura La Plante⁷⁰ with whom I went to Hollywood, we all travelled together with her new baby...the baby must be what now? A grandfather I should think?

I: Well, we're talking of the.... Yes, it's 60 years ago, isn't it?

CB: Yes, it is, yes

I: Any thoughts about Irvin Asher, when I say thoughts, you know, your memories of him because he was very capable producer, he eventually went to work for Korda, I believe.

CB: No, he stayed in Hollywood. I think he went to MGM.

I: Well, he did some work for Korda, late thirties; I know he made Q Planes for Korda

CB: In England?

I: Yeah.

CB: I didn't know he was here

I: Olivier⁷¹, Ralph Richardson⁷² and...

CB: Oh... Oh I didn't know that, because I kept... I was very, very fond of him and... but I didn't know he was here, when? Late thirties?

I: about '38, '39 yes, '38, he probably went back 'cause of the war, as so many of them did.

CB: Now, he....we all travelled together in '37 and he was still with Warner's then

I: Yes, yes

⁷⁰ Laura LaPlante

⁷¹ Laurence Olivier (1907-1989) was an English actor, director and producer. He is well known for his stage work (especially Shakespearean roles) as well as appearing in films including *Rebecca* (1940) and *Marathon Man* (1976)

⁷² Ralph Richardson (1902-1983) was a British actor whose films included *The Four Feathers* (1939) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965)

CB: I thought he stayed there, well, he did stay there....

I: Well he left for while, I know, I know that he made two pictures I think, I can't remember what the second one was but I know one is called Q Planes, which is...

CB: That surprises me...

I: quite well know, and it's a...

CB: I didn't know that

I: for a Columbia release but it was for London Film Production

CB: Yes

I: at Denham... any particular memories of him? And Laura La Plante..

CB: Yes, he was, I think a very sensible, clever man because, he you went to see him in his office he would never interview an actress unless the door was wide open and his secretary was in full due, which is very wise, as far as I'm concerned no, I wouldn't try to, might try to seduce him or anything like that, but there were girls who would and put him in a compromising position....Laura was a lovely little lady who I admired so tremendously, in those Heywood days she was a lovely actress, lovely comedian. Then they had this wee baby and they didn't seem to be, to me to be a very, very happy couple on the way, the way to Hollywood. Someone said "Laura has never loved the man she's married, she loved somebody else whom she didn't get" So obviously the very thought that she didn't really love Irvingthat is what I was told. I forgot the man they say who was the love of her life.

I: It's an unpredictable business marriage isn't it?

CB: well....

Chili Bouchier Tape 2 Part 2

I: Yes we're just generally chatting about Warner Bros. at this stage, are we not? perhaps rather than individual pictures, it's the feel of the business, how it was to work in this area at that time. You're working again consistently, from one picture to another, is that right?

CB: Oh yes, yes.

I: And again...

CB: Very varied

I: Yes. Any particular favourites that you had? You liked Irving Asher and you did a couple of pictures with Bodine, was it? Or just the one?

CB: I liked Bill Bodine very much, yes.

I: Very experienced director, was he not?

CB: Yes he was, yes. And his granddaughter is writing his biography, so she phoned me from America to ask me my feelings about him. So I've been helping a lot of people lately to write their biographies of their famous uncles and grandfathers and things.

I: Source of unique knowledge, I've got a film called *Mr Cohen Takes a Walk*, which he directed, and I see in the cast, along with Violet Fairbrother was Paul Gretz, do you remember him?

CB: Yes...yes

I: Because he became a famous...err...French producer

CB: Did he become a producer?

I: In France, yeah

CB: But was he German, wasn't he?

I: I think he was, yes, with a name like Gretz, but umm...yeah.

CB: Can't always tell, I mean Dupont sounded like a Frenchman, and he was a German

I: He was a German, yeah. Yeah, but I know he produced some important pictures in France, immediately before the war.

CB: Yes, it was a story of a Jewish family, yes

I: And then a break a Warner Bros series, maybe it was shot at a different time, *The Ghost Goes West*. You were in that...

CB: Yes. Oh, there's a sad story (laughs)

I: Tell me?

CB: Well I played Cleopatra. You know *The Ghost Goes West*, you know they're taking, taking the castle brick by brick to America where this rich man is having it rebuilt, and a ghost goes with it. So on the, on the ship, there's a fancy dress ball, and I am dressed as Cleopatra, and I look up at the orchestra and I see a Scotsman in full kilt standing on the stage. And I say "oh, what a lovely Scotsman". And we meet up later, and we have a ship board romance, and my husband can't understand why I'm talking to somebody, because he can't see the ghost (laughs) and I can. And it was a lovely part, and I went to the opening night, it was a big night with Queen Mary, for some charitable thing, and I dropped my programme, and I missed my line. My one line that was left in was just "Oh what a lovely Scotsman". Everything else was cut out. They'd overshot. And lots of people were cut out, Elsa Lancaster (?) and lots of other people in it. They all had their parts cut out, so...it's very sad.

I: Korda was notorious for waste, yeah

CB: For overshooting, yes.

I: How long did you work on the picture, then?

CB: Oh, quite a while. You know, oh...I would say about a couple of weeks all together, because you weren't, I wasn't a part of the film right through. Only on the ship board, only on the ship.

I: So that was shot fairly efficiently and erm...

CB : Yes, a René Clair⁷³, wasn't it?

I: Yes, René Clair. I was going to ask you about the two famous names on it; there's Clair and there's also Alex himself. Did you, umm...shoot at Isleworth or had Denham opened by this time?

CB: What does it say there?

I: Well it says the picture was shot at both Isleworth and also at Denham...

CB: What year?

I: Thirty-five. The film was released at the very end of thirty-five.

CB: Because, *Southern Roses* was the very, very first picture made at Denham. And I think that was in 1935.

I: Yes well, I'd need to go specifically in to the Korda history to check precise dates, I just wondered if you remember where you shot...

CB: No, I don't remember.

I: No, right, ok.

CB: But I rather feel it was Denham.

⁷³ Rene Clair (1898-1981) was a French filmmaker, whose films included *The Italian Straw Hat* (1928) and *Then There Were None* (1945)

I: Yes? Well, was it a nuisance to get to? You were driving yourself to the studio were you, in those days? Right. Do you remember driving all that way, all that way out?

CB: Yes

I: Well *Southern Roses* was released toward the end of thirty-six. It was trade shown in September of thirty-six

CB: Yes

I:...and *Ghost goes West* was finished long before that.

CB: Oh, yes, yes it was. But I've got a feeling, I think it was Kevin, who told me that *Southern Roses* was a very...as a matter of fact, I did look it up in a book recently and it said yes, it was the first the first picture to be made at Denham, once they opened

I: Right, right.

CB: Once the studio was ready.

I: So, there you were more or less on the cutting room floor, the Ghost that went west...yeah.

CB: (laughs) that's right.

I: Donat⁷⁴ was in his prime at that stage, wasn't he?

CB: Yes, lovely man.

I: Yeah...so sad about his ill health.

CB: Yes.

I: How about the Americans, did you meet up with them at all, Jean Parker and Eugene Pallette?

CB: Yes, yes, she was a cute little thing

⁷⁴ Robert Donat (1905-1958) was a British film and stage actor. His films included *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939) for which he gave an Academy Award winning performance.

I: Really? A great Hollywood star in behaviour, or, umm...

CB: No, she was funny; she used to listen to me rehearsing my lines and try to send me up as if it would put me off. She'd say "Oh, what a funny thing to have to say", she'd say, "Oh, I wouldn't like to have to say a thing like that". But it didn't worry me; I was an old hand at it.

I: Really? That's a little naughty.

CB: Naughty, naughty.

I: Have you encountered that very often...

CB: Not very often

I: Upstaging, and err...mucking you about?

CB: Not in films, not in films. Usually everyone is very helpful. Umm...but then she wasn't, she was just a little girl. She was very young. I suppose she thought it would put me off but it didn't.

I: But she was known to be difficult though, I think

CB: Yes, I believe she was. Pretty, very pretty.

I: And a very good actress, yeah.

CB: Eugene Pallette was nice.

I: Yes, one imagines that he must've been. Umm...next one, again, you're back at Teddington, I think, for a film called *Faithful*

CB: Right

I: Directed by Paul Stein⁷⁵.

CB: Yes

⁷⁵ Paul Stein (1892-1951) was an Austrain born film director whose films included *Faithful* (1936) and *Lisbon Story* (1946)

I: With Jean Muir. I always get confused with all these Jean Muirs, umm...that was an English actress.

CB: No...

I: That was the American actress, right.

CB: She was a Hollywood actress.

I: I knew her subsequently, she killed herself.

CB: Did she?

I: She was one of the McCarthy victims.

CB: Is that why she killed herself?

I: She couldn't get work.

CB: Couldn't get work

I: There were several of them

CB: Yes

I: I was there at that time; it was a very depressing time indeed.

CB: You were in Hollywood at that time?

I: Yeah, yeah Hollywood and New York

CB: What year was that?

I: I went there in forty-nine, McCarthyism began a little later. Forty-nine was still the time the house un-American activities committees, they started it all and then McCarthy came along in the early fifties.

CB: Yes, I wasn't sure when that time was

I: Yeah, well it lasted, it began about forty-six I think, forty-seven, and lasted up till, well, in to the sixties, more or less.

CB: Yes, a lot of people went under, didn't they?

I: Oh they did indeed, yeah. So Paul Stein was the director, what do you have to say about him?

CB: Yes, I'm trying to think, I must've worked with Paul Stein before, it seems to be a name I know.

I: Really?

CB: But I don't know when. Paul Stein, I can't even remember. I don't know what nationality he was, again he sounds German.

I: Austrian, I think. I think he was Austrian. Anyway, not to, um...I always, again, my memory's playing me up today. Was he married to Elisabeth Bergner or that was Zinner, wasn't it?

CB: Yes, yes,

I: Yes. Dear oh dear, what would Kevin say?! Paul Stein is a familiar name, but I can't pin him down either, so...

CB: No, I can't, I seem to have worked with him before in some capacity, I don't know if maybe he was an actor, or...

I: I think he was one of those refugees who came here and err...carved out some sort of career in the thirties. With how much talent, I don't know. Do you remember *Faithful* as a movie, were you pleased with...

CB: *Faithful*?

I: *Faithful*.

CB: Yes, we had a German actor in that too.

I: Hans Sohnker.

CB: That's right, yes. Nice young man, yes. And Jean Muir played his wife, and I played the naughty girl, of course, as usual

I: And Gene Gerrard.

CB: Yes.

I: So no clear memories of that one, particularly, anywhere?

CB: Not particularly, no.

I: Now you're in to, next, a film called *Where's Sally?* Also with Gene Gerrard. Claude Hulbert, bless him. Renee Gadd and you're directed by Arthur Woods⁷⁶, I'd love to hear about Arthur Woods.

CB: Yes. A lot has happened about Arthur Woods recently, and I'd like to get to the bottom of it. Arthur was a very, very nice person. I'm not sure whether he was a gay or not, but I rather feel he was. Um, a different girl came to see me who is doing some thing for her A Levels or something, and she's writing the story of Warner Bros. And, um, she said she'd met an American lady who was a journalist who said she'd like to know about Arthur Woods, because he was killed

I: Yes, in the war.

CB: But not on active service, he was killed down on the coast here, on practice duty. And she said "I'm very anxious to speak to Chili Bouchier, because she made some films with him, and I'd like to know why, why Arthur Woods's death was hushed up". And I said "there was nothing like that", I said, had she made it into something rather mysterious and something unpleasant? And I said to this girl; "I don't want to know about this, because I don't know what happened. However, much later, somebody wrote

⁷⁶ Arthur Woods (1904-1944) was an English film director, best known for the acclaimed film *They Drive by Night* (1938)

to me from the coast, from a station of, of...air force station, and again asked me for my comments about Arthur Woods, saying “we’d love to hear what he was like because he was a very good pilot, and unfortunately he was killed in a collision with another plane”. So I wrote back and I said “I found him delightful to work with, I knew nothing about his private life and never did”, but I said there was this strange woman who was insinuating that there was something sinister about his death. And this man wrote back and said “yes, she’s been down here, trying to make, you know, trouble”. So I don’t, I don’t understand it at all, because bless his heart, he wasn’t a big director. He would have been, if he’d lived. Because he’d come from the cutting room. He was in the cutting room at Warner’s and then rose to, and I made quite a few pictures with him. But that’s all I know about him, and there’s still this strange mystery. But they treat him as a hero down there, and they’ve even sort of had a little plaque put up in his honour or something. But I can’t understand why there is such an interest in him, when as I say he wasn’t a name that springs to mind...why were you so interested in him?

I: He’s regarded as showing enormous promise, that he would have developed, as you say, into a very considerable director had he lived. How old would you say he was, at that point?

CB: Oh, quite young

I: Twenties, thirties?

CB: Perhaps early thirties.

I: Early thirties, yes...

CB: Yes.

I: What makes you think that he might have been gay?

CB: Well, this woman asked...said he was.

I: Right...

CB: Oh, I don't know, as I say, I told her, I said I know nothing about his private life. I only know what he was like to work with, and he was charming. But she did...I don't know, I don't know what she was after. Anyway, she's done nothing, so...

I: Well, they can be so mischievous, can't they?

CB: Well yes, I mean (unintelligible.) should be enquiring about a practically unknown director

I: Well, he's been rediscovered, I think, hasn't he? And again, from what you said before, maybe his films don't survive. Maybe...

CB: Well, some of those don't. There's one there that has, I think, directed by him. *Mr Satan?*

I: Yes

CB: Yes.

I: That was quite an important picture I think, wasn't it?

CB: The British Film Institute have got that, and they showed it last year one Sunday night.

I: I've got him down on your list as...*Where's Sally, Mayfair Melody, The Dark Stairway, Mr Satan, The Return of Carol Deane*

CB: Yes, right...

I: So, you worked with him pretty consistently, yeah, yes. Well the more you can remember, because I mean whether or not he was gay and whether or not there was a

sinister aspect to his death; the more information there is about the poor man, would be very useful, I think, for historians...

CB: I don't know very much about him, I know nothing about his private life, whether he was married or what he was. We didn't meet after work, ever. Very, very seldom. Many of us, we just went home, you know, and went to bed early.

I: Wasn't there a pub where everyone piled into?

CB: Oh yes...I don't think Arthur came to it though.

I: Was, umm...Teddington a pissy studio, because, I mean Ealing certainly was...everyone was a laugh at Ealing.

CB: No, it wasn't, no.

I: Reasonably temperate?

CB: Yes.

I: Was that the American influence, do you think? Do they take things more seriously, perhaps, as a business?

CB: Possibly, possibly yes. There was a pub next door, but we only went into it when we had finished, after work, and you know, relaxed. It's still there, the little pub next door.

I: I haven't been there for years and years and years.

CB: I was down there in February, you see, for *This Is Your Life*. Television studios which I couldn't recognise at all.

I: Coming out of sequence, if I may, and that is to talk about the bomb. You weren't there then, obviously...

CB: No.

I: because that was forty-four. But do you remember Doc Solomon?

CB: Oh, yes! Of course I do. He was killed that night.

I: He was killed that night indeed, along with...um...

CB: He was on...who else was there?

I: I've forgotten her name, umm...she was in the distribution side of things which had been evacuated there for safety, and the poor girl got killed that night.

CB: I only heard about Doc, because I believe he was on fire duty that night, I think.

I: I must get you together, Chili, with Peter, Peter Newbrook. Because Peter is one of the few survivors, if not the sole survivor, of the technical staff there. And, err...has astonishing memories, astonishing recall, of people and events. So you'd enjoy meeting him.

CB: Yes, I would, yes.

I: He lives in Norwich, but next time he's down, I'll try and arrange it. But anyway, would you say Doc was Jewish, or not?

CB: Oh yeah, I think so.

I: Right

CB: And he was lovely.

I: Do, do you know if he were related to Jack Warner's first wife? These are the questions that are bothering Peter!

CB: I don't know who Jack Warner's first wife was

I: No, right.

CB: But I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't all kept in the family, yeah, I mean it rather was...

I: Well there was a lot of nepotism, wasn't there?

CB: There was in Hollywood, yes. No, he was a short little, short little stumpy man with a gravel voice (growls) he'd talk like this...and he had a beautiful English wife, um, and it was very sad that he, that he went like that. And I say, I often wonder, as there was this chunk of my films from Warner's that are missing...if they didn't go up in smoke with the bomb, I mean might they have been stored in the....as there's no trace of them, anywhere. I mean they haven't even got them laying around rotting, as far as I can see.

I: It's a mystery, it's a puzzle. Does Kevin have anything to say about that?

CB: I haven't discussed it with him.

I: Well, yeah – it's worthy of investigation, isn't it? How it...

CB: Well, it's possible, isn't it?

I: Yeah. Because I would've thought that if nothing else, they would send a print, if not negative or a frame grain to Burbank, and that being so...

CB: Of each one?

I: Well, I would've thought just for them to see, umm, and that being so it would've gone into the vault. Mind you, a lot of the...they had a bent librarian at one point in the vaults there, and um...

CB: Where?

I: At Burbank. And he stole a lot of the prints. Some of which were later recovered. But I don't think with all respect he would've necessarily stolen British Warner's.

CB: No, no, no...

I: Well that's something to try and look into somehow.

CB: Yes, it would be interesting...

I: Next time I see Kevin I'll ask him

CB: If he knows anything about it, yes.

I: But coming back...I know this is fairly daft, but it is only because of Peter, umm...his worry is that, before Doc died, actually...Peter was in San Francisco during the war, in Forty-three, and he met the family...and, err...he remembers Doc's mother going to church, not to be a practicing Jew, and err...I don't quite know how this has become something that needs to be settled, other than umm he doesn't think that Solomon was related to the Warner's, even by marriage, whereas there is a woman called Cass Warner who is descended from Harry Warner, umm, who says that he was a cousin by marriage. But anyway, I thought you could shed some light on that.

CB: No, I didn't know, no...Irving was, Irving was a nephew I think, Irving Asher

I: Yes, with a...

CB: Was a nephew of one of the Warner's

I: They, they, as you say it was all kept in the family, wasn't it? An astonishing amount of nepotism, not just at Warner's but at all the studios, yeah.

CB: Yes...

I: Right, well, we've done *Southern Roses*. Wendy Toyer I see choreographed the dances arranged the dances.

CB: That's right, yes, yes.

I: Did you dance in that?

CB: I did, yes, but she didn't do my dances. She did, umm...it was a story of mistaken identity with Gina Marlow and myself who were rather similar in appearance and it was...and she did, she did hers, she did Gina Marlow's. Because she did the sort of big numbers, and I didn't, I just danced alone. In my underclothes (laughs).

I: How about George Robey?

CB: Oh, he was nice!

I: Was he?

CB: He was nice, yes. But I don't think he took very kindly to films.

I: No he didn't.

CB: He rather liked to declaim, you know, and stick to his own words.

I: And have an audience, I would have thought.

CB: Yes, I should have thought so, yes.

I: He didn't make many films, did he?

CB: No

I: You shot at Denham. Do you remember is it Goldsmith, the producer?

CB: The name is familiar.

I: Only the name?

CB: Yes. And was he the producer of *Southern Roses*?

I: *Southern Roses*, right. And...your director was Fred Zelnick⁷⁷

CB: Yes

I: What do you recall of him?

CB: I don't know. He was either German or Austrian I think.

I: Yeah

CB: Yes

I: Another refugee I would think.

CB: Yes. Didn't he do things later on, Zelnick?

⁷⁷ Frederic Zelnick (1885-1950) was an Austrian film director, best known for his work during the silent era. His films included *Dancing Vienna* (1927) and *I Killed the Count* (1939)

I: It's a name that, without looking him up, I couldn't tell you much about him.

CB: I think he did quite a lot, later on. I think this was his first thing over here.

I: Mmm-hmm. Right, we're on to one of your favourites no, I think, Gypsy.

CB: Yes.

I: Yes, *Gypsy*.

CB: Well, it was an absolutely wonderful part, for me. It was written by a lady Eleanor Smith, it was called *Zigeuner*, and it was about a Spanish gypsy dancer who comes to England and marries in to the aristocracy. It's...I would say it's novelettish but wonderful, wonderful stuff (laughs).

I: She loved gypsies, didn't she? She was very involved with gypsies, Eleanor Smith?

CB: Well, she had an affair with the girl I was supposed to be, Hassina, you know, they were lovers. Because I met them at The Savoy. Umm...and so, Irving sent it to me, and I said "Ohh Irving, it's wonderful...", because I looked like a gypsy with all this mad hair, because I'd gone back to my bad hair. And, err...so I said well I, I can dance, but I've never done Spanish gypsy dancing. So I went and we had about six months before the film was to be made. Well quite a long time anyway, and I went regularly and learnt to do Spanish gypsy dancing. We were all set to shoot on the following Monday and Irving said "Chili, the Spanish Civil War has broken out so we can't make it Spanish, you'll have to be a Hungarian gypsy dancer" (laughs). All that time was wasted. I had a week in which to learn Hungarian gypsy dancing which was absolutely, entirely different. It was very Russian, you know, where you hold your hand like this and tap, tap, tap, tap...so that was the way we started it. And of course, we had to make it into a Hungarian gypsy. And,

was it...err...Hugh Williams played my Hungarian gypsy lover, and err Roland Young...not Roland Young...yes...

I: Roland Young, yes, very, Roland Young, lovely man.

CB: Yes, yes. Yes, he'd come over to work for Korda, I think. In the big picture he came over, and he was absolutely right for the part as a sort of elderly, you know, aristocrat.

And so he came and we worked together, and he was absolutely adorable, he was lovely.

He was the most natural actor I think I've worked with. I never knew when he finished talking normally and when we'd gone in to the scene, he was so natural

I: Yes, ease of performance

CB: Yes, there is...nothing...so I mean that one was certainly sent to Hollywood. It might still be there, but as you say it was a long time ago.

I: I think it had an American release, didn't it? In fact, several of these pictures had releases...

CB: I think so, yes...yes, I think it must be, I had a notice sent to me from someone in America at Variety, and (coughs) had seen it and said it is very difficult to understand that this English girl is not a product of the continent.

I: Oh, really?

CB: Yes, well it was, it was, yes. Because English girls had a reputation of being rather cold and...in those days.

I: Indeed. And with that cut-glass accent which put everyone off, too, especially the Americans

CB: Right, right...they couldn't understand it.

I: Indeed not

CB: Well, we had to, at Warner's, we were told to cultivate what they called a mid-Atlantic accent, they said they won't understand you in the sticks in America, so you know, we were sort of saying 'ledder' instead of 'letter' and things like that, because our 'ts' are very, very, very sharp, aren't they, in English

I: Yes, I think that's alright, to pronounce the word. But it's that very affected accent that, umm...the West End, stage, the RADA accent that really got me down.

CB: Yes, yes.

I: I used to see a lot of British pictures in the States and half the time I either couldn't understand them or my teeth would be on edge.

CB: Yes, yes...

I: Now did you know that Terrence Rattigan⁷⁸ worked on the script of *Gypsy*?

CB: Yes, I did

I: Yes, right. Did you...had you met him at that time?

CB: Yes

I: Right. Did you know him before, or through the picture?

CB: No, no, only through the picture, but then he left shortly afterwards, didn't he? And wrote his first play

I: French...*French Without Tears*.

CB: *French Without Tears*. I think he wrote it in Warner's' time (laughs)

I: Yes (laughs). I'm surprised they didn't claim it! Brock Williams⁷⁹ was also on the script.

⁷⁸ Terrence Rattigan (1911-1977) was an English dramatist whose plays included *The Browning Version* (1948) (also adapted for film) and *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952)

⁷⁹ Brock Williams (1894-1964) was an English screenwriter, whose work included *The Lash* (1934) and *Date with Disaster* (1954)

CB: Yes

I: Brock Williams, I think, was head of the scenario department, was he not, at Warner's?

CB: He was, I think, yes. I think he stayed on, didn't he?

I: Yes, were you friendly with the writers?

CB: Yes

I: I mean, was it possible to have chats with the writers, over a drink, or...

CB: It was a very, very friendly studio, very friendly

I: Right. Were they on the set?

CB: They used to come on the set, yes.

I: Once the script was written, was it sacred, did it go to Burbank for approval?

CB: No, no

I: So it was up to Irving Asher, the way the studio was run?

CB: Yes, oh I mean, some of those scripts weren't written till last minute (laughs). I mean, we didn't know how they were going to end sometimes. It wasn't sloppy, it was, umm...*Mr Satan*, for instance; we didn't know whether I was going to be killed off, or if I was going to go off with the leading man, or what. Eventually I was killed off.

I: Yeah. Just the one ending, or did they shoot more than one

CB: No

I: No, they just shot the one? Yes.

CB: Yes.

I: Your director on *Gypsy*, Roy William Neill?⁸⁰

CB: Yes. Another American.

⁸⁰ Roy William Neill (1887-1946) was an Irish born director best known for directing the *Sherlock Holmes* films starring Basil Rathbone

I: Very, very, well actually he was Irish, but worked in the States. A very capable director.

CB: Very. Very nice.

I: He did all those Sherlock Holmes films during the war you know, they were his.

CB: Where, here? Or?

I: No, in the States. The Basil Rathbone ones.

CB: Oh yes.

I: What are your memories of him? Because again, as I say, he was quite a good director, so he...

CB: Oh, did he?

I: Yeah. I think he was in his forties, I think, by then.

CB: Ohhh...oh yes, I got along with him very well. I liked him.

I: An actor's director?

CB: Yes, yes

I: Nothing more about him that comes to mind?

CB: No. We had a very peaceful picture. It went through very smoothly, after we'd changed from Spain to Hungary (laughs). It went through very well.

I: Was it all studio shot? Or...were you...where did you do locations?

CB: No, it was all studio I think. No, no, it was supposed to be some location, but we did...no, it was all studio. Oh yes, I had to do mad things like hang upside down in a tree for ages, umm...(laughs)...she was a madcap sort of a person. A gypsy, a band of gypsies arrive at her mad house, and umm she joins in and he comes back and finds her looking like a gypsy again with her hair all over the place, and all my gypsy friends rushing

around and fooling around. Umm, and I can't remember, oh I know, I climb out, I climb out of the window for some reason and I get caught at the top of a tree and then I drop down from the tree, and hang upside down looking into the kitchen, I know it was very difficult. I had had to have things up round my waist, under my clothes, you know to, to hang on, and umm, and I'm hanging upside down and is it...is his name on the cast list...he was a very funny actor, but...

I: The only ones I've got are those I read out, I don't know...

CB: I've forgotten his name. And I say "hello" to him, he's a butler, and I say "hello" upside down then drop out of shot, and umm...Roland Young sees me coming down, he's on the wide staircase and trying to get there to catch me as I fall on the ground. It was a very funny scene.

I: Have you...have you signed a contract, or?

CB: Oh yes.

I: When did you sign with them, when you first went there?

CB: I think it was during the Max Millers film, the first Max Millers film

I: Right, I see, ok. And it's seven years with options for them to pick up, yep. When did they send you to the States, when did that happen?

CB: Thirty-seven, wasn't it? Thirty-seven, yes.

I: I'm looking at, um...how long were you there?

CB: Only a few months.

I: Right. Because actually, oh...the big gap is *Change For A Sovereign* was trade shown in September of thirty-seven, and then there's a gap until November thirty-eight with *Dark Stairway*

CB: Oh, well *The Dark Stairway* was made before I went to Hollywood.

I: Was it? Oh, well that was on the shelf then.

CB: Mmm.

I: *Mr Satan* was shown in thirty-eight. But I don't have the month. With James Stevenson who...umm, actually, Teddington was a little proving ground for players, wasn't it? Because James Stevenson also was sent to the,

CB: We went together.

I: Did you? Oh.

CB: Yes. We went to Hollywood together. He was a very, very good actor with a lovely voice. But he'd become an actor late in life. I suppose he was early forties, hadn't been an actor for very long. But Hollywood wanted him, and we sat around in Hollywood together quite a lot. I didn't go out very much and he didn't go out very much. We commiserated! And when I came home, I ran home, he, just as he made *The Letter* with Bette Davis, his first part, he died.

I: Yeah.

CB: Of what, I don't know. Another actor came with us, Bruce Lister. He was a very beautiful young man, but just a little too beautiful - he wasn't a manly looking beautiful actor. And I used to see him wandering around in the background in some Warner pictures for a couple of years. And then I hadn't heard of him since. So out of the three of us, you know, nothing happened, and should have made Jack Warner very cross, I think!
(laughs)

I: Patrick Knowles was also sent over, he umm...

CB: He didn't go over to Warner's.

I: No?

CB: I don't think so, no.

I: Metro, was it Metro?

CB: I think he went on his own, under his own...

I: Oh did he? Right.

CB: I remember him telling me that he was going to Hollywood but I don't think he was put under contract. He did quite well.

I: Well I don't know when to get on to your Hollywood experience. Let's go down and you tell me when you think you left. *Mayfair Melody*, which is Arthur Woods again.

CB: I can tell you that the last two pictures I made for Warner's, when I came back from America. There was *The Return of Carol Deane*, and *Everything Happens to Me*.

I: Right...well I'll tell you what I've got in the interim. Did you only make the two when you got back?

CB: Yes

I: Right. Oh well then we've got *Change for a Sovereign*, *Dark Stairway* and *Mr Satan*. *Minstrel Boy*, which is not Warner's, right, and *The Singing Cop*.

CB: Yes

I: So, you made quite a lot which seems to have sat on the shelf, then. So you must have gone in thirty-eight...or thirty-seven.

CB: I'm sure it was thirty-seven

I: Thirty-seven. Right. Well tell us the story of that, going over there and umm, what they did to you, what they wanted to do to you and what you didn't want to have happen.

CB: Well the first thing is a funny story, the moment we got to Hollywood, to Los Angeles station...

I: Yes, well let me ask you first, if I may, butting in. What did you sail on, do you remember?

CB: On The Normandy.

I: Oh, on The Normandy, oh my god, lovely!

CB: With Marlene Dietrich⁸¹

I: Yes? Oh, you're lucky. I shall wish I sailed on her.

CB: Oh, it is a wonderful, wonderful ship. Yes.

I: And...Ms Dietrich was on board, yes?

CB: Yes.

I: Available, or...or not? Or was she?

CB: Was she what?

I: Was she available, where...did she mix, or?

CB: Oh yes! She was very much, very much to the fore. I watched her absolutely fascinated, because every time she appeared she was wearing a different outfit!

I: She's box office poison, of course, at this point, isn't she?

CB: Was she? Well she was, she was very, conscious of herself, of her appearance and her public image at that time, because she always looked perfect, her make-up, and err...

I: But she always was

CB: Oh, she looked wonderful. And especially at night in the dining room when she would be wearing, she wore black sequined things, split to the thigh, with osprey

⁸¹ Marlene Dietrich(1901-1992) was a German actress and singer. Her films included *Shanghai Express* (1932) and *Stage Fright* (1950).

feathers, and always with lots of men sitting at her table. And she wore what I call a thigh watch; she wore a watch around her thigh. As I say, the men always appeared to be anxious about the time because they kept looking at her watch! You see (laughs)...no, she fascinated me all the way to America. But when we got to Los Angeles station, they sent a car for us from the studio to take us in to Hollywood, and all along the route in to Hollywood there was this - above the shops, and the cafes - the one word. Chili. And I said to Jimmy, "isn't that lovely. What a lovely Hollywood welcome, I said it really is fabulous". He said "there's something else up there"...I said "what is it?" "Oh yes, it says twenty-five cents". It was Chili con carne you see, no welcome at all (laughs). In fact I don't think they even knew what sex I was, because when we first went to the studio we were given passes, and mine said 'Chili Bouchier, actor'. I mean, so there you are.

Umm...Irving used to invite us to some of the parties, they were all rather grand. But nothing happened from the studio very much until one day the casting man sent for me. He was sitting at a great big desk and I don't know, he said "you know, Chili" - 'Shilly' they called me, 'Shilly' Bouchier because they didn't think I was a Mexican bean, which is a Chili - so he said 'Chili, you're going to be very difficult to cast because of your French accent'. So I said "oh", and went home. I got home, and I was taking my hat off, and I thought "my what?! My French accent?" Obviously he couldn't tell the difference between a French and an English accent (laughs). So...that wasn't the reason that I ran away, I just hated the place by this time. They're all mad, anyway. And, the trouble, and also this is not the real reason why I ran away, but I was almost raped by a bell boy in my hotel. Which was rather frightening. And, that really put the kybosh on the whole thing, I mean I'd got a locked door, but he was a bell boy so he could get in, you know. So, I had

a good friend there, he was a director who'd failed, and he used to take me around, and he knew how much I hated it. And he took me to dinner that night because I was still upset, and I said "I'm going to go home, Eric". And he said "that's my good girl. You go home". So I did, ran away, not thinking for one minute that Jack Warner would even notice that I'd gone. I didn't think I was important enough to Jack Warner. But he did notice, and sent a message through that when my six monthly option came up, I'd be out. So, there we are.

I: Any regrets?

CB: No. No, the one thing that I didn't want to do, and I which was fighting against, and which this friend of mine knew...I was fighting against becoming part of Hollywood. It was called 'going Hollywood', as you know. That was what I was fighting against; I didn't want to become part of Hollywood. I didn't like the atmosphere, I didn't like. Well, the eternal films, isn't it, it's nothing but pictures. If, as I say, later on when I worked with Jimmy Stewart⁸² in London, I thought if I'd met somebody like Jimmy Stewart and his nice family, it might have been different. But I didn't meet anybody like that.

I: What about the Warner's contract players; did you have much contact with them when you were there?

CB: No, I, no...I met some of them and saw some of them around, like, like Bette Davis⁸³ who I admired tremendously as an actress.

⁸² James Stewart (1908-1997) was an American actor whose films included *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) as well as Hitchcock films including *Rear Window* (1954)

⁸³ Bette Davis (1908-1989) was an American film actress, whose credits included *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) and *Death on the Nile* (1978)

I: Because Warner's had a reputation for being a very business like studio. No nonsense, right?

CB: Oh it was!

I: Everyone went from picture to picture and worked hard...

CB: And had to do as they were told.

I: Absolutely, yeah. You were...

CB: I mean Jack, Jack Warner just cracked a whip. I mean even Bette Davis and people like that were suspended if they didn't do as they were told.

I: Oh yeah, yeah.

CB: So I can understand why he was so cross with me.

I: Yes, you were studio property, that was, yeah...

CB: Mmm, mmm.

I: How much did you see of Warner?

CB: How much did I...?

I: How much did you see of, of Jack? Of Jack Warner...

CB: Not much, no. Once at his house, that's all. Didn't see him in the studio at all.

I: So all in all it was not a happy experience. What was living like in Los Angeles in those days? Fairly relaxed, or not? Which hotel were you in, by the way?

CB: We were put up at the Roosevelt Hotel to start with

I: Oh yes, opposite...

CB: Opposite Grauman's Chinese Theatre. And the studio, they were paying for it at the time, and then they said "now you're on your own, so and find somewhere to live", and we all went our separate ways. I found a place called the Chateau Elysee, which was like

what they have there, sort of hotel-come-apartments. You can eat, and have room service, and...

I: Mmm, yes. Like the Chateau Marmont?

CB: Yes, it was very nice.

I: Right. Wasn't it, umm, wasn't it off Franklin, Franklin Avenue, am I right?

CB: It was just off Sunset Boulevard, it wasn't far off, so it maybe was...I've forgotten actually where it was now.

I: Well, umm...so you're back here. What did you sail back on?

CB: Berengaria

I: Ahh...you were collecting some handsome ships, I do envy you the Normandy, I must say. And, err...you had to serve out the contract, or they just didn't pick up the option...so you made two more?

CB: Yes. I had to finish to the end of my contract, yes.

I: Right. Umm...did we talk about *Mr Satan*? We didn't, did we? James Stevenson, Franklin Dyer, William Collier produced, and Arthur Woods was your director again.

CB: William Collier. He was from Hollywood, wasn't he?

I: Yeah.

CB: Very handsome man in his day

I: He married, someone, didn't he, one, umm...?

CB: I'd forgotten him, William Collier...he was very handsome in his day.

I: An ex-actor, was he?

CB: Yes. He was a well-known actor, yes.

I: I'm sure he was married to one of the ladies; I can't remember...again, I'll have to look it up. My memory doesn't work much anymore. Umm...he was your producer, anyway. I don't know how long he was here

CB: I wonder what happened to Irving at the time?

I: Well I would have thought this was the point at which he left the studio

CB: No, he came with me...oh, he might have left the studio. I think...

I: Well, you went in thirty-seven, right...and you saw him in Hollywood.

CB: Who?

I: Asher

CB: No, he came on the ship with us.

I: Yes, but you also said you saw him over there, so he was there?

CB: Oh yes

I: You went to parties?

CB: Oh, he went to his home, he'd got a house out there, with Lara

I: Well, again we'll have to check the dates but I know that...maybe he'd had a falling out with Jack or someone

CB: Oh, there was a falling out

I: There was?

CB: Oh, he never went back to Warner's

I: No

CB: No

I: Well this is then when he made *Q Planes* for Korda

CB: I didn't know he'd come back to this country.

I: I think he must have done, yeah.

CB: Because I had some correspondence with him. When I hadn't mentioned Teddy Joyce, the man I was in love with and who I was going to marry – but he died, 1941. And I don't know whether Irving wrote to me, or I wrote to Irving about being alone now, and dead, about Teddy's death...and he said, I think he was with MGM at the time, this is shortly after I got, well not shortly after...and he said "send me some pictures", he said "perhaps now..."

Chili Bouchier Tape 3 Part 1

I: Second session with Chili Bouchier. It's the third tape, side 5.

CB: How's the rustle?

I: OK now

CB: How's the rustle?

I: It's gone.

CB: *Mayfair Melody* was the next Warner Brothers, directed by George King, and it's...

I: Oh, now that's interesting. I've got Arthur Woods down as the director. You sure it was George King?

CB: Yes

I: Oh, right

CB: And it starred Keith Faulkner who was...I think they were trying to make him into a singing star, he had a lovely voice. But I don't think he lasted very long, I think he just

made a couple for Warner's, umm...then I followed that by, while I was making Mayfair Melody I was also making *The Minstrel Boy* for Butchers. So on my days off, or halfway through, I would dash across to Elstree to do *The Minstrel Boy* which was directed by Sidney Morgan

I: Mmm hmm

CB: Who's...

I: Tell us...sorry, I was going to ask about Sidney Morgan but go ahead, sorry

CB: Well yes, his daughter, Joan Morgan wrote the script

I: Oh right

CB: She used to be an actress, and she goes right back to 1920, she played in a film called *Little Dorrit* and she made several other films, and then she took to writing. And of course, she's still with us (laughs)

I: Mmm, she had a very long career

CB: A very long career, yes. Umm, Sidney Morgan of course was, he had his own company at one time I think, didn't he?

I: I know nothing about him I'm afraid to say

CB: Yes, yes, I think he did yes.

I: Right. Someone called Fred Cunningham was in it with you

CB: Yes, he was an Australian song and dance man. So many of them seem to have disappeared, don't they? I don't think I came across him again

I: Maybe he went back

CB: Maybe he went back to...to...he's probably in one of the soaps now

I: Well, yeah

CB: It was a long time ago though; that was 1937

I: Yes, sixty years ago

CB: Indeed. And then there was *The Dark Stairway*, that was Warner Brothers. That was directed by Arthur Woods. And starred the gorgeously handsome Hugh Williams you know, father of Simon, Simon Williams.

I: Simon, right.

CB: That was a, that was a sort of thriller in a hospital; and, and...Hugh Williams was a doctor and I was...I was a nurse. Yes I was. Yes

I: Now these were shot after you came back from the coast, are they? Or...these are on, these had been sub piled

CB: These are all before I went to Hollywood, yes.

I: Right

CB: Then there was *Mr Satan*, that was again Warner Brothers and directed by Arthur Woods, and umm a new actor came upon the scene, James Stevenson

I: Right

CB: He was, he was getting on a bit to start in films but he had a beautiful speaking voice and he was a handsome man, and I went to Hollywood with him. With James Stevenson, he was the one who, just after he got his big break in Hollywood and starred with Bette Davis in *The Letter*, he just died

I: Yeah

CB: That was the end of him. So then I was off to Warner Brothers after that, and err when I came back, I've already told you that I ran away, and that they, err, said that I would be let go, as they say, at the end of my six monthly clause in the contract

I: They weren't going to pick up your option?

CB: They weren't going to pick up my option in six months. So we just had time to do *The Dark Stairway*. No, I've said that...

I: Yes

CB: *Mr Satan. The Return of Carol Deane.*

I: Yep

CB: Arthur Woods again, and that starred Bebe Daniels. And being a brunette, and me being a brunette, we would have clashed. So I had to go blonde for that. And, err that is, that has been one that has been umm retained, we still see that and *Mr Satan*, Both of those have been restored. Umm...then I finished...

I: Could I just, could I just interrupt for a moment, I see...going back to *Change for a Sovereign*.

CB: Yes?

I: I see Seymour Hicks was in that

CB: Yes

I: I don't think we talked about him, did we? Umm...he was a very famous actor of that time. How did you enjoy working with him?

CB: Oh he was great fun

I: Yes

CB: He was getting on a bit at the time

I: Mmm hmm

CB: When was it? When was it?

I: *Change for a Sovereign*...I've got Warner Brothers, shown in September of 1937

CB: Oh yes, directed by...

(simultaneously) Maurice Elvey

I: Maurice Elvey, that's right.

CB: Yes, and Seymour Hicks...yes, he was knighted for his work in the theatre.

I: Mmm hmm

CB: So he was getting on a bit but he was great fun, I think he only made that one picture for Warner's, I don't know if he made any others.

I: I think he made a few pictures, umm...

CB: Umm, right

I: There's nothing...nothing else here on the list, it was the one time you worked with him

CB: That's right. Yes, yes.

I: So nothing in particular about him?

CB: No, except that he was fun, and a bit, bit, bit naughty (laughs)

I: Very actorish? Umm...very naughty with the girls?

CB: Yes, yes, yes....

I: Yes, saucy? Right...

CB: Yes. He said "will you come to...with me to Paris for the weekend", he said, "but bring a big clock, because the ticking of a clock puts me off these days (laughs)...oh no, *don't* bring a clock! (laughs)

I: Don't bring a clock! And he was quite serious? Or...

CB: Oh no, just fun, just fun

I: Sending you up, right.

CB: Yes

I: Now I see, umm, we, we haven't yet gone to...we start at *The Return of Carol Deane*, yes?

CB: Yes

I: Bebe Daniels, who, umm, I guess was not as well known then as she had been or subsequently became, right? What...

CB: Well I think she was very well known then

I: Right...remembered...

CB: From her early films, because I think she started way back in 1914 or something

I: She was one of the bathing beauties

CB: Was she? I thought so. So she must've been getting on a bit then, in 1937

I: Getting on around the forty-ish mark

CB: Yes, yes. She was a lovely lady. Really warm, lovely, beautiful person. But it was only later, when she did all the radio stuff, that she became very famous in England, wasn't it?

I: Yes

CB: With her husband, yes

I: They stayed during the war which I think...

CB: That's right

I: Really gave them, the people had a warm feeling about them

CB: Yes

I: For so many went haring off to the States, didn't they?

CB: Yes, yes. And then I finished my contract with Warner's by playing in a picture with Max Miller the way I started, in a picture called *Everything Happens To Me*, directed by Roy William Neale who directed *Gypsy*

I: Yes...and Max Miller's in it. Is that right? Max Miller's in *Everything Happens To Me*?

CB: Yes! Max Miller

I: Were you getting on with him any better this time?

CB: He was a little more relaxed on this picture, but he still wasn't funny (laughs), I mean he didn't fool around like most people do on set. I can't imagine why they've put *The Singing Cop* here, or I've put *The Singing Cop*, because that was done before I went to Hollywood

I: Well, again...I'm sure it's because of the date of the release, you see

CB: What have you got down there?

I: I've got it for January 1938

CB: Right

I: And there's something I want to ask about that. The dances were staged, or choreographed or whatever by Jack Donohue whom I met, I worked with later in the States

CB: Oh, yes?

I: What are your memories of Jack?

CB: I don't remember him

I: Not at all, ah

CB: Because I didn't dance in it

I: You didn't dance?

CB: No

I: Ah, right

CB: So I probably wouldn't have met him. I know his name of course.

I: He'd been a very successful dancer on Broadway, in the twenties or the thirties

CB: Yes, yes...but I can't recall anything at the moment about him, no

I: Right, ok

CB: So that of course was the other one. That was the other one that Keith Faulkner made. He made *Mayfair Melody* and *The Singing Cop*.

I: Mmm

CB: And then, as I say, he disappeared and we didn't see anything of him again. He was a lovely singer, but perhaps a little lacking in personality, a film personality. So, I say goodbye to Warner Brothers after quite a long time...1934, wasn't it, *The Office Wife* right up to 1938. So that's four years I spent with them

I: *The Office Wife*, yes. 1934. Right, there's one person at Warner's I'd like to ask you about and that's Jerome Jackson, who was the producer on, your last two pictures. Do you remember him at all?

CB: Yes

I: He was an interesting character. I think he was American, and he's interesting in that he was Michael Powell's producer too, in the thirties. Any...

CB: Jerry Jackson, we called him. Yes, I remember him very well

I: What are your memories of him?

CB: I didn't like him

I: No, why not?

CB: He rather suggested – this is a bit of casting couch stuff – that when I went, I drove down to his studio and got this bolt from the blue that I was going to be dropped; he rather suggested that if I was nice to him he might be able to keep me on, which I knew he couldn't, because it had been Jack Warner who said get rid of her

I: Right, Jack was determined, was he?

CB: Oh yes, yes, yes, it was out completely. So I didn't like Jerry Jackson very much, umm...

I: Was that endemic in those days, the casting couch approach?

CB: No it certainly wasn't, it certainly wasn't at Warner's with dear old Irving Allen...Irving Asher I should say –

I: Irving Asher, yes

CB: Quite a different person to Irving Allen, Irving Asher was a lovely man...No, I mean one was quite, was perfectly safe there. But Jerry Jackson, I think he had been with Lady Yule's studio at Elstree for a little while

I: Yes

CB: Yes, I had met him there

I: He was, he was a, I think he produced, well, I was going to say B pictures, but the quota quickies, right, umm

CB: No, well we did them later on, and it doesn't say anything about him here. But it was British Nationals, that was her studio, wasn't it?

I: That was indeed. That's Lady Yule's

CB: He was, he was the producer of some of those pictures yes

I: Now, are we confusing Jerry Jackson with Louis Jackson?

CB: No. Jerry Jackson. He was an American Jew

I: That's right, yes.

CB: Umm, I didn't strike it very much, the casting couch. Not in those days. Previously there had been a bit of it. And so I didn't like him. And, as I had spurned him he wasn't very nice to me as I made my last two pictures, you know. And he took over from Irving.

I: How often in those days did a producer get involved in the shooting? Did Jackson come down on the set, for example?

CB: Not very much, no, no.

I: No, so your contact with him was really limited. Contract negotiations I suppose, the start and end of the picture, things like that. But not much...

CB: Well, they wouldn't, he would do that with the, with my agent. If there was anything to discuss over money, about anything like that. But you know, it was done from his office. So I suppose they had their get togethers, I suppose the whole crew got together to discuss pictures, but he would come down occasionally to see how things were going. But I didn't have much to do with him.

I: But the director still had the, the authority on the set

CB: Yes

I: The producer didn't interfere, much

CB: It was the same as Irving, he rarely came onto the set to see how things were going. I think if you trust your director it is the best thing to do, isn't it?

I: Oh, it's the only sensible thing to do, yes. If you don't trust him, don't hire him

CB: Right (laughs)

I: Umm...what sort of deal were you on with Warner's? You were on six monthly options, then what...

CB: Apparently. I'd forgotten that. I mean I settled down so nicely there that I'd forgotten. I possibly was on a six monthly option and they were taken up every time

I: Right

CB: But not, nothing to do with me. It didn't concern me; it concerned Irving and my agent.

I: Mmm hmm. Who was your agent?

CB: Connie, at the time. At that time.

I: Connie? Connie's? Or just Connie?

CB: Just Connie, Connie's.

I: Connie's, that's right

CB: Her name was Connie something, she used to be the secretary to an agent earlier when I first went into pictures. Somebody, somewhere in Shaftesbury Avenue – not Bramlins where I went but another one. And he was quite a big agent; and she was a clever lady, she took all of his clients and started up on her own, and it was just known as Connie's. She was a very good agent, very smart lady. So I would have known nothing about it. And it was a shock when I got to the studio and found that in six months time, or when my six months was up, that I would have to go

I: Did your agent consult you when she was negotiating with Warner's initially, did she set a price with you, or, or did you leave it entirely up to her?

CB: No, she would have, she would have had talks with them, and they would have just told her what they were prepared to pay, and then she'd ring me and say 'what do you think?' and I would say yes or no. And of course I said yes.

I: Right. And you were pleased with what you were getting? Or...

CB: I was

I: You'd got more from Wilcox though, hadn't you?

CB: No, no, I think I got more from Warner's

I: Did you? Oh right, right. So when Herbert said to you, you wouldn't find it easy, he actually was wrong? Until you had your spat with Jack Warner

CB: Well he was right in a way because it was quite a while before I started again in pictures. Too long a period after making such a big success in *Carnival* and the *Blue Danube* and *The King's Cup* and we...I was being shown everywhere, all over the country, and I was surprised that I didn't start straight away in another picture, but I didn't. I think it was quite a few months, which is too long when you are very young and wanting to work. When the agent, my previous agent, who had a reputation of being very expensive...and I had to start all over again, and I think I started all over again in *Honour's Easy*. We've passed *Honour's Easy*, have we?

I: Yes, oh yes, yes

CB: A long time ago. Yes, I think that was the first picture I made after...

I: Yes, yes...that was BIP

CB: Yes, Herbert Brennan, Margaret Lockwood, yep. British International. That was in 1935...I suppose it was almost a year after I left Wilcox. I think I left Wilcox in thirty four

I: That is a long time to be out of play. Yes. Had Wilcox been malicious, had he been deliberately sabotaging you, do you think?

CB: I think he was trying to, I think...I don't know what was in his mind except that he was obsessed now by Anna

I: Yes

CB: And, errr...probably didn't quite know what to do with me. I mean, to me it seems a very stupid thing to do; to build me up like he did and for *Carnival* to be such a great success, and then to say "you're now drawing them in Dorothy, what films would you like to make now?", as he did, umm...and to then, to let me go was very foolish on his part.

I: Well indeed, he had an investment on your career, yes

CB: I think so, yes. I mean if he didn't want to direct me himself, he could always find another director. I mean there were plenty of other directors that...(unintelligible) ...like ...Rogers and one or two other people. And I think he was very foolish. Perhaps he just didn't quite know how to say "well, I'm really not interested in you...". You see, what he wanted right from the start, what he told me he wanted, was he wanted to make a star, and to love the one girl. He wanted to make it like a lot of the big Hollywood people did, especially with people like Garbo⁸⁴ and Dietrich.

I: Were, yes...the major...

CB: They, they did

I: The major Hollywood studios had a whole roster of, of stars, it was their business, it wasn't based on personality

⁸⁴ Greta Garbo (1905-1990) was a Swedish actress. Her films included *Romance* (1930) (for which she was nominated for an Academy Award) and *Anna Karenina* (1935)

CB: No, but the two of them, both...one of them was German, wasn't he? He was very much in love with Dietrich; he directed most of her films and loved her as well. The other one was Garbo, who brought her over...then she became so big and he was cast aside and just left and went back to Sweden

I: Mmm, that's right. Murray, Murray Stiller

CB: So, so...that's right...so with Wilcox...he had exactly what he wanted. A girl to love, and a girl to concentrate on starring. So...the way he did it, whether he was deliberately cruel to get rid of me, I don't know. I mean, if he'd been sensible and said "Look Dorothy, Anna is my lady now and I don't think we're going to make pictures with you anymore", I would of, I was so unhappy, that I would've said "Oh, thank you Mr Wilcox" and off I'd have gone. But when he humiliated me to the extent of dropping me down to second lady, to Winifred Shotter, who I...who's died recently, I didn't know and then to put me in this picture that he was going to make with Anna called The Queen, in which I was to play the lady in waiting. I could see myself on set behind Anna, playing the lady in waiting. And that was it.

I: It does sound as if he were rubbing your nose in it, doesn't it?

CB: It does. I think it was very cruel. I mean I was so young and inexperienced, really, about things like this. I'd never ...anything like it before. Umm...and of course I was having such a bad time privately, emotionally, with my husband.

I: Right, right

CB: So I think it was a cruel thing to do, I really do, the way he did it. He could have thought of a better way.

I: Korda was going great guns at this point

CB: Yes

I: Did you have any dealings with him, or did your agent try to get you in at Denham

CB: Well no, (laughs) you haven't read my book thoroughly. By this time, by this time, he was in love with Merle

I: Yes, but he was producing a lot of pictures. His problem was keeping Denham busy

CB: Yes

I: I mean Oberon wasn't in every picture that he made

CB: No, no, no. Actually when he first came over to England he did what was the first big picture he did with Charles Laughton⁸⁵...

I: That's Henry VIII, The Private Life of Henry VIII, yes

CB: Well he shot that at British and Dominion Studios, and he had an office there, and I used to talk to him all the time, I didn't, well he wasn't, he wasn't Sir Alexander Korda then. I used to call him Xander, which is his...

I: Yes, I remember you used that, yes...

CB: And he said if ever Wilcox drops you, or doesn't want you, I'd like to have you. And that was very nice to know that I could go to Korda if he dropped me. And as I said in the book I smiled, but not in a superior way, but in a confident way and I said "no, Wilcox will never let me go, not now". But of course he did, and by this time he was casting for Henry VIII and of course he had fallen for Merle, and you know, everywhere I looked they were in love with somebody else, some other actress. And then, no...I did go to see him about one film but it didn't work. That was when he'd gone to London films.

⁸⁵ Charles Laughton (1899-1962) was an English actor and director. His films included *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933) for which he was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actor

It was just that...I can't remember what it was called. It was a story about giving a white feather to somebody; umm...it's a famous story...

I: That's *The Four Feathers*

CB: The Four Feathers, yes. So he obviously, I did go and see him about that, and he obviously didn't think I was quite right for it

I: I think it was June Duprez eventually, wasn't it?

CB: It was, yes, it was. So I...but...no, it was a very, a difficult time, especially as nobody really knew why, knew why I'd left Herbert. And Herbert didn't tell anybody, he didn't explain. Or if he did explain, he probably didn't tell the truth

I: Yeah...

CB: And I say...the paper started to ask the questions. And of course in those days one didn't tell the paper everything

I: No. I'm surprised though that your agent wasn't able to set the story right, I mean that's what agents are for...

CB: I didn't have, I didn't have an agent

I: You had no agent? Ahh...

CB: No, I didn't have an agent. You see, Max, who I was engaged to, and I had to...

I: Yes of course, I remember, yes

CB: So Max had gone away, and become a camera man in a studio. And I negotiated *Carnival* and my contract with Wilcox all by myself

I: Did you? Right...

CB: And I always said to myself "you never really needed an agent", because everything I've ever done which has worked well and become successful, I've done myself

I: Do you remember the deal that you negotiated with Wilcox? How much he paid you?

CB: I think it was...sixty, the retainer

I: Yes

CB: And a hundred on working weeks, but going up with every picture

I: Right

CB: So it was quite nice in those days

I: So a minimum of a hundred and sixty when you started out with him

CB: Yes

I: Yes that wasn't bad at all

CB: No. Considering that it would have been more maybe if I had an agent. But it was better than Julius Hagen (laughs)

I: Yes. Well incidentally, in the book, you call him Julian...that's

CB: I never, I didn't do it, I didn't, no, thank you! Oh, it's been very difficult about the mistakes. You know Kevin Brownlow do you?

I: Yes indeed

CB: Well he said "I enjoyed the book, but I'll forgive you for all those mistakes you made in the names of people", and I wrote back and said "what do you mean? All those mistakes? I got yours right, I got mine right, I got Anna right, I got Herbert Wilcox right, who is wrong?" So he sent back only six. I just made one error in all of them – John Longden I spelt with an o instead of an e, you didn't notice that one

I: I did, yes, yes

CB: Oh you did? Umm...who else was it? Oh (...unintelligible...) of course I had no idea how to spell it (laughs)

I: So you were doing a lot from memory, were you, when you were writing?

CB: Well I thought that I knew that John Longden had an o in it because I had worked on a couple of films with him. I was sure it was. I can't remember what others...I got (...kraut?) right, and I got Zinkheisen right, and I got Brigitte Helm right, and all the difficult ones...

I: True

CB: It was the easy ones. Oh, McLaglen yes, I put a g,

I: Cyril McLaglen, yes

CB: I put a g, instead of a, oh, it didn't have a g. I thought it was McLachlen?. There was about six of them.

I: And there was one other misprint where I think you, you, I've forgotten exactly what it is. Days instead of months or something like that – or hours instead of days. I'll look for it in a minute and point it out to you

CB: Oh and I, I'd be very glad if you would, because I've just read it through again, for the first time in a long time, and I've seen a few errors that they have made. Not me. Not me. I mean, Gladys (?) I was always very careful to put the w in, the way they spell it in Welsh, Gladys and no, they've cut it out, oh she's made a mistake, it's Gladys...and *The Office Wife*, which I did the filmography myself, in the book, underneath the photograph it says *The Officer's Wife*

I: That's right

CB: Warner Brothers, with a small b, that was only pointed out to me a few days ago by a man who'd read the book. So I'm finding more and more and more mistakes. But the lady who, did the, didn't do the printing but prepared it for the printing, will not admit to

an error at all, and it gets very difficult. And she's "oh no, no, no, no, no, it couldn't have been changed, it couldn't have been changed. You must have done it yourself". Now at the end here, where I say I...silent star to sing, a friend of mine sent this with a photograph and text down from Aberdeen where he lived, and I wanted, I wanted to put, put it in at the end and say ...(unintelligible)...you know, and I phoned him up and said "which paper was it in?" He said the Press and Journal. So when I sent in the photograph and thing, I put Press and Journal. Blow me if she hasn't put Aberdeen Angus. And I phoned up and said "what are you doing, it was Press and Journal" She said "oh, you wrote it down and put Aberdeen Angus". And I said "what are you talking about?! I wouldn't be thinking of cows!", and I'd never heard of Aberdeen Angus. However, she has put a notice at the beginning – you'll see in your, in your book. Oh no, not in this one...she has put a notice in the front saying it should read Press and Journal

I: Errata... yes. We should say for the record that you're reading from a book you published this year, right? Your life story?

CB: Yes

I: Right. I don't think we've said that on the tape. So that they know what we're talking about, anyone listening to this tape

CB: Oh, I beg your pardon, yes, yes. Oh yes, we're discussing my autobiography, *Shooting Star*, which is published this year...

I: Published 1996, yes...

CB: 1996. For the centenary of cinema

I: Of moving pictures

CB: Pardon?

I: Moving pictures

CB: Yes (laughs)

I: Right. So there you are leaving Teddington, with some regret. They had done very well by you, hadn't they? Nice little pictures, and umm...some very good directors, it was a professional studio I think, Warner's...

CB: Very, yes, it was. It was. We seemed to stick to, stick to hours. I mean we started at nine o'clock, and that rarely happened at other studios. We shot nicely, worked hard, and we finished at a reasonable hour. And I think stuck more or less to schedules all the time

I: Well, there again, that's all the difference between a professionally operated studio, I'm sure they...

CB: Yes, yes. I think Arthur Woods was exceptionally good at sticking to schedules. I think he started at Warner's in the cutting room; therefore he was an economical director. He knew when to come to the end where some would go on shooting, shooting, shooting...and leave it on the cutting room floor

I: Yes, right. But did Warner's tolerate that at all, in anyone? I would have thought that...

CB: No, I don't think so; I think it, like Bill Bodine...

I: I would be surprised if they did

CB: and Roy William Neale and all those, all the directors were pretty good at that

I: It was a notoriously tightly managed studio in, in Burbank, umm...

CB: Umm yes, I suppose so, yes, yes, yes.

I: No wastage at all. So, I've got next a picture called *The Mind of Mr Reader*

CB: Yes, yes. An old friend of mine, Jack Raymond directed that. Will Fife was the leading man in that. That was, *The Mind of Mr Reader*, that's written by umm...it was written by...

I: Was that Edgar Wallace?

CB: Edgar Wallace, yes, it was an Edgar Wallace. There were a lot of Mr Readers, weren't there?

I: I think there were, yeah. I was a running character of his. You shot it at Highbury

CB: Yes

I: One of the studios that disappeared, along...

CB: Well it wasn't a studio really, it was a house wasn't it?

I: I never worked there so I, I don't know, I remember the...

CB: Yes it was, it was a big old house converted into a studio

I: No actual shooting stage, sound stage?

CB: Well I suppose...there were big rooms, it was a big old house, a big old fashioned house. Oh they were fairly big the sets, yes. Yes. It was on that that...Max Roche my former agent and former fiancé, he was taking the stills, he was a still cameraman, yes

I: Kay Walsh was in that, in her pre David Lean days

CB: In *The Mind of Mr Reader*, was she?

I: I've got her listed as being in it, yes

CB: Ah. She married him, I don't know which one, I don't know where...

I: I think number two. Although, I think, she was number two

CB: She was a lovely actress

I: Was she at the Neagle Wilcox reception?

CB: I don't know if she's still alive

I: I think she's still alive, I think so yes

CB: No, I didn't see her. If I did I didn't recognise her

I: Anything to say about Will Fife? I think we talked about Will Fife before, didn't we?

Or is that...maybe that's in the book...

CB: No, Will Fife, no...I haven't written about Will Fife in the book

I: You didn't like him, did you?

CB: I didn't dislike or like him, one way or the other, I think he was, he seemed to be a very private sort of person. I heard from his son in law, has he got a son? Or

nephew...who is writing, writing about him and has written to me and asked me to give me my memories of him because I think he is doing a biography. So many people are doing biographies...so I didn't really think much about that, about that picture at all.

Monarch, it was for Monarch, yes...I don't think I've even seen it. No, I'm sure I haven't...then we come to...

I: There's quite a gap now. According to my list.

CB: Oh, well...yes there is because I went into the theatre then, yes, and ran my own company and things until war was declared. And then, in 1941, I made *My Wife's Family*, or was part of *My Wife's Family* for Pathé, directed by Walter C Mycroft and starring Charlie Clapham who is, and Pat Roc⁸⁶

I: Now isn't that interesting, I don't have his name on the list, I've got Warwick, Pat Roc, David Tomlinson, Joan Greenwood, and Lesley Fuller – quite a cast. But, but... who was the lead, the...

⁸⁶ Pat Roc (1915-2003) was a British film actress whose work included *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945) and *The Wicked Lady* (1945)

CB: Well it was Clapham and Dwyer wasn't it?

I: Yes, oh...I didn't know that...

CB: Clapham and Dwyer, yes

I: Right, yes, I remember them

CB: They were the two leading people, yes. So Charlie Clapham, I've got here, because I couldn't put them all in, they were lovely, they were kids in it, you know, they were quite young then; Pat Roc and Joan Greenwood and David Tomlinson...no I don't think I've said it in the book but David Tomlinson had had his call up papers and we had to hurry to get him through on the day he had to join the army, so he was fairly young

I: No deferments in those days

CB: For some people. I was exempt. When my age group came up I found I was exempt. They had to keep some people back to, to keep the flag flying, or keep the curtains up, didn't they?

I: Well they came to that...at first they presumed that they would close down everything, production and theatre, films and theatre, and then...

CB: Yes

I: It was a very stupid policy, they realised that the services and the civilians needed entertainment

CB: Of course they did, and they did terribly well during the war, the theatres, doing great things

I: But they closed it all down the moment war broke out

CB: Only for a run...

I: Well, yes, a couple of weeks wasn't it? Something like...

CB: Well in my case, I, I had already left. They decided that umm, yes, I had my own rep company and he was going to send me up north but he said no, he wasn't going to. But Teddy Joyce, my fiancé who was playing at the time, he was playing at the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle I think at the time, the night, umm when war was declared. They closed, but I think they opened up the very next night. And umm, I don't know what the theatres did in London, they may have closed for a couple of weeks, I don't know.

I: The assumption was there would be immediately heavy bombing, was there not?

CB: That's right, well nothing happened for a year, did it?

I: Nothing happened, no

CB: I mean we did terrific business, on tour particularly, with forces. I went out with *Is Your Honeymoon Really Necessary?* and *Room For two*, and these lovely...by Desmond Walter Ellis, an old gentleman then, and of course it was just what the troops needed. They wanted a bit of laughter, a bit of sauciness, and I was in the first, the first play that Delmont (?) ever sent out, Bernard Delfont. And he'd only been doing sort of revues, like *Eve without Leaves* and rather nasty reviews...and we went out with *Almost a Honeymoon*, and umm...he couldn't believe it! He said this is money for old rope! (laughs) You know, absolutely filling the big theatres up with...it was a lovely play, it was George Gee, he was, he and I were sort of leading in...remember George Gee?

I: No

CB: No, no, no you wouldn't have. So, so as far as I'm concerned that was what I was doing until I made *My Wife's Family*, and that was on...I met my future husband on that one. He eventually, I eventually married Bluey Hill

I: Yes

CB: Who was the assistant director on *My Wife's Family*

I: Right, after going into the theatre, did you have a preference? Between the theatre and making films?

CB: Oh I always hankered after pictures

I: Pictures, yes, right

CB: They were my love, yes, yes. But, well, I did another one straight after *My Wife's Family*, didn't I, at, *Facing the Music*

I: *Facing the Music*. Maclean Rogers

CB: Maclean Rogers, directed with, yes for *Butchers*

I: Yes

CB: With a young Betty Driver in it, err...who has this glorious singing voice. And she plays Betty, Betty the barmaid now in *Coronation Street*

I: That's right

CB: And I wish she would sing now sometimes, because I believe she can still sing.

I: Ruby Miller was in that too

CB: Yes she was, yes. Ruby Miller was in it. She was the original little bit of fluff, in the First World War. Then we put it on in 1942 I think it was, at the Ambassador as a little bit of fluff, and she sat in the box (laughs). And, oh, she came round first to tell me how to play it (laughs), and then she sat in the box and watched it. And it was just as successful in the Second World War. Again, it was just a silly farce, just what the troops ordered

I: What they wanted, yes

CB: Yes, yes...so I became a sort of queen of the farce for, for years, with...

I: So you're rather happy to be back in the studios, but then again after that there's quite another gap. Back into the theatre...

CB: Yes

I: Right, and err...

CB: *Murder in Reverse*

I: Oh, now I don't have *Murder in Reverse* on my list

CB: 1945. Directed by Montgomery Tully, British National...yes, it Lady Yule's, yes, that's right. William Hartnell⁸⁷ was a leading man...now, let me think...husband and wife...Hanley, Jimmy Hanley and his wife...whose...

I: Diana Sherridan, were they married at that point already? At that point?

CB: Yes, yes. And Petula Clark⁸⁸ played my daughter

I: So does this come before or after *Laughing Lady*? Which was the one I had next

CB: Before

I: Before, right. Yes, now, umm...did you ever meet Lady Yule?

CB: Oh yes, yes...but I can't remember...

I: Yes? She's a rather forgotten and mysterious figure; I suppose now...what are your memories of her?

CB: Oh I can't remember what she was like. I believe she was very nice, not anybody you'd think that would run a studio.

I: You...no...well she'd been left a great deal of money, hadn't she, by her husband?

CB: Well I hope, I hope she made some money out of it

I: I think they did. I suppose at some stage...

⁸⁷ William Hartnell (1908-1975) was an English actor who played the first Doctor Who from 1963-1966

⁸⁸ Petula Clark (1932-) is an English singer and actress, perhaps best known for the song 'Downtown' (1964)

CB: I mean they weren't just little B pictures; she made some quite nice pictures, like...

I: No, it was a very, it was

CB: Like Mrs Fitzherbert, and umm, what else did she...something's gone...

I: It was a very busy studio

CB: Something's gone madly wrong here, this is very naughty, I'm seeing some more mistakes. *My Wife's Family*, 1941; *Facing The Music*, 1941; *Murder in Reverse*, 1945; *The Laughing Lady*, 1946; Mrs Fitzherbert, 1947...yes *The Case of Charles Peace*, that's 1949, should be, yes...so where have we got to? *Murder in Reverse*, yes.

I: *Murder in Reverse*, yes, which I have no credit for at all, you've just...

CB: Oh dear

I: You've just, you've just done that, you've gone over those, right

CB: Yes, yes

I: And then it seems to me, with *Laughing Lady* you made your first colour picture

CB: That's right

I: In Technicolor, with Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth..

CB: Yes, yes

I: Who were two famous warblers of the time

CB: Yes, yes, they're back in England. I think they're working again. I think I saw them that night...

I: Really? God lord (laughs)

CB: Yes

I: Paul Stein directing, Geoff Unsworth on camera, he was a marvellous cameraman

CB: Yes he was, yes he was

I: Now Louis Jackson is the producer at British National

CB: Yes, he...

I: I'm going to ask you also what you remember about him

CB: Who?

I: Louis Jackson

CB: Oh, I probably got Jerry Jackson and Louis Jackson mixed up...

I: Possibly. Well you were right about umm...Jerry Jackson, being, umm...

CB: At Warner's?

I: Yes, being at Warner's. And being an American Jew. Umm...Louis Jackson was Lady Yule's studio head, umm...I think he was a fairly rough and ready character by all accounts...does...anyway, two Jacksons. Can you separate them in your mind?

CB: No, I can't

I: No?

CB: I thought they were one and the same. I thought Jerry Jackson was with Lady Yule...and it was Louis Jackson

I: It was

CB: Lou Jackson?

I: Lou Jackson they called him, yes. Louis H Jackson was his credit

CB: Ahh. Well, they were very similar people then, and I have got them mixed up in my memory as being one and the same person. Yes

I: Right. Well I don't know what to ask you about that picture. It was a fairly high budget piece of frivolity, I guess, was it?

CB: Yes, lots of songs and thighs

I: What did you play?

CB: What did I play? In *The Laughing Lady*...I...ohh...yes, I was, I played, I think I was a French, a French maid. And there was a, a very nice looking Frenchman played with me. He was also...we were servants on Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, but what they were I don't know (laughs). I know there were lovely sets and lovely clothes and things

I: You enjoyed it?

CB: Oh yes! Yes

I: And then a year goes by, and you go back to British National for, for *Mrs Fitzherbert*

CB: *Mrs Fitzherbert*, yes, directed by Montgomery Tully

I: Right, with...

CB: Peter Graves

I: A considerable cast. Margareta Scott

CB: Yes

I: Lesley Banks

CB: Yes

I: And Frederick Valk, who was one of my favourite actors actually

CB: Yes

I: Did you play with him in the film?

CB: No

I: No, umm...

CB: Who was the leading lady, has it got it there? Because I haven't, I can't remember...

I: Umm...I have got Margareta Scott and Joyce Howard

CB: Joyce Howard, she was Mrs Fitzherbert. But she wasn't right for, for Mrs Fitzherbert

I: No

CB: Yes, I, I met Margareta Scott quite recently and I said "oh we've played together, haven't we?", and she said "oh, I don't recall ever making a film with you" (laughs), but yes she did, yes she did, and that was *Mrs Fitzherbert*

I: Right, umm...I'm going to ask you about Margareta Scott later because I know someone who is trying to reach her to interview her, and we didn't know if she was still alive or not

CB: Well, she, she was, she was last year, when...was it last year when...oh, I don't know, time goes by so quickly. She was at the, when we all went to pay our respects to Evelyn Laye⁸⁹ when she had a big night at the London Palladium

I: Oh yes

CB: And we were all in the same dressing room, with Margareta Scott

I: Oh right

CB: And I saw her after that, and, actually, are we still running? Oh I had forgotten we were running, I've been saying...

I: Doesn't matter

CB: Is it alright? Is it?

I: Yeah, sure

⁸⁹ Evelyn Laye (1900-1996) was an English actress her films included *Princess Charming* (1934) and *Never Never Land* (1980)

Chili Bouchier Tape 3 Part 2

CB: But you can find out, yes...

I: Yes. Then I've got you – sorry?

CB: It's ok

I: Norman Lee⁹⁰ directed your next picture, according to my list, which is *The Case of Charles Peace*.

CB: (laughs)

I: You chuckle?

CB: Yes, umm...yes, we've gone from...that's 1949, *The Case of Charles Peace*, yes.

Norman Lee, for Monarch. With Michael Martin Harvey playing Charlie Peace

I: Was that a son?

CB: The son of, yes. I think it's the only picture he ever made, because he looked exactly like Charles Peace. Perfect casting. Umm, yes, that...that was made at...I think that was made at Ealing wasn't it?

I: I don't have the studio. I could find out for you

CB: Yes, yes I think it was, yes

I: The director, Norman Lee, what are your memories of him? He was an indefatigable self promoter, wasn't he? Was he any good as a director? I've never seen one of his pictures

CB: No I don't think so (laughs). No, he had, he had um a lady friend who I think backed this picture, or had money in this picture; so she was always around and he was always very busy with this lady

⁹⁰ Norman Lee (1898-1964) was an English director, his films included *The Farmer's Wife* (1941)

I: Oh, very fortunate, yes

CB: Busy with the lady, and I think with money. (laughs) No, I didn't take to Norman Lee as a director, really

I: Maybe now is a good time to ask you what you expected of a director

CB: I expected to be directed. I liked being directed

I: Yes. But you did a, you did a lot of homework yourself didn't you, in terms of the character?

CB: Oh yes

I: Yes

CB: Yes, but in this I played the Irish girlfriend of Charlie Peace and it happened to be my birthday and I had a few days off. And I went over to see Bluey in Ireland, who was shooting a film over there. And, I was told when I got back, what an actress, she went over to get her Irish accent right...and I hadn't, I'd gone over to have my nice birthday with Bluey (laughs)

I: You didn't contradict them, I assume?

CB: (laughs) No, I didn't!

I: It's an interesting cast, or a strange cast – Valentine Dyall and Bruce Belfrage, I've got also in Charlie Peace

CB: Yes. Valentine Dyall, yes

I: Valentine Dyall rather than Franklin

CB: Yes

I: And Bruce Belfrage, was...was he acting then, or...

CB: Yes

I: Yes?

CB: Yes – but he was a writer, wasn't he?

I: Well, he was one of the famous war time announcers, wasn't he? On BBC, Bruce Belfrage

CB: Yes, he was

I: His brother, Cedric, was the writer

CB: The writer, that's right, mmm. That's right.

I: Yeah

CB: Yes, he played a part but I can't remember what he played...Bruce Belfrage. I know, I know he had a real...the scene, the scene in the court we had a real Judge. Somebody called Christmas. Is there somebody called Christmas? Christmas Humphries

I: Yeah, yeah

CB: We had him

I: Became a Buddhist

CB: Did he? (laughs)

I: Didn't he? I think so

CB: I don't know

I: I think so, yes. That's somehow connected!

CB: Yes. No, he was in it. So I think Bruce Belfrage, I would imagine, was part of...possibly playing a barrister. I think he must have done. He's got that kind of face, hasn't he? And voice, to play a barrister.

I: The voice, yes, I don't remember the face...

CB: I can remember his face

I: I sort of vaguely remember a very mellifluous voice

CB: Yes

I: ...umm, announcing war time communique

CB: That's right

I: Right. So...nothing particularly to say about Charles Peace, other than what we have down?

CB: Umm...no

I: Did you take an interest in the pictures once they were finished, I mean...

CB: Very seldom did I see them, no. Very seldom. No. All my career, I probably haven't seen half of, half of my films

I: No, no. And they didn't get major openings, did they? So it wasn't...

CB: They all had trade shows

I: Trade shows, but not gala premiers or anything, not, not...

CB: No, except that the Warner Brothers pictures were always shown at the Empire Leicester Square as a second feature

I: At the Empire, rather than the Warner?

CB: Which are the two there?

I: Well, the one on the corner of the square is the Warner, recently rebuilt

CB: Warner? Ah, no, no. It was at the Empire, the big one

I: Well...the Empire was MGM, I'm surprised they played Warner pictures. It might have, it would've been...I'd put money on it was the Warner

CB: Warner's, yes, well anyway whichever one it was

I: It's where the Gaiety used to be

CB: The Gaiety?

I: No, no, Dailies, Dailies, sorry

CB: The Gaiety, the Gaiety's still on The Strand

I: On The Strand, yes. No, Dailies, mmm

CB: I didn't know there was a Warner Brothers cinema in those days, I thought there was only the Empire in that quarter

I: No, there were four. There was the Empire, which was MGM, umm...there was The Warner, which was built mid thirties, and recently rebuilt. Umm...technically it's the best cinema in London, umm, 9, 9 screens. The Odeon Leicester Square went up about thirty seven I think, didn't it?

CB: Oh, on the other side?

I: On the side, yes

CB: And...oh the other side of the square?

I: Well, yes, on the east side of the square where...(unintelligible)...had been

CB: Yes

I: And then...what is now the Odeon West End, which was, I think, Jack, Jack Buchanan had built it hadn't he, or at least was the leasee for a while

CB: That's the one where Jack Buchanan had, used to live, on the top floor. Now what's that called?

I: It's now called the Odeon West End

CB: Odeon West End?

I: Yes, it was, for a while it was the Gaumont, umm

CB: But that's on the other side of the square?

I: That's on the south side of the square

CB: I seem to remember in those days there was only the big Empire in the middle

I: No, it umm...the Empire, I...

CB: But even so, I was sure, because I could see the entrance of it now. I mean even so, even if, even if they did show them there, MGM had to, had to have a quota, had to show another British picture

I: Well, yes, but I mean Warner's had their own cinema, so I don't see why they would book them into the Empire. I don't, I'm not contradicting you, you might be right...

CB: No, no...I can't remember.

I: But the fact is that Metro Goldwyn Mayer was a major Hollywood studio and...

CB: Quite, got their own pictures

I: ...and they released a picture every week

CB: Yes. But I doubt they had enough British pictures to meet the quota

I: Well, MGM were very naughty. They were the worst of the American majors in terms of quota. They would buy any old rubbish, and they would show it at nine o'clock in the morning when the cleaners were still working

CB: Yes

I: They didn't care at all about quota. Until, umm...with the new legislation in the offing, in 1937, there was going to be a new quota act. And this is when they changed policy, and they hired Michael Balcon who, as head of the English operation, and their first picture was *A Yank at Oxford*, so going from absolute rubbish, they made major pictures

CB: Mmm, yes, yes. Well, maybe it wasn't, maybe it was Warner's...but I always thought it was the Empire Leicester Square

I: Right, well, I...

CB: As I said it became sort of repertory for me, you know, with these pictures...always was shown...and for the week, the whole week.

I: That's right, yes

CB: And they weren't quota quickies of course, I mean, I would say they were B pictures...but they weren't quota quickies by any means.

I: Well, we'll have to leave that up to future historians

CB: Oh, yes. Ummm...

I: *Old Mother Riley* seems to be next on your work list

CB: Yes. John Harlow...director John Harlow⁹¹. Arthur Lucan and Kitty McShane, yes.

I: Yep. And supporting, there was John Le Mesurier⁹², C Denier Warren and Sebastian Cabardt says

CB: Am I in it?

I: Well I know you're in it, yes

CB: On there?

I: Well, I didn't put your name on any of these because I knew they were your pictures

CB: Oh, I see! Oh, you've written that out yourself Yes, yes. John Le Mesurier, he was a lovely man

I: Yes, yes

CB: Really lovely

I: Yes, strange man, but, erm...

⁹¹ John Harlow (1896-1977) was an English director, his films included *The Dark Tower* (1943) and *The Blue Parrot* (1953)

⁹² John Le Mesurier (1912-1983) was an English actor whose credits include *Dad's Army* (1968-1977)

CB: Yes he was strange (laughs), but he was lovely. He was a gentleman, if you can say that about an actor, because everybody – not everybody – but I didn't have a stand in, because my part wasn't big enough. And we had a scene together. And they said, oh..Mr Mesurier's stand in, and he said no, no, I will sit with Miss Bouchier. He wouldn't let his stand in face me, you know, we were facing across a desk like this. I thought well there's a lovely man

I: Indeed, very good, yes

CB: Yes...and I believe he said to his wife "when I die, just send to the papers 'John Le Mesurier has conked it'", I think he said...conked it or something (laughs), yes, beautiful. I'm watching *Dad's Army* again, are you?

I: I've seen a couple of them, yes, yes, they...

CB: He plays a very strange character in that. Weird

I: I've never sussed out that character to tell you the truth. I don't know what the writers intended, or what he's playing. I agree with you absolutely

CB: I, yes, I know...it's sort of airy fairy, isn't it? And it...what does he say? All the other characters are very well defined, even, even Ian Lavender⁹³ as a silly boy...but John Le Mesurier, last Saturday or Sunday or whenever it was, he got off with one of the ladies. They seemed to imply that he was a ladies' man, but...

I: No he lives with, with...

CB: Oh, he's got a wife

I: Ian Lavender's mother, and um...whether or not Ian, what's his name, Private...I can't remember, but Ian, the Ian Lavender character, whether or not he is John Le Mesurier's son is never explained. And in the writing – I don't know why we're doing this now (both

⁹³ Ian Lavender (1946-) is an English actor best known for his role as Pike in BBC comedy *Dad's Army*

laugh) – in the writing there is an indication that he comes from what was then called a good family, that he is aristocratic, that he has good people, umm...which of course infuriates Captain Mainwaring, but umm...it isn't a clear cut character to me, either

CB: No, no it isn't, no...he waffles (laughs)

I: Yes

CB: However

I: Indeed

CB: He was lovely in that, in...

I: Back to our onions, umm...so um, well *Old Mother Riley's New Venture* was what, just another job presumably?

CB: Yes, another job, We all got things in our face you know, pies, pies in our face and things...no we didn't, no everybody rushed into the kitchen and got a pie in their face, and...Who directed? An old friend of mine...

I: Umm...Harry, Harry Reynold...oh no, John Harlow

CB: John, John Harlow said no, we're not going to have a pie on your face Chili, so I had a pie on my chest (laughs) you know...what do you call them?

I: Custard pies

CB: Custard pies! So he wouldn't let me have it full on the face. And, I think we really...we're nearly coming to the end and I'm not terribly proud of any of these (laughs)

I: Well, let's just, you never know what we might turn up. I see the next one is called *The Wallet*...does that...

CB: Yeah, I don't...

I: ...Ring any kind of bells, Morton Lewis⁹⁴. Morton is still around, he's still with us

CB: Yes, I've heard about him. He still owes me money from *The Wallet* (laughs)

I: I'll tell him if ever I see him again

CB: He knows it! I did work for him, no not for him again...hasn't he got an office just over the road here?

I: I don't know where it is, but yes, I bump in to him occasionally

CB: When I was in *The Mouse Trap* I went and did some work there, and I saw him there. But no, it was in his office or in his premises where I did some dubbing for him, for a foreign film. But he's very clever. He said that it didn't make any money; I was on a percentage or something

I: Oh, I see, yes

CB: And he said we'd never made any money on it (laughs)

I: Why, do it in that case? Why would he do it?

CB: Oh just that he...see I've got John Longden down here with an o, I've put John Longden, he was in it

I: Was he? In *The Wallet*? Yes

CB: Yes

I: What do you remember of *The Wallet*? I've got no details about it at all, other than Morton directed it, produced and directed it. 1952, it says

CB: He was, he was the boxer wasn't he?

I: He was the son, of the famous Kid Lewis

⁹⁴ Morton Lewis (1917-) is an American actor and producer whose films included *The Wallet* (1952) and *Garden of the Dead* (1972)

CB: Kid Lewis, that's right, yes. Umm...no I don't remember much about it. It was about a wallet. I don't remember much about it, it was pinched or lost or something. No, umm...yes, John Longden, and...anybody else, have you got down here?

I: I don't have any names at all for that

CB: Well John was in it and spelt wrong there...and then there was another funny one, *The Counterfeit Plan*

I: Right...

CB: At Ealing Studios, directed by Montgomery Tulley. Starring Zachary Scott⁹⁵. From Hollywood.

I: Yeah

CB: Umm...this was um...about counterfeit money being made, and when I went to see Montgomery Tulley he said "we want you to look terribly foreign in this", so I said oh that's easy, I said, look, look at me, I pull up my eyes like that. And he said "yes, that would be wonderful!" And he said "because you're so foreign, you don't speak any English", and I thought great, wonderful. So when we got there, we were made up, they did the eyes with makeup, and he said "no, I want you to look like you looked in the office, like that". So, I don't know, I must've spent two days in the make-up room with a man, the makeup man, trying to stick my eyes up with some sort of glue and things, awfully Finally we got them up (laughs)

I: Sorry, since this is an audio tape, we should say that what you're doing is...

CB: Oh! (laughs) pulling up the sides of my eyes

I: Doing a (unintelligible) Wong type thing with your eyes, pulling you, elongating them

⁹⁵ Zachary Scott (1914-1965) was an American actor, his films include *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *The Young One* (1960)

CB: That's right, yes, making them look terribly foreign. Because I was supposed to be very foreign. And he got them stuck up like this, and we were just about to shoot when one of them flopped down, so I was left with one up and one not, down (laughs). Oh it was agony, and there was sticky stuff all over, it was dreadful. But umm, I must say I looked rather mysterious and I did see this picture and people said "wooo" when I came on, because I did look very mysterious and foreign, and didn't say a word. That's what I remember about that. And Zachary Scott was very much a Hollywood actor and took over, and...

I: Was he being grand?

CB: Oh yes, and cutting everybody's parts out and changing the script, and cut a lot of mine out...

I: It was a time when they brought over lots of has been Hollywood actors, didn't they?

CB: Yes

I: In the hope of getting something, some sort of release in the States?

CB: That's right, I don't suppose it helped

I: So what, you didn't enjoy working with him?

CB: Ummm, no...you see, when you work with big people like Jimmy Stewart and people like that, who are absolutely wonderful, because they're real stars, it's lovely. But when someone who possibly knows that they're on their way out but they wouldn't be in England, they try and umm...

I: Well at that time they either were blacklisted, in which case there was a problem anyway because their films wouldn't be shown in the States, or they were on the slide

CB: I think that was the case with Zachary Scott, I think it was. So they had to do something about it, and...however...umm, where are we now?

I: I've got *The Boy and the Bridge*, which was produced and directed by Kevin McClory who of course had the rights to one of the Bond pictures

CB: He did have the rights to one of the Bond pictures, yes

I: Which keeps getting remade, because it's the only one not owned by Broccoli

CB: What, what, which one was it? I can't remember which one it was

I: Oh god...I can't remember the title of it, but it'll come, but umm...they've remade the story three times I think

CB: Has he done it three times?

I: Yes, I think he, he owns...

CB: At this point, he hadn't made it of course

I: No, no, no, no

CB: This was his very first picture, umm...Kevin McClory was a focus puller on the set with Bluey, they were great chums, and umm, when umm Mike Todd (?) was going to do *Round The World in 80 Days*, he asked Bluey to do it. And Bluey was busy with another so he said no I can't, I'm afraid I can't do it but I know a good young man named Kevin McClory, let him do it. So Kevin went out, all round the world with this picture; and then got very big ideas and got to know all sorts of wonderful people, and married a millionairess, Bobo Sigrist, and umm...became a big producer, with umm...Thunder, *Thunderball*

I: *Thunderball! Thunderball*, that's it, right

CB: Yes, and I don't know where he is now. Is he still around, do you know?

I: I don't know either...I would think that *Thunderball* made enough money that he doesn't have to worry. And as I say, since that basic story can be remade, they have remade it, umm...

CB: Yes, so this was a lovely, lovely story of a little cockney boy, umm...on the, on the bridge, a big bridge, London Bridge...no – the one that goes up and down?

I: Tower Bridge

CB: Tower Bridge, yes. And it was a very interesting location, we were on the Tower Bridge for a very long time, saw all the workings of the inside of the bridge, and umm, used all the towers at either side, umm but I don't know why the picture, it could have been a marvellous picture. I believe it did win an award at a Cork festival, umm...but it didn't seem to make much of an impact over here because it was such a sweet story about this little boy. A little cockney boy...somehow he missed it in this one, I think. Kevin, umm...

I: Yes...he directed it, as well as...

CB: He directed it, yes

I: Right...what was he like as a director? Any good?

CB: Pills to go to sleep and pills to wake up, so he was a bit...erratic

I: He was dozing a bit? Right...

CB: Erratic, yes.

I: Now with his background as an AD, was it an efficient production? Or not?

CB: No, he wasn't an Assistant Director, no

I: Oh, had he not been an AD?

CB: No, he was a focus puller

I: But you said he was on *Around the World...*

CB: Oh yes, he did that. Well that was a wonderful picture, wasn't it?

I: Yes. I was curious whether his experience on that, because that was a complicated shoot, they had so many cameos and they were shooting all over the place, it must have been quite a jigsaw

CB: Right...yes, I think he did very well on that, yes I think so

I: But he was a bit dozy on this one, from what you say?

CB: Yes, possibly, possibly it was the wrong subject for him, you know, it was a gentle, a gentle subject

I: Right. Did his wife finance it? Was that where the money came from?

CB: I don't know...they didn't stay together very long, I'm afraid, no

I: Sounds like a springboard for his career

CB: Oh yes

I: Right, so umm...

CB: And I think we're umm...oh, very sad, we're coming to the end aren't we, with *Dead Lucky*

I: *Dead Lucky*

CB: Montgomery Tulley

I: Uh huh

CB: British Lion. Vincent, Vincent Ball⁹⁶...oh, another mistake, oh this is dreadful.

Vincent Ball, I've got here. That, I never would have written. Do you know anything about, you know, books

⁹⁶ Vincent Ball (1923-) was an Australian actor, his films include *A Town Called Alice* (1956) and *Where Eagles Dare* (1968)

I: No. No, no experience in publishing at all.

CB: She swears that any mistake in the book is my fault

I: Well...she sounds very defensive

CB: Oh, she won't admit to a mistake, you see. So there is another one, Vincent Ball, there we go...never mind. Umm...what is it...

I: It's a shame, it's a shame

CB: Well, I don't, as Kevin said, Kevin Brownlow said "don't upset yourself, your book is strong enough not to worry about a few mistakes"

I: Indeed. Well they're also very obvious, so people will assume they're typographs, you know, that they're literals, that the printer has done it, or that someone hasn't properly proofread it...

CB: Oh yes, right...

I: You know, they're not going to blame you for it

CB: Yes. But I wish she'd just say "oh, I'm sorry", because, you know...now what is this one?

I: *Dead Lucky?*

CB: *Dead Lucky*

I: I don't know

CB: Who's in it? (laughs)

I: Well, you just said it was directed by Montgomery Tulley for British Lion and...Vincent Ball

CB: Vincent Ball, he was an Australian actor, wasn't he?

I: I've no idea, I wasn't, umm...

CB: Ah. And you haven't got it down there?

I: I wasn't working...no, all I had was the title, and 1960, I couldn't trace it, more than that. Which means it wasn't in the Halliwell collection, umm...

CB: I wonder how you got as much as you did out of Halliwell?

I: Well, um...you know...

CB: I think you got all of mine...except what?

I: Yes, umm, to explain how I got my list, umm...I...up to thirty nine, they're all in *The History of British Film*, which is the Rachel Lowe series. And then after that it was a matter of Halliwell or one or two other sources

CB: Yes I met somebody at a party the other day, you know...I've forgotten his name but he said don't you worry, Halliwell did have his moments when he didn't want, he didn't want to keep, put some of the films in...just like with Herbert, he didn't seem to put many of Herbert's in. And he said "I've done one, it'll be out soon", and I've forgotten his name now. He did write it down for me

I: Yes...

CB: So I've...he came and sat with me when we were...

I: There's another good book I've got called...

CB: Oh, Gifford, somebody, Gifford

I: Oh, Denis Gifford right, yes, yes, he's a great authority on what has been made. Umm, there's also a very useful book called *British Sound Movies*, which go up through the fifties. Twenties, thirties, forties and fifties, yeah. But umm, the *History of the British Film* hasn't yet continued into the fifties and sixties, yes, so it isn't as well documented as it should be. Denis Gifford has a book called *The British Film Catalogue*

CB: That's right, yes

I: Which I think is being republished this year at a hundred and fifty pounds! (laughs)

CB: Ohh, thank you! No, he told me where I can see it in the library here, somewhere

I: Right, well...

CB: The big library

I: Well, the BFI, presumably, because I think, I think they're republishing it in a revised edition

CB: Gosh...that's a lot of money, isn't it? Anyway...

I: Yes, right...so *Dead Lucky*, what do you recall?

CB: *Dead Lucky*, well...ummm...well, it was 1960 wasn't it? Umm...I can't remember where it was made, even...*Dead Lucky*...Montgomery Tulley...British Lion...

I: So what...this was your concluding feature film?

CB: That was the, the last of me in, in pictures. Yes (laughs)

I: Yes. And it doesn't seem to have registered! (laughs)

CB: No, it doesn't. It doesn't. Hasn't registered at all. *Dead Lucky*, *Dead Lucky*...I know it was umm, a man called Lucky and he was Dead, I mean it was a funny title. But...was I his mol or something? I can't remember. *Dead Lucky*...no, I think I, I can't remember

I: What umm, yes, sorry?

CB: Carry on

I: I was going to say, what about television? Have you done much television?

CB: No, no, very little television. Until recently, I've done quite a bit lately, this last year

I: Have you?

CB: Well I did Kevin's, Kevin

I: Oh I see, as yourself?

CB: Oh yes, yes, interviews

I: Right, yes, yes. But as an actress, I wonder...

CB: No, I have never acted on television, they have all been interviews or documentaries

I: Is that what *Catch a Falling Star* is? What is, what...

CB: A documentary. About Jessie Matthews

I: Right, I see. And something called *Flip*, I've got...

CB: Ah that, I'm wrong; I did act in that, yes (laughs). Yes, yes that was a funny little piece. *Flip*, yes, that was the only time I've ever acted...in...

I: Right. It sounds like children's, to me

CB: It was, it was, children's, yes. BBC.

I: OK, umm...well your theatrical career is extremely well documented in your book, and also, what shall I call it...your emotional life,

CB: (laughs) Yes

I: Your various affections and liaisons...umm, I don't know if you want to go into any of that, or shall we let the record...the book, speak for itself?

CB: I think so, yes, I umm...I am at the moment...there is a young man who comes every week to me to write the script from the book for a film

I: Really? This book?

CB: Yes, yeah

I: Oh marvellous, that's great

CB: And so I'm doing all that at home and I'm finding it agonising, quite frankly

I: What, to remember?

CB: Not to remember. I remembered it well, because I, well, only finished writing this last year, so it's fresh in my mind. But...he is going through my life with a fine toothed comb, and I'm finding some of the...sadder bits...

I: It's, it's uncomfortable for you...yes

CB: It is, it is, it is. And I shall be glad when he has got to the end of my life. He, I think he is coming either tomorrow or Wednesday and we've got, we've got up to Bluey so we can't be much longer (laughs)

I: Right, is, is it a commissioned script he's writing? Or is he doing it on spec?

CB: No, he's doing it on spec. But all sorts of people are having a little go. I saw on the Saturday night programme last week, on the lottery programme, not this week but last week that they have been granting a lot of money for films and so I wrote to my agent and asked why can't we apply? You know...and I don't see why not

I: No, anyone can apply

CB: We can apply, we can apply at least

I: But if it's a worthy project, a sensible project, and if there is co-financing, they won't give you all the money, they just augment finance, umm...and they give small amounts and large amounts, so there we are, you know?

CB: Oh good, we may as well try it

I: Absolutely, absolutely

CB: So, umm...it, well, it's just an idea, but he wanted to do it, he's interested, he's interested in the book, and he's interested – very keen – on writing a script for it

I: Does he have any credits, any experience, or...

CB: He has, but I can't tell you what they are at the moment

I: But he's not wasting your time?

CB: I hope not, otherwise it's, it has, as I say it has been rather distressing at times to have to go...it was distressing enough to write some of it, especially when I've exposed myself for what I am (laughs) in places...

I: Well, it's a very truthful book, umm...and the detail is very surprising, the fact that you have it either so well remembered or so well documented, you know, I...

CB: Well of course, they took a lot of...

I: I felt an idiot...you know, having read it, after making lists out, my list out, that yours is so much fuller

CB: Well, I don't think we'll worry about the, just...suffice to say that I just went on appearing in plays, and on and on and on from the sixties onwards, and right up until recently

I: Let's talk about Bluey, then, because I know you're writing currently about him

CB: I am, yes

I: And I don't want to pre-empt that, although again this is for reference and for the future, umm...maybe, umm, the time you publish your Bluey book, we should get together and do another session about him, because he was the ranking AD, first assistant for umm...

CB: Oh, he definitely was, yes

I: ...a considerable period of time, yes...is there anything you want to say about him now, umm...

CB: Well, that I am, I am writing this book, but it's not a biography because I didn't know enough about him to write a biog...I don't know what, I don't know anything about

his childhood, and teenage years, I only met him when he came over, in 1930...thirty six, I think when he arrived

I: And how old was he then?

CB: Well he was two years younger than me and I'm eighty six now, so...

I: Right, well...so...two years younger, you were born '09 so he was born 1911

CB: Eleven, yes, yes

I: Right. What was his real first name, his given name? Bluey was obviously an Australian nickname

CB: His real name, I've, I put it in the book, haven't I? I think it was Robert Lamar Picapitals was his name. Bluey, of course, is all red haired Australians are called Bluey, and he took Hill from his wife's second husband, Roland, Roland Hill. Oh, he called himself Roland Hill, that's right. Alan Roland Hill. He changed it by deed poll when he came to England because he didn't like Picapitals and I don't blame him, it's a peculiar name (laughs)

I: Indeed, yes, it sounds almost a joke

CB: It did, yes. Well he said that he used to get ragged at school about his name, so he was determined to change it when he came over here. So I couldn't, umm, I couldn't write it as a biography, so I have written it, all of the extraordinarily funny anecdotes that I could remember about him when he worked for all the big American companies. He worked for Columbia, and MGM and Twentieth Century Fox, and all the big stars that came over at that time, in the fifties and sixties, like (?) Power (?) and, umm, who have we got as well...well, wonderful people, and enter...Marlene Dietrich, and...

I: Were the...

CB: A wonderful array of American stars

I: What about the British films you worked on, because he was on some of the major pictures during the war, and of course the famous, notorious, infamous *Caesar and Cleopatra*?

CB: Well that is going to be the main theme of my book, because there are so many stories about Gaby Pascal. So I have written it, I'd finished it, but of course it's not long enough (coughs) excuse me...(coughs)...just the anecdotes themselves are not sufficient to make a book. So I am rewriting it and giving it all a bit of a background, and adding to it. And unfortunately I still have to bring myself more into it, than it being Bluey's, just Bluey's book. I have to. And so that's what I'm working on at the moment, trying to extend it without it trying to, without it looking like it's padding

I: Will the same publisher handle it, or, or...

CB: Well I've got a new man, I've got a new literary agent, but I think he's rather good, and he's read Bluey's...what I've called Bluey AD, and he said there's no doubt that there's plenty...that a book like that will sell very well, especially with the famous names and the anecdotes. He said we enjoyed the anecdotes very much, so I suppose he's got readers there, but he suggested that prolong it, make it...extend it

I: Yes

CB: And that's what I'm doing, and being terribly careful not to make it appear as if it is padding. And I do agree with him, they were rather loosely strung together, the anecdotes. They do need something solid between them. But, umm...I mean I still laugh when I read the Gabby Pascal one, and Bluey of course was with him for three years. Umm, it took three years I think, the first one, didn't it?

I: When you say ‘the first one’, do you mean *Caesar*?

CB: Yes, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, the first one

I: Well, they were shooting I know for fifteen months. How early he joined the production, I don’t know

CB: Oh, right from the start

I: Yes, well, then, yes, could be

CB: I mean, 1942 he was on it. 1943 he was still on it, because I had just finished when Bluey...I was in Cairo, I was working with Edsar in 1943. And I decided to come home, after practically a year out there, and a month later, Bluey arrived in Alexandria. And I’ll just tell you this one little story (laughs) umm..with, when he arrived, the customs man said to him have you anything to declare, and Bluey said “yes, I’ve got a Sphinx and twenty tonnes of red sand”. Much to the astonishment, and in the middle of a war.

I: Yes, well it was, I suppose from a war point of view, a bit...pro...prodigious, is that the word I want? But on the other hand, in terms of film making it made total sense. Because you need a sphinx that looked like a sphinx two thousand years ago

CB: Of course...of fibreglass, it was made in fibreglass in the studio, but smaller

I: Yes, and the sand had to match

CB: Well they took it down to Devon to do some close ups of the Sphinx; which they called the kitten Sphinx because it was absolutely beautiful and pristine, you know. And, um...so they had to...and the sand in Devon is slightly on the red side, and the sand in the desert in Egypt is white, practically. So...

I: The kitten...sorry, I was just going to say that the kitten comes from the play itself

CB: Yes

I: Because Cleopatra says oh, this isn't the real, the big Sphinx, this is just a little kitten Sphinx

CB: The kitten Sphinx, kitten Sphinx, yes. So, that's, that is how he arrived, and...in Egypt with a Sphinx and twenty tonnes of red sand, and I think oh I wonder what the natives thought when they suddenly saw...the Sphinx (laughs)

I: What was his opinion of Pascal?

CB: Well, he loved him really. They were very much alike in a way, they were both outrageous, and I think had a, I think they had a great respect for each other actually. I mean he couldn't have told those stories about Pascal unless he really liked him. You know, he really, he enjoyed telling them, and I enjoyed hearing them, and I hope people enjoy reading them. Because there are some fantastic stories about him

I: Well yes. I was, I went down on the set of that picture several times, it was I guess 1944

CB: Well there you are, it must have been three years then

I: Yes, well they were still shooting in forty four, and I think it was finally released, shown in forty five. But, umm...I don't think you will find anyone maybe other than Bluey who had any respect for Gabby, I mean he was known as a charlatan, and um...

CB: (laughs) yes

I: In some ways an interesting producer because he got things that nobody else could get

CB: Absolutely

I: Like the rights to the plays. But as a director he was terrible!

CB: (laughs) I know, I know...

I: Well, I look forward to reading those anecdotes and, as I say, maybe then we can do another session and, and...

CB: Right...

I: So you don't know at this point when the book will be available?

CB: No, I, no...I'm just writing it when I get time at the moment, and I don't get very much time at the moment!

I: No, it's a very social period, isn't it, with a hundred years of cinema

CB: Well it has been for the last year, it's been very very, I've been very busy. So, anyway, it's been very interesting talking to you, and I'm sorry it's come to an end

I: Yes, well indeed...

CB: I wish I'd finished up with some nicer pictures than these little tiddly bits (laughs)

I: Yes, but then again, I mean, what was...it was all part of the British film industry, it just collapsed, and err...

CB: Well I was lucky, considering that I was blacklisted, to get back into pictures at all after Jack Warner decided to blacklist me. Umm...but of course we never got back to the glory of the early, early days...oh, I'm, I'm making a noise (rustling paper)

I: Oh, it doesn't matter, bit of plastic rustling. Umm...well before we actually sign off, is there anything that comes to mind, or anything that you want to add?

CB: Well I would like to say how very delighted I am that somebody, when I'm dead, will be able to listen to me. It will be very nice, in the next century; it will be in the next century because I'm determined to live until the end of this century

I: Good, excellent

CB: Oh, determined, yes

I: You're going to see the new century in are you? Right

CB: Oh yes, even if I get drunk and fall down dead while they are ringing the bells I'm going to see it (laughs). And I would like to say hello to somebody who is listening to me in the next century, and hope that they've enjoyed what I've had to say, and that I've enjoyed myself in pictures, especially in the early days, it was wonderful. And well, good luck...

I: We had faces then, as they in Sunset Boulevard

CB: Yes, yes. It's quite true, we did have faces. And think of the wonderful faces. Dietrich, Garbo, all of them wonderful faces. Even Bette Davis was a wonderful face

I: Gish

CB: The Gishes, yes, the Gishes and...oh yes, there were so many lovely faces of the older days. Do you remember, oh I can't, no, I...oh dear, I'm beginning to forget now...but there were, when you come to think back. One who was killed, killed in an aeroplane

I: Carol Lombard⁹⁷

CB: Carol...I mean they were lovely, intelligent faces, just beautiful, and Colmar, the very dark one, do you remember her?

I: Yes, oh yes. She's still alive

CB: And...Irene somebody...Irene...

I: Dunne! Irene Dunne⁹⁸

CB: Yes, Irene Dunne. Irene Dunne

⁹⁷ Carol Lombard (1908-1942) was an American actress whose films included *Safety in Numbers* (1930) and *Mr and Mrs Smith* (1941)

⁹⁸ Irene Dunne (1898-1990) was an American film actress whose films included *The Awful Truth* (1937) and *My Favorite Wife* (1940)

I: Myrna Loy⁹⁹

CB: Myrna Loy, lovely face, lovely, saucy face

I: Yes, they were chiselled, weren't they, the two of them

CB: They were, yes

I: Such lovely bone structure

CB: Yes

I: And the cameraman was always, umm...well I'll tell you a little story before we finish that Gore Vidal¹⁰⁰ told me many years ago, because a great friend of his was Ina Claire¹⁰¹. And, err...she worked with Garbo on *Ninotchka*. And err...she said to her one day "Miss Garbo, I hope you don't mind my asking, but umm...you, you always look so marvellous", you know...and Garbo said "The cameraman always takes care of me" (laughs), and they had marvellous cameramen then

CB: (laughs) of course...

I: Who had such extraordinary techniques, umm...both in lighting, and also in, in compensation, you know, just covering up the defects...

CB: Yes, well I had one cameraman, Eddie Kronyager, Kronyager I think. He came over, I think he was going to work for Wilcox, and he did a test with me, and I saw it the next day and I said "that's not me up there", and it was. What he'd done, with a few spots, fantastic. And that was Dietrich, you see, she could walk in to a set

I: Umm, yes...

CB: And say "I want one there, and I want one there, and I want one there, and that's it"

⁹⁹ Myrna Loy (1905-1993) was an American actress whose films included *The Black Watch* (1929) and *Too Hot to Handle* (1938)

¹⁰⁰ Gore Vidal (1925-2012) was an American writer known for his novels, screenplays and essays

¹⁰¹ Ina Claire (1893-1985) was an American actress whose films included *The Awful Truth* (1929) and *Claudia* (1943)

I: But she'd learnt all that from Sternberg

CB: Yes, yes she knew exactly where she wanted the spots, and she got them...

I: Yes, but Sternberg was the one who taught her

CB: Yes

I: She always looked for her key that was essentially her technique, the key light

CB: Yes, quite, quite

I: We're at the very end of the tape, Chili, so err...

CB: Oh right!

I: With that I will thank you most kindly for your patience

CB: It's been a pleasure, it really has

I: Well it has for me too, and another lovely edition to the archive

CB: Right, ok

I: Thank you very much indeed

CB: Bye bye

I: Bye bye

CB: Right

END

