

Eddie Dryhurst (writer, producer, director)

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by [admin](#) — last modified Aug 10, 2008 07:41 PM

BIOGRAPHY: Eddie Dryhurst entered the film industry in the late 1910s as an office boy at Ideal Film Company. His directorial debut followed just a few years later in 1922, a two-reeler entitled Hims – Ancient and Modern which he also co-wrote. In 1924 he relocated to Hollywood where he worked for various film companies, including a stint at Universal’s publicity department. On returning to Britain at the end of the decade he worked mainly as a screenwriter, eventually diversifying into film production with his own company, Edward Dryhurst Productions. His production credits include *Noose* (1948) and *The Romantic Age* (1949), both of which he co-wrote. **SUMMARY:** In this detailed interview with Roy Fowler, Dryhurst discusses his early career in British film during WWI and subsequent employment as an office boy at Ideal Studios. Responding to Fowler's rather direct line of questioning, he provides a great deal of information about the facilities and working culture at the studio. His relocation to America during the mid-1920s and impressions of the different filmmaking conditions offer enlightening reading, as do his recollections of quota film production in Britain during the 1930s. He refers to his autobiography on a number of occasions: *Gilt Off the Gingerbread*, Bachman & Turner, 1987.

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Interviewer: Roy Fowler

Interviewee: Eddie Dryhurst

Tape 1, Side 1

Roy Fowler: This recording is copyright by the ACTT History Project. It's recorded on the 26th April 1988 in the executive room of ACTT at 111, Wardour Street. The subject is Edward Dryhurst, interviewed by Roy Fowler. Eddie is a producer, writer, director, going back a long, long way. Edward, the fact is that you have written recently about your life in great detail and so I thought on the tape what we'd do is expand on some of those areas, or maybe cover the areas that, for whatever reason, you didn't go into too much or at all in the books. Is that fair?

Eddie Dryhurst: Anything you say, Roy.

Roy Fowler: Okay. It's just that it seems pointless to repeat a great deal, but obviously whatever you want to say, then say. We had better establish the fact that you were born in what? It was 1904 was it not?

Eddie Dryhurst: At the end of, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Yeah right, okay. And at a very early age you had a great desire to go into motion pictures.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: Your family background, as I say, is documented, so why don't we start out with your first initial urgings to go into film and what films were like at that particular time, what made you feel that way about them?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well we're going back to the First World War, around 1916, '17, that period. Well I was a youngster at school and I started going to the movies on Saturday afternoons with my father, and I became completely smitten with them, I can only say that. I just couldn't wait to get involved in them. My opportunity came when - I was a member of the boy scouts, and there was an opportunity for me to do something about that when the head of our local scouts for some reason was approached by a film company for some extras for a boy scout film they planned to make called Boy Scouts Be Prepared. And of course when we were invited to volunteer I was up there, [chuckles] I jumped like a kangaroo! That was really the beginning of it and that was in 1917. And we worked on location near St Albans and I loved every minute of it and couldn't wait to get next to the producer as he was called in those days, the director, and the cameraman and others. I wanted to learn all I could, I think I must have made a hell of a nuisance of myself. The director, Percy Nash was a very tolerant man I remember. Anyway I did a couple of days, or three days maybe extra work in that and then I used to bombard Mr Nash for a letter, because I wanted to be in the next picture and I wanted a bigger part, etcetera. Well probably out of self defence he did put me in his next picture which was called, The Boys of the Otter Patrol and some of it was shot at the old Samuelson Studios in Worton Hall Isleworth and I had to make the journey from St Albans down there. And my parents got a bit worried on two accounts. For one thing they thought it was rather a long journey for a boy of my age to make, which I suppose it was. And secondly they felt my education was being interrupted and they didn't like the idea of that either. And certainly I suppose there was a certain amount of opposition to the movies anyway because in those days they were rather frowned upon by the bourgeois.

Roy Fowler: How about the theatre?

Eddie Dryhurst: Pardon?

Roy Fowler: Did your parents have any dealings with the theatre, did they enjoy going to that?

Eddie Dryhurst: None at all. My mother was a farmer's daughter, my father was a hotelier's son. He was Thomas Cooke, chief auditor.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...when I was a child. So no, not really, except an aunt of mine - a cousin of mine became the leading lady of the Stock Exchange Operatic Society, and an aunt of mine was a pretty well known singer in her day, a sister of my fathers. He was very musical, he was a child in the choir of the East Castle Street Welsh Baptist Chapel, which is still there today of course.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well, members of his choir included David Lloyd George, D.H. Evans and John Lewis.

Roy Fowler: John Lewis of the store?

Eddie Dryhurst: He was in the choir, yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha. Now there can't be many people around who actually made a film, participated in filming in 1916, '17. So do you have clear memories of the time?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, very.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Can you describe procedures and the size of the crew and the way they worked?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well crews as we know them today were really non-existent, the cameraman didn't even have an assistant as far as I recall. The director had a fellow trudging round him just - he was at his beck and call - virtually a messenger chap. But there were no assistant directors and there were no assistant cameramen, there were no focus-pullers and no operators as we know them today, they were unheard of. If the director wanted the cameraman to pan, well he panned! [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: How was everything organised? Was there an assistant director?

Eddie Dryhurst: No as I just said, there wasn't an assistant director, all he had was a sort of messenger chap, a youngster who'd...

Roy Fowler: Who did all the yelling?

ED:... "Go there!" "Tell so-and-so that!" - just running around.

Roy Fowler: Who did all the shouting?

Eddie Dryhurst: The director I guess. They always worked with megaphones in those days.

Roy Fowler: These are what, one-reelers?

Eddie Dryhurst: No the Boys of the Otter Patrol was an eight week serial, released at one reel a week. The Boys of the Otter Patrol was a six-reeler if I remember.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, and shot consecutively? I mean shot in one er...

Eddie Dryhurst: No they were two separate entities.

Roy Fowler: No what I mean is, they didn't shoot each episode separately, they worked them all together, did they?

Eddie Dryhurst: What?

Roy Fowler: Did they work all the episodes together?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember, I think so.

Roy Fowler: Right okay. So it was a very basic operation?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, very.

Roy Fowler: In terms of cost, any idea what they were spending?

Eddie Dryhurst: No idea at all, no. We used to get about a pound a day I think, which was a lot of money, we thought.

Roy Fowler: That wasn't bad. Was it a well-established company or a bit of a fly-by-night outfit?

Eddie Dryhurst: It was called The Transatlantic Film Company, I don't know whether it was English or American, this is going back a long time, but I think it was English.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I don't remember any Americans being connected with it. Percy Nash was a well-known director of the period. He was formerly a floor-walker at Selfridges, how he got into the movie business I don't know. He was a very nice man, I liked him.

Roy Fowler: Did he ever go on to do anything else?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes he made a lot of pictures in England in that period, features and all kinds of things. Oh yes, he was a busy man.

Roy Fowler: There was a fairly healthy English or British production organisation at that time, was there not?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was struggling to be born in a sense I think. There were a lot of fly-by-nights, running around, capitalising on them, or raising money on the strength of it. There were, however, some very dedicated people who were really very interested in the business. People like Sinclair Hill, A.E. Coleby and others of the period.

Roy Fowler: You mentioned G.B. Samuelson when you were at Worton Hall, did you have any er...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, yes. He founded Worton Hall.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. I say, did you have any meetings with him or were you aware of him at that age?

Eddie Dryhurst: I was introduced to him briefly, yes. I was very young don't forget.

Roy Fowler: Indeed yeah. Any memories of him?

Eddie Dryhurst: Not really, no, no.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: His sons have asked me the same question.

Roy Fowler: What might be interesting are your memories of a film show at that time, what happened in a cinema.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh well I can tell you that because I used to practically haunt them! They used to have continuous performances from about five thirty in the evening until ten thirty at night, and the admission prices were around four pence, five pence, six, seven pence, up to a shilling, that was the back-row price where the courting couples went. And er, they were usually fairly noisy I remember, especially at the front, where the cheaper seats were. And of course there was a piano accompaniment, the pianist was usually pretty poor, at least in a small town like St Albans. The projection varied, it was hand-cranked in those days, and er, the customers loved the pictures, as I say, anything that moved and they were there, they were not critical at all.

Roy Fowler: What made up the audience? You said before the bourgeoisie were a bit er...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they were mostly what my mother would have called "common people."

Roy Fowler: Right, in other words the so-called working class?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: And how often do you think they went to see a film?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh I should think once or twice a week. There was no other entertainment to speak of in those days.

Roy Fowler: Right. Was this yet the era of the picture palace or were these converted premises still?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the purpose-built cinema had not really come into its own and it didn't until after the war of course. But er, the purpose built cinema in St Albans I remember, which opened in 1913 I think, which for its time was quite good.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: There was no balcony, no circle.

Roy Fowler: Seating, roughly how many would you say?

Eddie Dryhurst: I should say about five hundred, five fifty.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. And they played to packed houses every night?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes as a rule they were pretty well full, yes. And you've got to remember the war was on, there were a lot of soldiers around and they didn't know what to do with themselves. I think cinemas on the whole had a very nice time of it.

Roy Fowler: What were the booking patterns, how often did a film play?

Eddie Dryhurst: Three days.

Roy Fowler: Right, so the programme changed twice a week?

Eddie Dryhurst: It changed twice a week, yes.

Roy Fowler: And were they opened on Sunday?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no.

Roy Fowler: No, I see, right. And what did the programme comprise, what did you get for your money?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well we usually got the newsreel, which by then was a couple of issues old. The newsreel, a travel short, a two-reel comedy, the feature of course and maybe a second feature sometimes.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. Any commercials at that stage, advertisements?

Eddie Dryhurst: No. Well I beg your pardon, yes slides, they were on slides, local advertisers.

Roy Fowler: Local stuff?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, right. Musical intermissions?

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: But there was the pianist accompanying the pictures?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: So the films, were they mostly British, mostly American, or mixed?

Eddie Dryhurst: Mostly American.

Roy Fowler: Yes, so already at that stage, even that early it was coming in.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes, yes.

Roy Fowler: How about French films like Melies and um...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well there were occasional French films, not very often. There were some two-reel comedies by - featuring a man like Max Linder.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: But mostly the features were American, Vitagraph a lot of them, and Edison.

Roy Fowler: Yes. Now audiences related already to performers did they not? This was the beginning of the star system?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes, yes. Pearl White and people like that were very popular.

Roy Fowler: And they went to see the star as much as they did just going to see a film presumably?

Eddie Dryhurst: I wouldn't say that, they went to see the film as well. If Pearl White was doing a serial, in addition to seeing her they were equally anxious to find out what happened this week, you know, how it continues.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. Do you remember any of the major films of that time, such as Birth of a Nation for example?

Eddie Dryhurst: Curiously enough no I don't really. I don't think there were any major films as such, they were run of the mill pictures you know. I don't remember a major film of that period at all. [Slight pause] The first really important film I remember was a British - was made in 1921 I think by a man called Stuart Blackton featuring Lady Diana Manners. It was about Queen Elizabeth I think, I've forgotten the name of it, The Great Adventure was it called? I've forgotten. [NB Manners starred in The Glorious Adventure in 1922 and played Queen Elizabeth in The Virgin Queen in 1923, both directed by J. Stuart Blackton.]

Roy Fowler: That was what, made in America?

Eddie Dryhurst: No it was made here in...

Roy Fowler: Oh was it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: Because Blackton went on to the States then and formed a company.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh this was after he'd been to the States. He was one of the original founders of the Vitagraph Company in America. I knew him, I met him.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: J. Stuart Blackton, Commodore Blackton he liked to be called.

Roy Fowler: Yes?

Eddie Dryhurst: [Chuckles] I wonder why?

Roy Fowler: Which was a self-awarded title was it, or rank?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't know, I know he liked to be called Commodore.

Roy Fowler: Sounds like a Southern Colonelcy doesn't it? [both chuckle] So any other particular memories of film-going in the First World War?

Eddie Dryhurst: No. I used to go quite a lot, every week in fact. Sometimes I would try and get in for nothing if I was short of money. Of course a lot of the time I was taken on as a pianist, in times of illness of the regular person.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. Tell us about that, what it was like accompanying the film.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I was seeing a serial, following a serial at the St Albans cinema, starring Houdini, it was called The Master Mystery. It was a lot of tripe of course. And I was enthralled with this serial, partly because I think the pianist used to give it a lot of um, tremolo and that sort of thing, and play the old overtures like William Tell, and you know, she brought it to life for me. Then one evening I went in and to my horror there was no piano and this Houdini who had been an intensely dramatic character now became a rather silly sort of rake who was up there prancing around. And the audience were very restless too, I couldn't think why there was no piano. And finally I looked round and saw the bowler hat of the manager, standing at the back, so I made up my mind to go and speak to him, which I did. I walked straight up the aisle to him. I was then thirteen I think, thirteen and a half. And I asked why there was no music. And he said, "Because the piano player is sick..." got colic or something. And I said, "Well that's too bad, can't you find somebody to take her place?" He said, "Well if we could, we would have done so. No we can't find anybody to take her place." I said, "Well you have now, because I'm here!" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I can play the piano." He said, "You?" I said, "Yes I can. I'm the son of Mr So-and-so." Now everybody in town knew my father and of course he was the local church organist and all that, so that impressed him and he said, "Well have a go then, let's listen to you." So I went down and looked up at the screen over the front of the piano. There was a burst of applause from the theatre, the audience, and for the next two or three days I had to deputise for the regular pianist and loved every minute of it. Then she came back and that's another story.

Roy Fowler: How did one play? Was it all extemporisation?

Eddie Dryhurst: In those days yes, or memory, culmination of both.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, presumably derived a lot from what you'd seen in the past and heard in the past?

Eddie Dryhurst: It depended on the piano player, some had whole sheafs stuck up in front of them, but I didn't, I didn't need it, because I had a remarkably good ear.

Roy Fowler: The prepared each film did they, some of them?

Eddie Dryhurst: Some of them did, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Were cue sheets distributed with the film there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: Very rarely taken any notice of by me!

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Was that a general practice or was it just for important films so-called?

Eddie Dryhurst: General practice, with features.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. And was it important to stay in synch or was it a very general accompaniment?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh very general. I used to look up at the screen to get the mood of the scene and play accordingly.

Roy Fowler: Were the pianos any good or were they upright old Joanna's that made any...

Eddie Dryhurst: They were uprights, they were not much good and of course they were thumped twice nightly at seven and nine so they were not very nice to play upon. [Chuckling]

Roy Fowler: It must have been a very tinny, peculiar sound?

Eddie Dryhurst: Rather tinny yeah, inevitably.

Roy Fowler: What else do you remember of exhibition in those days?

Eddie Dryhurst: Exhibition?

Roy Fowler: Yes, how a cinema was run. Was there any element, as you saw it, of professionalism involved, or was it just a very minor operation?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well by our standards today it wouldn't be at all professional. I mean in the case of the St Albans cinema, the manager worked in the Town Clerk's office during the day and therefore he didn't know much about movies. And he used to spend a lot of his time in The Bell next door - he was just there as a sort of figurehead I think. There was a woman taking the money in at the cash desk, there were about three or four attendants as they called them, and two or three up in the projection room, that was the lot.

Roy Fowler: So these were all spare-time jobs really for people?

Eddie Dryhurst: Really, yes.

Roy Fowler: Including the projectionist?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, most of them were moonlighting. Er, I think the projectionists were also moonlighting, yes.

Roy Fowler: Were they union members already at that stage?

Eddie Dryhurst: There were no unions in those days.

Roy Fowler: Not at all, not even for the projectionists?

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: I wondered if the stage unions had moved in?

Eddie Dryhurst: No you could do what you liked in those days. [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Right, well we're entering an era where you can do what you like again by the look of it! [Chuckling]

Eddie Dryhurst: That's what's called the clock turning full circle isn't it?

Roy Fowler: Er yes, or...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the hand of the clock.

Roy Fowler: Or the cycle of history, I'm not sure which, yeah. I don't suppose we'll ever go full circle quite. Right, if you've nothing to add to that then, we'll move on. Is it true to say that your next important touch with films was when you went to Ideal Studios?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Right okay. Now that seems to me a particularly fascinating thing to have been at Ideal in what was it, 19...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Twenty.

Roy Fowler: 1920, ah ha.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well Ideal was the only studio in Borehamwood in those days and it was really only equipped to make one film at a time. It had two stages, one of which was only small.

Roy Fowler: Now tell us what a stage was in those days. Was it a very large open shed, was it open to the elements or roofed?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think these were purpose-built, the whole studio had been purpose-built.

Roy Fowler: How old was the studio?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think it was built in 1913, just before World War One.

Roy Fowler: By Ideal?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, by a firm called Neptune. They didn't last very long, the only film I can remember of theirs was called A Non-Conformist Parson and it starred a girl called Constance Worth. I remember that vaguely but that's the only thing I can remember. The Ideal Film Company was run by two brothers, Rowson, and er, they had a renting office up here in Wardour

Street, seventy-six to seventy eight, and one brother ran that branch of the business while the other ran the filmmaking branch. The filmmaking branch was ran by Simon Rowson, he was a man of some education strangely enough, he was a Bachelor of Science, or a Doctor of Science, and generally a well-educated man. He was not a man of many words, he didn't talk much, however he was in charge at Elstree, they took over the studio from Neptune or the liquidators, whoever they were, and they ran it for some years, I can't remember exactly how many. But I was at St Albans School at the time and I used to go over there in my holiday, weather permitting. I'd ride my bicycle over there, about seven miles, and I just used to wait and station myself outside the studio and look at it, there was nothing to see except buildings. But I could hear the gas engine going and the gas engine gave me a certain amount of comfort because that gas engine was supplying the electricity for making the films with. So one way and another, I was drawn there and it gave me a lot of spiritual comfort. But what finally happened was that I been in a lot of struggle at school, I usually was. In this case - my headmaster didn't like me anyway and he treated me quite sadistically - he gave me a hell of a caning. And I was smarting not only physically but mentally I was very annoyed, very unhappy, very rebellious. And it was in one of those sort of moods that I cycled over to Borehamwood one afternoon and when I got there I was listening to the gas engine and I thought, "Why the hell don't I go in there? What's the good of standing out here? Why can't I go in there? Maybe I'll get a job!" So it took a lot of courage to do it but I plucked up sufficient courage to march into the building and then the first thing I saw when I got in was a mouse scampering across the floor, there was nobody else in sight! This mouse saw me and darted for cover and I'd been waiting for a few minutes when a rather grouchy old man came shuffling along, he had a white coat on and a cap. Well he stood and he looked at me, he said, "What do you want, son?" I said, "I want to talk to somebody about a job." "There aren't no jobs here," he said. And a moment later he was joined by a middle-aged lady who seemed to take control of the situation. She looked at him and said, "Who's this?" "Oh," he said, "a boy who wants a job." She said, "Oh yes, you want a job, son, do you?" So I said, "Yes I do very much." She said, "Well what do you want to do?" I said, "Well I don't know, anything." So she looked at her husband - she was his wife, they were the housekeeper and his wife - she said, "I'll have a word with Mr Berry." So she disappeared for a couple of minutes then came along followed by a tall man, bald, who was Mr Berry, he was the brother of W H Berry the West End comedian, as it turned out later. Anyway, Mr Berry listened to me for a couple of minutes and he said, "Well I'm busy now, I'm afraid I've got nothing that would interest you." And he started to walk away, then he said, "Well I've got a thirty-bob a week office boy's job, that wouldn't interest you..." And I leapt after him, I said, "It would indeed interest me, Sir!" So the upshot of it was he said that I could start on Monday morning at thirty-bob a week as an office boy. Well in those days for a boy of fifteen and-a-half, thirty-bob a week wasn't bad. Anyway I wasn't interested in the money, I was interested in getting into the studio. So I went over there on the Monday morning, I left home as usual, perhaps a little earlier than usual and my mother, I told her some story about... it was training, or whatever I said, and I cycled over to Borehamwood. I did that for a week and then I had to come clean and tell my parents, who by this time had had just about enough of me and the film business. And I feared I was going to be in real trouble for running away from the school, which is what I'd done of course. Instead of which, they accepted it quite philosophically. My father threw up his hands and he said, "Well I know when I'm beaten!" And my mother said, "How much are they paying you then?" That's what interested her. Anyway that's when I really started in the film business, that was in April 1920, sixty-eight years ago, which dates me of course! [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: What do you remember of the studio and how the studio ran and the people who worked there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah indeed I can, because I was a very impressionable age. The studio manager was a tall, gangly Englishman called Captain Kendrick. He was almost a Wodehousian Englishman, you know he'd got the 'frightfully frightfully' accent and all that. He leaned forward, well he was a tall man, I expect he must have been about six foot two or three - he sort of leaned forward when he walked, as if he was going to fall over if you touched him at the back. And he had his office and secretary, and I don't know really what he did. How he got into the film business is a mystery to me, but he did. He was cricket mad, if you were a male and eligible to play cricket and didn't, you were in his bad books. He was mad about cricket, he had a fairly good team in its day, and most of its members were cameramen and technicians and so on, what we call technicians today, they weren't called technicians then. And he was all right, he was quite nice to me really, Kendrick. He lodged in a house near the studio, he used to tramp across the fields for his lunch I remember. The house was owned by a solicitor, and it's only recently been pulled down. Let me think... They used to do all their own film processing, everything was done under the one roof. The labs were run by a man called Allday who looked a little odd because he had an eye, his left eye I think it was, was in a receding socket, which made him look rather odd, but he was all right. His assistant was a man called Carter who was fat and tubby and jolly, he used to make bird noises! I don't know - [chuckles] his way of making his presence felt. His main job was to supervise the negative development and also he would do the positive tinting. In those days if they wanted a night scene it was tinted blue and if they wanted a nice sunny day scene it was tinted sepia and so on. And he used to do all that work. I remember he used to wind the film onto the drums and then get the drums going electrically and they would revolve and when he considered the film was dry they would stop and wind it off.

Roy Fowler: You say there were two stages?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: What size were they?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well as far as I can remember I would say that the big stage was about er - maybe sixty feet by about a hundred, something like that.

Roy Fowler: As large as that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm.

Roy Fowler: And used for how many films concurrently? Just the one or did they have a continuity?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well sometimes they'd use it for two perhaps.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. How large a staff was there at the studio?

Eddie Dryhurst: Staff?

Roy Fowler: Yes, the size of the staff?

Eddie Dryhurst: Um, there were quite a lot of people employed there at the time, probably about a hundred and fifty all told I would think, including technicians and carpenters, chippies, you know, electricians and so on.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: I would think somewhere of that order.

Roy Fowler: Do you know how the company was financed?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, I deal with that in my book. But I do know that the Hudson's Ferry Company was interested in it somewhere.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: But I think what they used to do to a large extent was, they did a lot of blind booking which of course the Films Act, which came into force in 1927 made illegal. They would decide on a programme and pictures - mostly subjects that were in the public domain, so they didn't have to pay any royalties or rights, and then they would announce this series in the trade papers and start taking bookings on them. And when they reached nine hundred or a thousand bookings on a film I think they could discount that, or somebody would let them have a certain amount or possibly a large part of the production costs, and enable them to get the film into production and made. But as I say that practice was stopped by the government later.

Roy Fowler: Right. Did the studio have its own roster of players?

Eddie Dryhurst: Players?

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no, no...

Roy Fowler: Performers.

Eddie Dryhurst: No, because most of the 'stars' as we would call them today were well-known West End actors like Henry Ainley and Milton Rosmer, Clive Brook - well Clive Brook became a film-star. And er, no they were mostly theatre people.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: The theatre people looked upon it as a means of supplementing their income.

Roy Fowler: Did the - what kind of film was being made there?

Eddie Dryhurst: They varied, you know they might do a Dickens story like The Old Curiosity Shop or something, and then they might make a story set in Ireland by an author like the late Alan Burn [?could it be Byrne?] or... they didn't rate modern pictures which reflected the period I don't think really. In fact I would say they definitely did not. Guy de Maupassant, they used works of these which were free of course.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. How long were they, the length of the films?

Eddie Dryhurst: They were features.

Roy Fowler: What was a feature in those days, a silent feature?

Eddie Dryhurst: About six five [meaning 6500ft]

Roy Fowler: Ah ha, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Roughly you know, they were around that. An hour and a half to be on the screen roughly, perhaps a bit more than six five, eight thousand perhaps.

Roy Fowler: So essentially the studio was the production arm for a distribution company. Was the distribution company also called Ideal?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: It was.

Eddie Dryhurst: Ideal Film Renting Company.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: Sixty-eight to seventy, Wardour Street.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha, I see.

Eddie Dryhurst: Where British Lion were later.

Roy Fowler: Any unions at all in the studio? How about the electricians, were they unionised?

Eddie Dryhurst: Unions? No, I don't think they'd have got off the ground if they were, it was all too free and easy then. People didn't want them I don't think.

Roy Fowler: Okay.

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't think they'd want to be told what they could and could not do you know.

Roy Fowler: Did you get involved actively in production at this stage, or were you confined in the office area?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I was too young wasn't I? Very soon afterwards of course I made my own picture.

Roy Fowler: Yes but I mean at Ideal, you were, what, in the office all the time were you?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I was in the office but sometimes they called me onto the set and gave me a costume to get into, and I would work that day as an extra, for which I got a few pennies extra I think.

Roy Fowler: What were your hours, your working hours?

Eddie Dryhurst: Roughly from nine o'clock until five or six o'clock in the evening.

Roy Fowler: So the front office kept office hours. How about the production staff, what sort of time did they work?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think it depended on what they were doing, if they were in between pictures they would more-or-less come in and go out when they wanted you know, but otherwise they worked fairly long hours.

Roy Fowler: You mean every shooting day was a long day?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: Did you used to wander over to watch the shooting after hours?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of it in terms of technique, the way they organised it, the way they managed it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the sets I remember were small.

Roy Fowler: Painted or...

Eddie Dryhurst: Painted, oh yes.

Roy Fowler: But I mean painted flats as opposed to something more solid?

Eddie Dryhurst: Um, no, painted flats as far as I remember yes. There was a certain amount of furniture on them of course.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the director would be there and the cameraman and a few electricians. There weren't many people around, there wasn't a big staff hanging around the set, they were relatively small in number.

Roy Fowler: How about the camera equipment? Was that British, French, American?

Eddie Dryhurst: That varied. There was a cameraman called Claude McDonnell who was probably the best cameraman I had. He was English or Scottish, whatever he was. He had his own camera which was an American Bell and Howell, four turret job you know. And the Mitchell today is more-or-less modelled on that I think. So he had the most up-to-date camera. Horace Weddon, another cameraman used to use a Pathe camera, which you would just crank at the back. Another popular camera then was the Debie Parvo which was a four hundred magazine camera.

Roy Fowler: What were the others, were they four hundred feet?

Eddie Dryhurst: They varied, but mostly four hundred, yes. What else was there? But they were the cameras I remember very well. George Pocknell was another cameraman, he liked to use a Debie, the Debie was a popular camera.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, yeah. You say Ideal then was the only studio, when did other people start to move in? That was later in the twenties was it?

Eddie Dryhurst: J.D. Williams moved in on what later became BIP, in about 1925 I think, '26. I was then in America. He got the Elstree Studios going. He was an Australian. I met him in Hollywood funnily enough, he used to visit Hollywood a lot. He was a very big man, podgy, he gave the impression of being rather slow-thinking, he spoke slowly and he acted slowly, he walked slowly, everything he did was slow. But he could be very quick mentally I think. Anyway he definitely started the studios, but for him they probably wouldn't have been built.

Roy Fowler: Any other memories that we should record of Ideal, your time there?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't think so.

Roy Fowler: No. Right let's move on then. As I remember you were laid-off?

Eddie Dryhurst: Er, well I laid myself off really didn't I? I got fed-up with being an office boy, I thought that they should move me up. As they didn't feel inclined to do so, I decided to make a picture of my own just to show 'em! So I decided to make a two-reel comedy called The Cause of all the Trouble in St Albans. And knowing a lot of people in the town, I don't know how I got away with it with being so young, but I did. I managed to raise fifteen hundred pounds to make

this picture with and I got a couple of well-known stars of the period, George K. Arthur was the male lead, and a girl called Flora Le Breton the female, they were both well-known then, very well-known. He was called 'Kipps' because he played the lead in H.G. Wells's Kipps for Stoll and the name had stuck to him. And after he'd finished with my little film he went to Hollywood and did very well for a time.

Roy Fowler: You cover the story of that film in your book. Do you have anything to add to that?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't think so, no, there's not very much more I can say.

Roy Fowler: You write in the book as if you had enormous confidence about the project. Did you have any self-doubts at all or...?

Eddie Dryhurst: About the film?

Roy Fowler: Yes about what you were doing.

Eddie Dryhurst: No, none whatsoever, no it never entered my head. I thought it would be a big success, and it might have done well if I had gone to the right distributors - that's where I went wrong.

Roy Fowler: You were then what, eighteen, seventeen and-a-half?

Eddie Dryhurst: Seventeen and-a-half, yes.

Roy Fowler: Did you look that age or did you look older?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I tried to make myself look older by wearing a pince-nez. [Chuckles] Whether I succeeded or not I don't know!

Roy Fowler: And the cast and the crew took you seriously?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes.

Roy Fowler: Yes, no er...

Eddie Dryhurst: They'd have had their knuckles rapped if they didn't!

Roy Fowler: Ah ha!

Eddie Dryhurst: But as I say in the book, when I look back on it, it's amazing with a man like George K. Arthur, who by then had established quite a reputation as a light actor, light comedy actor, would come into this picture and accept my direction. And without question - not even bother to read the script, it was amazing to me. At least it wasn't then but it is now, when I look back on it.

Roy Fowler: The bait was money presumably?

Eddie Dryhurst: I suppose so, they wanted work.

Roy Fowler: West End stars then, had they begun to take films seriously, or did they regard it still as somewhat...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they'd begun to work in films, I wouldn't say they took them very seriously, no I don't think they did.

Roy Fowler: No, so it was just a way of making a little extra?

Eddie Dryhurst: And of course they couldn't speak in those days, they couldn't speak any lines. It was a way of making some extra money.

Roy Fowler: Did you have problems with their technique as performers, because...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they were inclined to overact of course.

Roy Fowler: Right. Were you aware of the difference between a stage performance and a film performance?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very. I knew the difference between a close-up and how you do er - to be heard at the back of a theatre.

Roy Fowler: What sort of direction did you give them, do you recall?

Eddie Dryhurst: Intimate. I didn't yell at 'em, I just talked to them quietly.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, but in terms of performance, you were judging their performance?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh well yes, I knew what I wanted.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. And you carried in your mind a concept of the film did you?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they weren't great acting performances, it was domestic comedy, young husband and wife, that sort of thing.

Roy Fowler: Tell us what happened to it.

Eddie Dryhurst: The film?

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I'd arranged with a firm called Globe Films Limited, who had an office on Shaftesbury Avenue.

Roy Fowler: How did you find them?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember, somebody put me onto them, some siren voice. It was run by a man called Edward Gates who looked like a rather hungry grocer I remember. Anyway, they agreed to distribute the picture and when I had made it I think I'd had the negative cut. I was very keen to get the picture screened at The Grand Palace, St Albans, which was the new cinema built by a man called Whiting. It seated fifteen hundred and had a small orchestra, not a piano player, a small orchestra, and it was a very nice theatre in its day. In fact one of the men who'd invested in The Cause of all the Trouble was the architect of this theatre, a man called Harry Fenn. Well I saw Mr Whiting, the head of the cinema, with whose son I was friendly, and he offered me three pounds for three days. Of course I should have told him to go and jump in the lake, shouldn't I? I was a bit disconcerted I must say, but I was so keen to get the picture screened there that I agreed to it, and I told the distributor and they said, "Three pounds, you're crazy!" I said, "Well Mr Whiting may raise the ante when he..." Anyway they said, "Well we're not going to have a print struck especially for a three pound date. Give him the cutting copy." I said, "The cutting copy? I don't think he's going to be very happy about that! Well his projectionist certainly won't with all the joins in this film." But they did use the cutting copy and they had no trouble with it.

Roy Fowler: How many performances, how many times did it go through the projector?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well certainly it would have gone through three times a day, at the very least. Anyway the picture packed 'em out. Mr Whiting took a lot of money with it. Son of a bitch! He offered me another thirty shillings. He booked it for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, he offered me another thirty bob for Thursday, Friday and Saturday, son of a bitch! Of course I agreed, so he got six days play dates for four pounds ten, in those days.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, this was the father of a friend?

Eddie Dryhurst: He must have taken four hundred and fifty on that picture alone, however...

Roy Fowler: What do you put...

Eddie Dryhurst: Almost immediately after that - went into liquidation and they disappeared and the negative disappeared and everything else disappeared, so I don't know what happened.

Roy Fowler: No print survives?

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: That's a shame.

Eddie Dryhurst: But I'll tell you what, the still from that picture, which is in my book, was given to me by Kevin Brownlow, where he got it from I don't know, but he had one!

Roy Fowler: There's no telling where Kevin gets things from! [Chuckling]

Eddie Dryhurst: He's an amazing fellow isn't he?

Roy Fowler: He is astonishing yes - a real love.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: So well that what, confirmed perhaps two things, one your love of making films and the other the total cupidity of the business probably?

Eddie Dryhurst: Cupidity? Yes. Well the next thing that happened to me wasn't a very happy story really because having made *The Cause of all the Trouble* which the trade papers had reviewed very well, I went to see Mr Rowson, my late boss at Ideal. I tried to persuade him to give me a director's job now, if you please. Incidentally, a director in those days, the top director there, financially, was a man called Fred Goodwins, he was English but he worked in Hollywood. And his salary was thirty pounds a week so that shows you. Mr Rowson didn't go for that but he said, "We have a film called *Hutch comes Home*." [NB. Probably *Hurricane Hutch in Many Adventures*] Now *Hutch* was an American cowboy, I think actually he was probably of English descent, but anyway he had made his name in Hollywood as a cowboy. And he said, "This is a story about *Hutch* coming home to England where he originally came from, with his horse. And it has been directed by an American called Frank Crane." Well I knew the name Frank Crane. No, he spoke in the past tense, he said, "The picture had been made by Crane with [Charles] Hutchison starring, but it was so bad they couldn't release it," he said, "we've got a certain amount of money tied up in it, we can't do anything with it because it's not good enough for public screening." So I said "Well if you'll let me have a look at it I may be able to do something with it." So he said, "You can have a look at it," which I did, and I went back to him and said, "Look, if I can have the out-takes and so on, I think I can probably re-edit this and make it presentable." And he said in effect, "Well have a go." So I did, and to cut a long story short I did make it presentable, I worked on it for three or four weeks, I rewrote the subtitles, and it was presentable. But the pay-off is that he never paid me off! Although the film was made, I'd put it into a presentable condition so they could get their money back, he never paid me a penny. My father wrote to him, but he never did. So that doesn't do him much credit I don't think.

Roy Fowler: Was that typical behaviour of the people who ran the business, controlled the business?

Eddie Dryhurst: I wouldn't think so because if that had been typical I don't see how the business could have survived. No he was just a son of a... He was a mean little Jew. Not that I'm anti-Jewish - I'm married to a Jewish wife - but he was a particularly nauseating one. And so that taught me a salutary lesson, and the next thing I did was to go to Hollywood.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, well we're just at the end of the first side so I think what we'll do is break there. [Break in Recording] Side Two. Yeah, so it was off to Hollywood.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I went to Hollywood in 1924, April 1924.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. You sailed from Liverpool?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: On the White Star Liner called 'Regina'.

Roy Fowler: Yes. What was crossing the Atlantic like in those days?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well we had a very rough crossing I remember. The ship itself was nicely appointed and comfortable, but we encountered some very, very rough seas, very rough indeed.

Roy Fowler: Were you travelling first-class or was it a one-class ship?

Eddie Dryhurst: My father had arranged it through Cook's, yes I travelled first-class. I had a bath steward I remember whose job it was to run my bath for me.

Roy Fowler: I think the twenties and the thirties must have been the high point of elegance in travelling by ship.

Eddie Dryhurst: They were yes, in the twenties, yeah. Well I did a lot of travelling by ship in those decades.

Roy Fowler: Yes it was the only way. So what, you got off the boat in New York?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I didn't touch New York, we er...

Roy Fowler: Did you not?

Eddie Dryhurst: The ship was going to Boston, Massachusetts, via Halifax, Nova Scotia and Portland, Maine. I first got off - I actually got off in Portland, Maine.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm...

Eddie Dryhurst: ...for reasons described in the book, I having met some people on board who invited me to motor to Boston with them from Portland.

Roy Fowler: I remember.

Eddie Dryhurst: They said that it would be a good way to see New England, so I did. And New England I thought was very beautiful. I haven't been there since!

Roy Fowler: [Chuckles] These are the events covered in the book, do you want to add to that? The family that you met, or shall we move on to the coast?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I don't think the family I met is important. I had a sort of pseudo romance with their daughter - no I don't think so.

Roy Fowler: As I say you covered that in your first book didn't you?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: So you got out to California in 19...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, bright and early on a Sunday morning.

Roy Fowler: I suppose I should ask you about, as I asked you about the boat, travelling on the trains. Were you on one of the crack trains?

Eddie Dryhurst: On the Santa Fe Limited yes, from Chicago.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh it was very, very comfortable travel. There were upper and lower births, which were seats through the day. The servants were excellent, they were all Negroes, the waiters and the porters and so on, but they were very efficient and very cheerful, very nice.

Roy Fowler: Did you eat on the train or did they stop for meals?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was cheaper not to eat on the train. The train stopped at least three times a day for forty minutes or even more for changing locomotives and taking provisions on board and that sort of thing. And each station had what was called a Harvey dining room, and I don't know if you remember the musical called The Harvey Girls?

Roy Fowler: With Judy Garland.

Eddie Dryhurst: Right. Well the Harvey dining rooms were originally started by an Englishman called Harvey who came to arrangements with the Santa Fe railroad I suppose. And he put up these Harvey restaurants all along the line, and they did very well, because the girls were attractive who worked in them and the food was good and it was cheaper to eat in the Harvey dining room than to eat on the train. So I used to eat in the Harvey dining room, partly because you got to come off the train and the food was excellent.

Roy Fowler: What was the fare? I don't mean the train fare, I mean the food fare.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh f-a-r-e - er well, it was very good, excellent, excellent.

Roy Fowler: Was it American or...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes it was American, but it was plain American, you know, you could have bacon and eggs or...

Roy Fowler: And apple pie and pot roasts and things! [Chuckles]

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, apple pie, yes of course! [Chuckles] And you could have roast lamb or whatever you wanted, it was very good, excellent.

Roy Fowler: What did it cost, do you remember?

Eddie Dryhurst: Don't remember, probably a couple of dollars then.

Roy Fowler: Well even that would have been a lot I think, in the twenties, two dollars for a meal? Probably less?

Eddie Dryhurst: I may be wrong but I'm only guessing.

Roy Fowler: I'm guessing too.

Eddie Dryhurst: It certainly didn't throw me, whatever it was.

Roy Fowler: Yes, okay, so you're on 'The Chief' and you come into where? Union Station or...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Union Station, yeah. And we got out of the train at about eight am. We were early for some reason, I can't think why. I wasn't due in until the Monday I don't think. I'd had a room booked at The March Lane Hotel in Hollywood from the Monday. So I thought, "Well it's Sunday, I haven't got a room booked 'till tomorrow, I'll spend the day sightseeing in town, in Los Angeles, and go up to Hollywood tomorrow morning." I didn't know where to stay in Los Angeles, so I got hold of a cabby who took me to a bloody awful place in Main Street. I think it was, in the Mexican quarter, anyway. Normally I'd have shuddered at the sight of it, I wouldn't have stayed there, but I thought, "Oh it's all right for one night, so I stayed the night there." And having got rid of my luggage I got out into Los Angeles and started exploring, and I had a very thrilling time, a very thrilling day. I saw things I'd never seen before in my life, they were about fifty years ahead of us of course.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of the Los Angeles of that period? We're now... it's 1924?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Well it was very modern to me, very modern indeed. I saw things I'd never seen in England, traffic lights for example, there were no traffic lights here then - they'd got them all over there. And dial telephones I saw for the first time. I'd never seen the big cinemas, most of them you went into and up an escalator, I'd never seen an escalator before. So it was all very new to me and of course there were thousands of automobiles, which were rare in England then. The whole place, it was like leaping ahead fifty years.

Roy Fowler: Did the place look built-up?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm.

Roy Fowler: It did? Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was very modern, it was new, everything was new.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right. But still, I would have thought, a lot of open lots, no?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh I see what you mean - well yes there were, in that there were open lots in which they were selling second-hand cars for instance. But I don't remember any lining a lot of open lots, no.

Roy Fowler: One of my favourite past-times is to watch the old Laurel and Hardy, the Harold Roach Laurel and Hardy, and so much of that happens outside - they shot around the town, around the city.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they weren't shot in town I don't think. I think they were shot on the environs of Hollywood, really.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. Because there so much of it is still open country, it's quite fascinating to see.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Well Hollywood then of course was very new, it was an isolated community then I think, yes it probably was. I mean places like Burbank and Culver City were springing up but they were some miles away, now they're all more-or-less joined together you know.

Roy Fowler: Before the freeways too, it must have been quite a journey to go over - you know, through the pass into the valley?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes it was, there were no freeways then - the San Fernando Valley, yes of course San Fernando Boulevard whatever it was called. We used to go out to Pasadena a lot, Glendale and Pasadena, which was a very nice town then - over up on the mountain you could see - I loved it out there.

Roy Fowler: Yes, as they say, "God's own country" as they say.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. The people were very nice to me too.

Roy Fowler: They were welcoming were they?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yeah great.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about your contact with the Hollywood of those days, the film industry in those days.

Eddie Dryhurst: My contact?

Roy Fowler: Yes, with the film industry of that time.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I went out there knowing one or two people who I thought might help me. There was an American director, an earnest, lean young man called Denison Clift who had

come over and made one or two pictures for Ideal. I sorted him out. He was under contract at Fox then. He was a bit taken aback to see me I may say. I'd told him back here that I was going to Hollywood - I don't think he took that very seriously, he was very surprised to see me there. And he was nice to me and I told him all about The Cause of all the Trouble etcetera, and he listened to all this and he said, "What you've got to do now is to get to know the Hollywood studios. You won't do that in ten minutes. They're very different as you will see, very much bigger." He said, "In fact if you want to go from one end of Universal Studios to the other, you take a free bus that they put on for you to save you time - that's how big it is." So he spoke to me some more then he said, "I advise you to start work in Hollywood as an extra." I said, "An extra? Me? an extra?" You know, an extra, I thought he was crazy! He said, "Because you will get around the studios and you'll get to know people and that's the best advice I can give you." So I thought, "Well I'd better take his advice."

Roy Fowler: Tell me Edward, do you think that was serious advice or was it just to get rid of you?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh it was serious, oh indeed it was serious, oh yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah, it seems to me...

Eddie Dryhurst: To such an extent that he gave me an introduction to the woman who was the head of the extras casting at Fox!

Roy Fowler: Do you think it was good advice?

Eddie Dryhurst: Looking back I think it probably was.

Roy Fowler: Right. Excuse me [Break in recording] So, we were saying, you thought it was serious advice to go via casting. Because I wouldn't have thought anyone would give that advice now to anyone who wanted to go into production.

Eddie Dryhurst: Possibly not, but I think it was very good advice for those days.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Anyway I took it and I spent the first few months in Hollywood doing extra work.

Roy Fowler: This was before central casting was it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, yes.

Roy Fowler: And you say you met the lady at Fox who did the casting?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm, can't remember her name but she was in charge overall of extra casting and extra talent as they call it. [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: What did you work on, what did you do?

Eddie Dryhurst: My first film was a Tom Mix story, which we worked on location out in the desert. We were bussed out there, we used to leave the studio at about six o'clock in the morning, and eventually we would arrive at about half past eight or nine o'clock. I remember working as an extra in a John Ford picture, that was an all night location down near Santa Monica, at a place called Castle Rock. Castle Rock's since been blown-up I believe, it was a single rock on the beach, a large rock.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of Ford?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I didn't really come into contact with him. There were a lot of us extras there and people - I don't think I even saw him.

Roy Fowler: I see. Now what are your feelings about the difference between filming in England at that time and filming in Hollywood?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well there was really no comparison because er [coughs] the film industry was then considered the fifth most important industry in America, therefore it was an industry and it was operated as such. Over here it was fragmented very much, what there was of it. There was a studio here and one over Marlow where neither parties came in contact probably. There was no comparison really, no comparison. Everybody was talking movies, even if you went into a café at eleven o'clock at night you found yourself talking about movies! [Chuckles] People talked of nothing else.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right. What was the atmosphere in the community? Was it a buoyant one, an optimistic one?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes buoyant and optimistic, that is the American mood in my experience.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, right. I was thinking of the people who were trying to break into films and indeed you were one - that you were happy enough in a way to be doing extra work, to be on...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well, I knew there were many others in the same boat as I was and one always hoped for a break and there was always the chance of a break there, that was what kept you going I think.

Roy Fowler: And filmmaking was much more rigorously and more professionally organised at that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh indeed, absolutely, yes.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right.

Eddie Dryhurst: Properly organised.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha. Any particular memories of things that happened?

Eddie Dryhurst: Er, let me think, well I remember the tragic death of Thomas H. Ince. I don't know whether that name means anything to you?

Roy Fowler: Indeed it does.

Eddie Dryhurst: The most successful independent producer in Hollywood at that time. He had his own studios at Culver City and very attractive studios they were. The executive offices were built like a colonial mansion.

Roy Fowler: Well anyone who's seen a Selznick picture has seen the front...

Eddie Dryhurst: Right. And DeMille was negotiating, or concluding negotiations with William Randolph-Hearst to take over Cosmopolitan Productions, which Hearst had formed to finance films made by his mistress, Marion Davies. And he'd been losing money and he thought he'd rather hand the whole operation over to an experienced executive producer like Ince. Hearst had a yacht, which was moored off the coast, you know Santa Monica or somewhere down there, and it was agreed that with their respective attorneys they would meet one weekend to finalise arrangements. And er, Ince never returned from that trip, at least he was a dead man when he did. He was shot during the weekend, there was a big cover up I think. Anyway the story got round Hollywood that Ince had had a drink too many and had gone into Marion Davies' cabin, and Hearst had found them and shot him in a blind rage. But the whole thing had been hushed up and of course Hearst was probably the only - the person who could afford to do it. Whether that's true or apocryphal, I don't know, probably some truth in it I would think. I do know that Ince was cremated with almost indecent haste and that the studios closed right away, because every picture that was made there had to be supervised by him, that was in all the distribution contracts - obviously he was dead, he couldn't supervise them. So we all found ourselves out of work one Monday morning. Cecil DeMille took them over for a while, he had a row with Paramount at that time, I forget what about. And he took them over and moved them in here. And I remember him giving me a very benign smile one day as he walked up the stairs and I was waiting down in the hall, and er... I didn't get a job with DeMille but we were all terribly sorry Tom Ince died because we were very fond of him, he was a very likeable man.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. And then what?

Eddie Dryhurst: Of course he had a brother Ralph who worked over here later, at Teddington, do you remember Ralph Ince?

Roy Fowler: No I never knew him.

Eddie Dryhurst: I knew him well, he got killed in a car crash in Kensington.

Roy Fowler: This was, what, in the thirties?

Eddie Dryhurst: That was in the thirties. No, I think it was a bit later, during the war I think. I'm not absolutely certain, it may have been... [NB Actually it was 1937]

Roy Fowler: I've never heard of Ralph Ince. What was he doing at er...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Directing.

Roy Fowler: Was he? Ah ha.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was fairly well known as a director, not a - he didn't direct any memorable pictures.

Roy Fowler: We'll come onto the thirties in due course. I'm curious if there's any way to capture the flavour of Los Angeles, Hollywood in the twenties. I mean what are the things that stick in your mind about living there, being there, making films there?

Eddie Dryhurst: One was acutely conscious of the fact that people were - there was a very comradely [sic] air in the atmosphere. Everybody was very - well, I say generally, there are exceptions of course, but generally people were very kind to you and tried to help each other. They would lend each other money. If one was working and if you weren't, they'd lend you money. They helped each other as much as they could. If they heard of work going they would let you know quickly by telephone or personally or whatever. And I liked the whole atmosphere there.

Roy Fowler: It was also a very cosmopolitan area at that stage was it not?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very, very.

Roy Fowler: People from all over.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, still is I suppose.

Roy Fowler: On yes, yes, it's the 'Mecca' isn't it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Already I think the professional Englishmen were out there, were they not? Those who, if they were - when I was there, there used to be a saying, "If you were any more English you couldn't talk at all!"

Eddie Dryhurst: [Chuckles] I've heard that!

Roy Fowler: Were there the Colmans and the C. Aubrey Smiths and the cricketers?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they hadn't come along yet but there were a lot of others, yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. But you were...

Eddie Dryhurst: There was quite a British colony there...

Roy Fowler: Yeah, but you weren't...

Eddie Dryhurst: ...quite a rich one.

Roy Fowler: ...you weren't part of that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well yes I was, well I was on the fringe of it anyway. Men like Reginald Denny and people like that. No, Aubrey Smith and Colman came along later of course.

Roy Fowler: Right. So then what? You're working as an extra...

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh well then I did a job for Ince, loading and unloading camera magazines, it was a night job. That finished when he got killed, murdered, and er, I don't think I did very much for a time until I got a job at San Francisco with an independent company up there - where Frank Capra had worked, Frank Capra started with them in fact. I later worked with him at Mack Sennett's. Anyway I went up to San Francisco in 1925 - and I worked for this little outfit called The Gershwin Pictures Corporation which was up in the Golden Gate Park area. It was a very small studio, not purpose-built, and they made cheap second features there.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: It was undoubtedly where Frank Capra got his start.

Roy Fowler: Yes. What were you doing there?

Eddie Dryhurst: I was a film editor then, or a cutter as they used to call us.

Roy Fowler: Had you picked that up? I mean as a craft, you'd acquired that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well don't forget I did that job for Ideal, I re-edited that picture for them and of course I edited my own stuff. Yes I'd more-or-less picked it up, yes.

Roy Fowler: I see, that was to some extent instinctive I suppose.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes I think so.

Roy Fowler: Right. How long did you spend in San Francisco?

Eddie Dryhurst: About three months I think. I worked on two pictures. The director was a man called Duke Worne, a young man. I remember seeing his name on second feature westerns over here, before I went out there I'd heard of the name Duke Worne. He was quite pleasant to me.

Roy Fowler: Do you know why people were working out at San Francisco? Was it for locations and backgrounds?

Eddie Dryhurst: I've no idea why they were there, they were the only company in the city and they worked up there on their own, but why they were there I don't really know.

Roy Fowler: Right. And then what, after that? That came to an end?

Eddie Dryhurst: I went back to Hollywood and went on working there, I got a job with Sennett.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about that, that sounds very interesting.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I was friendly with an English comedian called Georgie Harris who only died a couple of years ago, he was older than I. And he - he went out to Hollywood from here, under contract to Sennett. Sennett had a talent scout over here. And this man happened, I don't know how, to be in St Albans, and he saw Georgie Harris at the Grand Palace there, this place I told you about. And as a result Harris was contracted to go to Hollywood, which he did and he became quite popular out there - I mean personally. He was a founder member of the big club out there, it's gone now, only recently - he was a founder member of that. Anyway I was very friendly with Georgie and he introduced me to Arthur Ripley who was a tall, gangly New Englander, a Yankee, who had been, or in fact was the head gag-man for Harry Langdon, do you remember him?

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: And Ripley said they could do with another gag-man. I wasn't very happy about the idea, although I didn't say so to him, but I couldn't see myself sitting around a room talking and inventing funny situations for Harry Langdon, I was always used to doing my work on paper. However, I wasn't going to turn him down was I? He took me on at seventy dollars a week, which was quite a good salary then. And that was how I met Frank Capra, with whom I shared a room. He and Ripley were very close, and Langdon - Capra later directed Langdon.

Roy Fowler: Well have you read Capra's autobiography called 'Name Above the Title'?

Eddie Dryhurst: The new one?

Roy Fowler: No this was published, oh in the seventies some time. It's just that Capra is very insistent that he created the stage character that Langdon played and as soon as Langdon got big-headed and fired Capra then he failed. Would you agree with that from your knowledge?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, in essence, yes I would.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Kevin Brownlow put me in touch, two or three years ago, with an American writer called Joseph McBride, who, Kevin said, was writing the definitive biography of Frank Capra. Did you just now refer to an autobiography?

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes. It's about oh, fifteen, sixteen years ago I think.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well this fellow, according to what I was told, was writing a definitive biography of Frank Capra and Kevin thought I might be of some use to him. I said, "Well ask him to contact me." The sequel to that was that I was in Australia some little time later, two years ago, and I got a phone call from this guy in California to where I was staying in Australia, he'd tracked me down. And he talked to me for forty-five minutes, at his expense I hasten to add, about Frank Capra. And he said that I'd been a great help to him and I'm still in touch with him as a matter of fact. This book's being published by Alfred Duff[?] and it's due out daily. [NB Joseph McBride, "Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success", Simon & Schuster New York 1992 & Faber London 1992.]

Roy Fowler: Is it? Oh I hadn't heard of that. McBride is a very well known writer, he's written about Orson Welles and quite a few important directors, yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: He's doing one on John Ford now he tells me.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Well how do you rate Capra? Because opinions vary considerably - a master technician and a superb filmmaker but er...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well at that time he'd yet to prove himself. He didn't - he impressed me as being a rather negative young man, he was not talkative, he was very reserved and introspective I would say really.

Roy Fowler: Sure of himself would you say?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well no I wouldn't, on the contrary he didn't seem to have much confidence in himself. He didn't seem to have any particular sense of humour, he was inclined to sit down and say nothing for long periods.

Roy Fowler: These brainstorming sessions that you had, you say that he didn't contribute much to them?

Eddie Dryhurst: Brainstorming?

Roy Fowler: Well in other words, sitting around, finding gags for the comedians at the Sennett Studio.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh, well he did contribute to them it's true, I don't remember to what extent. He didn't make a very great impression upon me, he was certainly not a very sociable person then.

Roy Fowler: Was he just a gag-man or had he started to direct?

Eddie Dryhurst: No he was just a gag-man, he hadn't started to direct, no.

Roy Fowler: Well doubtless what you've said about Capra will be in McBride's book.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, his new book, yes.

Roy Fowler: Tell me, something that I've never been able to work out, where was the Sennett Studio? I know it was in Edendale.

Eddie Dryhurst: It was on Glendale Boulevard.

Roy Fowler: But where - Edendale is now Glendale isn't it?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no it's a long way from Glendale.

Roy Fowler: Is it?

Eddie Dryhurst: As you went down Sunset Boulevard and into town, do you remember the Angelus Temple?

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was down there, there was a bridge there, if you remember...

Roy Fowler: No.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...Sunset Boulevard crossed another thoroughfare, which was Edendale Boulevard down below.

Roy Fowler: Ah.

Eddie Dryhurst: With the Angelus Temple standing, down there.

Roy Fowler: So it's all gone now?

Eddie Dryhurst: You went down there and you took a car or drove to Sennett Studios which would be about half a mile up the road. That's where it was anyway, Edendale Boulevard. [NB other sources place Sennett's Studios on Glendale Boulevard.]

Roy Fowler: Ah ha, right. I've never encountered it then, that's um, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: No it was a long way from Glendale.

Roy Fowler: What was life like at Sennett?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was a collection of wooden framed buildings really, as far as I recollect. There was something very impermanent about the whole place. Er, you wouldn't have thought you were in a comedy factory, at least I didn't. It struck you as a rather strange place where people did strange things.

Roy Fowler: You met Mack himself presumably?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, what are your memories of him?

Eddie Dryhurst: Mack Sennett I quite liked. And Georgie Harris and he were very friendly, in fact they corresponded right up to within a few weeks of Mack Sennett's death, I've seen the letters. He was a heavy man for his age, he was in his forties then I suppose. His hair was rather white, he wore a sort of yachting cap. And he didn't like to sit down and talk to you, he liked to stand and lean against the wall. He sort of folded his hands in front of him and put his head at about that angle so he looked half asleep, which he probably was. And er, he was a nice enough man I thought. He was very popular.

Roy Fowler: And so were his films. How about Mabel Normand?

Eddie Dryhurst: Who?

Roy Fowler: Mabel Normand.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well she was after [sic] my time, I didn't meet her.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: She's gone by then. I met old Fatty Arbuckle.

Roy Fowler: Yes?

Eddie Dryhurst: ...but not then, later.

Roy Fowler: You didn't work with him?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes I did because I was working, really I was on the payroll of Lupino Lane, do you remember him?

Roy Fowler: Ah indeed, yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: And Lane was being directed by Fatty Arbuckle.

Roy Fowler: This was post the scandal was it, after the scandal?

Eddie Dryhurst: After the scandal, well after the scandal yes.

Roy Fowler: When he was 'Will B. Good'!

Eddie Dryhurst: William Goodrich he called himself then.

Roy Fowler: Well he also had credits that said, 'Will B. Good'.

Eddie Dryhurst: 'Will B. Good' I know, yeah.

Roy Fowler: [chuckles]

Eddie Dryhurst: But when I worked with him he called himself William Goodrich. And we were working on the old Educational lot near the Fairbanks Studios at Hollywood and Highland - no, Santa Monica and Highland. Well Arbuckle didn't impress me as being a man of much brain. He was always up to - he was always playing practical jokes on people. I didn't care for him really. I felt sorry for him, I felt that he'd had a very raw deal from life. [Pause]

Roy Fowler: Is that um, is that it about that time? I mean your memories?

Eddie Dryhurst: Ideas?

Roy Fowler: Yeah, anything else you want to tell us?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I don't think so really. Lupino Lane, I was with for some time.

Roy Fowler: Where was he working from?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well when I met him he was working from Educational and prior to that he had a contract with Fox, and he also worked for Ideal over here, but not when I was with them. I met him in Hollywood. He was very much in demand in those days.

Roy Fowler: Yes. What was his style?

Eddie Dryhurst: Knockabout.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Music Hall, British Music Hall?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, yes, very much so.

Roy Fowler: Did you ever meet Chaplin when you were there?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, curiously enough. I could have met him if I'd wanted to I suppose but I never bothered. I knew Alf Reeves, who was his general manager, very well.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: And another actor called Henry somebody, he used to work with him, who ran a...

Roy Fowler: Bergman, Henry Bergman?

Eddie Dryhurst: ...ran a restaurant in Hollywood, I knew him very well, yeah, Bergman.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, yeah. You'd known Alf Reeves in this country or you met him there?

Eddie Dryhurst: No over there, over there.

Roy Fowler: You met him over there, yeah. Because he also was out of Music Hall wasn't he, out of Fred Karno, I think?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Well he was a friend of George K. Arthur, that's how I met him. And er, yeah I could have met him through these people but I didn't. I used to go into the Chaplin Studio. I used to live within a stone's throw of the Chaplin Studios. I can remember sitting on our front porch now and looking at the fence surrounding the studios and seeing the sets for Gold Rush on the other side of them.

Roy Fowler: That's right, hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: I used to go in and see Alf Reeves, have a chat with him sometimes.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. You didn't see Chaplin work?

Eddie Dryhurst: No - could have done. I saw Valentino work.

Roy Fowler: What was that on?

Eddie Dryhurst: A picture called Monsieur Beaucaire.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha.

Eddie Dryhurst: Paramount, Melrose Avenue, same studios are there now.

Roy Fowler: Any memories?

Eddie Dryhurst: Not really no, somebody took me on the set, I forget why - well I suppose to see Valentino. There he was working in a silent picture and er, I got an eyeful of him and then we went!

Roy Fowler: Well moving on then from that, what then? What do you remember then?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I'd always wanted to work for Carl Laemmle, the president of Universal Pictures. Whenever his name came up on the screen at St Albans when I was working in the

cinema playing the piano, or whatever I was doing, 'Carl Laemmle Presents' used to come up on the screen and this name became er, a sort of idol to me. I had a great regard for Mr Laemmle.

Roy Fowler: Because of the films he was making do you mean, or just the name?

Eddie Dryhurst: Partly, and because he'd founded this magnificent film empire, which was called Universal City, and they had their own distribution set-up throughout the world, they were very big people of course. And I admired Mr Laemmle, I knew that he'd gone to America as a penniless emigrant from Germany, when he was young, that he'd arrived in New York without any money - and of course he was not the only one. In fact they were all practically in the same boat weren't they, the pioneers of those days?

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Anyway, I made up my mind that I was not only going to meet Mr Laemmle, I was going to work for him. So that when I got to Hollywood, one of the first things I did was to sit me down and write to Mr Laemmle. To my acute disappointment he didn't bother to answer me. And I remember I was talking to Georgie Harris about that sometime afterwards, about a couple of years afterwards I should think. I said, "I can't get this bastard Laemmle to reply to my letters." "No" he said, "he probably doesn't see them. He's probably inundated with mail and his secretaries just don't let him see it." And I said, "You could be right I guess." So anyway that night, or the next morning I was in my bathtub and I was thinking about my talk with Georgie and I thought, "Well he won't look at a letter, maybe he'll look at a telegram!" And the more I thought about it the more I liked the idea, so I got me dressed and I went down to the Boulevard and went to Western Union and I spent about an hour composing a very carefully worded telegram to Mr Laemmle at Universal City. When eventually I was satisfied with it, I made it out, handed it in, paid for it and walked out, and I kept my fingers crossed. Well that did bring an answer, a very friendly cordial answer, I remember. He didn't call me "Dear Mr Roberts" as I then was, he called me "My Dear Mr Roberts"... "Cordially yours, Carl Laemmle." Well the gist of it was, he said, "You call my secretary, she'll make an appointment." Well I called his secretary and she made the appointment and I went into see him. And as a result of that I got a job at thirty dollars a week in the cutting rooms. At the head of which, they were very busy cutting rooms then. They used to make a lot of product, Universal, ranging from one-reel Slim Summerville comedies to features made by Bill Seiter with Laura La Plante and Reginald Denny, those people. It was a very big output, so their editorial department was a very large one. It was headed by an Englishman from Manchester called Maurice Pivar. He was the head editor there and he was the fellow who technically hired me. Laemmle sent me to him. Well of course, I suppose I was to get a job. Pivar put me on as assistant editor. Well I was joining film mostly for an editor, but then I became an editor myself, I was editor of the Slim Summerville comedies for a time. And I stayed at Universal until I eventually came home - that's very detailed in the book as you know, because of the trouble Jimmy Bryson got himself into here in London with the establishment.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: What I was supposed to do about it I don't know but...

Roy Fowler: Before you go onto that, two questions at least about Universal. One, was Thalberg still there or had he moved on?

Eddie Dryhurst: Thalberg had moved on.

Roy Fowler: Right. The other was, you say you were editing Slim Summerville comedies. How did one edit in those days? What was the equipment one had, what were the techniques?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well you had a Movieola and you had of course a splicing machine and so on and so forth - pretty much the same as today I suppose.

Roy Fowler: Right okay. But Movieolas were in use by this time?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yeah, yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha. Because up to a certain point, I'm not sure when, Kevin could tell us, people used to cut by eye didn't they, and then...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I've cut by eye a lot, but over here. But not in Hollywood, they all had Movieolas.

Roy Fowler: Right okay. You um - am I right in remembering from Hollywood you went back to the East Coast, you went to the East Coast, to New York at this stage, or was that later?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no, no, that was later.

Roy Fowler: That was later, right.

Eddie Dryhurst: I went to London from Hollywood.

Roy Fowler: You came back to London.

Eddie Dryhurst: I came here.

Roy Fowler: right and um...

Eddie Dryhurst: Albeit reluctantly but um...

Roy Fowler: Right. And there was this great scandal going on about misusing... [chuckles]

Eddie Dryhurst: Phantom of the Opera, yeah, funnily enough.

Roy Fowler: Misusing what was it, a guard's regiment or an army regiment?

Eddie Dryhurst: No territorial actually.

Roy Fowler: Territorial.

Eddie Dryhurst: Jimmy had them meet the boat at Southampton when he brought the print over, the first print. And he had them in the train with him for Waterloo and when they got there they lined up outside, and he sat in the car you know, open car with this print of the film. And a lot of ballyhoo and, preceded by the band of the Territorials - about fifty Territorials you know - they marched along The Strand and up Trafalgar Square and into Wardour Street, and he thought it was a great publicity stunt, which it was of course, but the trouble is that Jimmy didn't understand the English. He hadn't been here long enough to get to know that what you can do in America you couldn't do here, because the English were more conservative and, well, just thought differently I guess. They were very different to the Americans. I mean in America they would have - even in those days they would close off a section of Broadway which was then the busiest thoroughfare in the world I guess - they would close off a thoroughfare, a portion of it, if a film producer wanted to use it. Because they realised the value of publicity, they realised that what went on the screen was seen all over the world, it was advertising America. But the British weren't quite so quick as that. But the 'Daily Mail' in particular raised hell the next morning, they criticised this impotent use of the British army, which the Territorials, strictly speaking, were not. I suppose they might have been a branch of it, I don't know. They were a part-time soldier anyhow, and still are. And they raised bloody hell, and poor Mr Bryson was completely bewildered by all this, he couldn't figure out what had hit him! And the sequel to it was that the British [Exhibitors'] Association, the CEA, got worried about it and eventually banned the film from exhibition. They wouldn't allow their members to book it, which represented a serious loss to Laemmle, as in those days Great Britain was the second most important movie market, second only to America. Therefore they'd lost a great deal of revenue through this. That's why I came over here, they thought I might be able to do something, to pour oil on troubled waters. I said to Bryson, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do." He said, "Well make nice noises about us." I remember him using that expression - "make nice noises about us."! And er, well I wrote some articles for the newspapers and that sort of thing, I did what I could. But after two or three years in California, spending a winter here didn't cheer me up much. At home we were still burning gas, there was no telephone of course. I thought, "Well you know, these people are about three thousand years behind the States." So I thought, "I'm bloody well going back!" And I bloody well did go back! [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Where was Universal's office in er - what year was this, 1920...?

Eddie Dryhurst: 167 Wardour Street. It was not called Universal, it was called The European Motion Picture Company for some reason. Their British subsidiary was not called Universal Pictures, it was called European. But then they had a subtitle, 'Distributors of Universal Pictures'.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of Wardour Street? What year was this, 26?

Eddie Dryhurst: The end of - November 1926 when I came over. Well a lot of the buildings were the same as they are now. Jimmy Bryson's office was near Derby Street, we used to go into the pub up there, what's it called? It's run by a Jewish couple - I can't remember now...

Roy Fowler: On Wardour Street or round the corner?

Eddie Dryhurst: On Wardour Street, the corner of Wardour Street and Derby Street.

Roy Fowler: Oh 'The Nellie Dean'?

Eddie Dryhurst: No that's in Soho, Dean Street. It doesn't matter anyway, it's up the street here.

Roy Fowler: Well the only one I can think of is 'The Ship' but that's...

Eddie Dryhurst: No 'The Ship' is on the other side of the street.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, right.

Eddie Dryhurst: I'll think of it in a minute, I've been there God knows, hundreds of times in my life. That was the pub we used to use then.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: His office was just a few doors this way on Wardour Street, 167 - same building, it's still there now. Bryson was quite a character. He was very American, although he wore what we call a 'bowler hat' and what they call a 'derby' - he always wore a 'derby'.
[Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Well the 'derby' was very much a hat in the States too, was it not? It was earlier, I don't know if it still was in the twenties.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well not in California, certainly. I wore a 'derby' all the way over there, and in my ignorance, when I went out the first Sunday in Los Angeles, as the day wore on I became acutely aware that I was a figure of fun because everywhere I went, people were laughing at me. Well I was sort of buttoned up here [presumably indicating his flies], I looked perfectly all right and I couldn't think what the hell was amusing 'em. When I eventually got back to the hotel, there was a real deadpan behind the counter, you know he'd got the cuff protectors on and the horn-rimmed glasses and he was chewing, and he cut a real deadpan this guy. He said, "What do you think of Los Angeles, boy?" And I rhapsodised about it, I said, "It's marvellous, I've never seen anything like it." Then I told him, I said, "the only thing that worries me is that everywhere I go people seem to find me an object of amusement, they keep sort of laughing at me." So, still with his dead-pan look he said, "It must be the 'derby'." I said, "How's that?" He said, "It must be the 'derby'." I said, "You mean my hat?" He said, "Yeah, they only wore them in the movies out here." [Chuckles] "Oh," I said, "that's it, is it?" So I went upstairs, opened my window wide and slung it out into the night and I've never worn one since! [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Well you obviously weren't very happy back here so you...

Eddie Dryhurst: No I wasn't.

Roy Fowler: No, you made arrangements to go back?

Eddie Dryhurst: It seemed so antiquated and I don't know, everything seemed so slow here. And the weather of course was bloody awful! We used to get very bad fogs in the winter in those days, very bad ones, and they didn't tend to cheer one up either.

Roy Fowler: I tell you something that struck me reading volume one, that you had a very helpful, indulgent father.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I did. He was a very good man, my father. He didn't really deserve me, as I've said in the book, he was a - a very intellectual man, he was a man of many facets. He had a highly developed musical faculty, he had a highly developed literary faculty, he was an authority on Shakespeare. And he really didn't deserve me because I completely confused him, bemused him.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. But he always, it seems to me, went out of his way to help you.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes he did, he was very good that way. Mind you I wore him down half the time! [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Yeah [chuckles]. Well sons have a way of doing that with fathers, I think I was the same, so...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Yeah he was indulgent, he was a very good man.

Roy Fowler: And, what, he sent you back to the States, or you got back to the States?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: And then...

Eddie Dryhurst: Father didn't get me back to the States, he'd financed me out there on the first trip and I didn't feel like going back to him for another dose. So I plucked up the courage and went to see a friend of his called Sam Ryder, the Ryder Golf Cup, the Ryder Cup, the donor of that. He was a very wealthy seed merchant in St Albans and a friend of fathers. And the upshot of it was I got him to finance my second trip out there.

Roy Fowler: I think we're about to come to the end of the tape so we'll... [Break in Recording] Side Three. Right we were saying... I've forgotten what we were saying, to tell you the truth!

Eddie Dryhurst: I've forgotten where we were to tell you the truth!

Roy Fowler: I think you'd just been back to England, the business with Phantom of the Opera and you now were going back to the States or had gone back to the States.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Well I went back to Universal City to pick up where I'd left off, and was told by Maurice Pivar that retrenchment was the order of the day, that they were not taking on any more people, on the contrary they were loosing people. And I said, "Well that's all very well

but I was sent over to London by Mr Laemmle in effect, so I don't think I come into that category, I think you've got to take me on, hire me again, give me my old job back in fact." He came up with a solution that was satisfactory both to him and to Universal. They had an independent in there and they were making a picture with the late William S. Hart, his last picture it turned out to be, it was called Tumbleweeds. And he assigned me then as assistant editor. Now the film was produced and directed by a man called King Baggot, who was a well known name in Hollywood in those days, he'd been an actor years before. He was a very big, florid type of man - noisy, when he was around you heard him! [Pause to get recording levels set] So I went to work on Tumbleweeds with the editor who was a fellow called Roberts curiously enough, which is one of the reasons, if I remember, why I turned my name to Dryhurst, which was a family name. Because there used to be a lot of confusion, we used to get each others messages and mail and phone calls and God knows what. And I was talking about it to my old landlady one evening and she said, "What's the D?" I used to call myself Edward D. Roberts you see, I wasn't very proud of Dryhurst because kids at school used to call me 'Dry Thirst' and 'Dry as Dust' and all that stuff. I said, "It's an old family name, it means Dryhurst." So I told her it was a Saxon name which meant 'dry wood' - hurst being a Saxon prefix for wood, oak-hurst, oak-wood, elm-hurst and so on. So she said, "Well it's at least distinctive. Why don't you call yourself Edward Dryhurst?" I said, "Done! I will." And that's how that started.

However, to get back to Universal City, I was, as I say, assistant editor on Tumbleweeds and I done a very silly thing one day, I can't think even to this day what made me do it, I should have known better. I joined one scene in the rushes upside down, and when they went on into a crowded theatre - Mr Baggot very much in evidence - this scene came on and all hell was let loose! Baggot raised hell, he created such a row I can hear him now. He said, "Who the hell was responsible for that?" And I went forward and faltered that I was. I said, "I'm very sorry, it will never happen again." He said, "You're God-damned right it won't, you're fired!" I said, "Fired, Mr Baggot?" He said, "Yeah you heard me, fired! I don't want to see your God-damned face again!" Well I was very upset about this, and I went back to Roberts and told him what had happened. He said, "Well you were a bloody fool," he said, "you know the old adage - 'emulsion out, celluloid in!'" I said, "Yes I know, I can't think what made me do it, I can't think. I must have been wool gathering." He said, "Well I tell you what I'd do if I were you, I'd go down on the lot after lunch when he's had time to cool off and I'd ask Baggot for your job back." I couldn't bring myself to do that for some reason - I didn't, so I walked off the lot. I daresay Baggot would have given me my job back because he was a man of short bursts of temper, but I just couldn't face him for a second time, he put the fear of God into me the first time!

So I was out of work again and er, what did I do then? Oh yes, I decided to start a publicity business, as I'd come to like publicity work quite a bit, I'd done some of it in London. And that began another chapter in my life because I'd written some songs, which people told me were very good and I believed them. However, I started this publicity business as a freelance and I got about ten clients together and er - which brought me in a fair income, it brought me in more than working at Universal at thirty dollars a week. It brought me in about - I think I got fifty dollars a month from each of them, so ten, that was two hundred and fifty dollars, quite a good income. And if I'd have had any bloody sense I'd have stuck at it, but I didn't. I became imbued with the idea of becoming a songwriter, thinking that I'd got a great gift for melody. I was encouraged to believe this by all kinds of people who heard me play.

Well I knew of course enough about the popular music scene of the day to know that one of the most successful and one of the wealthiest librettists in the United States was a man called Gus Kahn who worked very largely with a composer called Walter Donaldson. And they'd written all kinds of great songs which are still played today. You know, 'Carolina in the Morning', 'California Here I Come', 'It Had to be You' - scores, they were both millionaires I think. But I didn't want to go to New York looking for Gus Kahn and trying to find him and not succeeding. But I made enquiries, I did some research and found that he lived in Chicago, that he was born and bred there. It surprised me rather, I don't know why it should have surprised me because he had to be born and bred somewhere! Well he was born and bred in Chicago and he still lived there. I found his address was 748 Buhatter Avenue - I don't know how I got this information but I did!

So I decided that I'd go to Chicago to see Kahn, and mesmerise him with my music. This took time to arrange but eventually I did and that's all detailed in the book of course. Well Kahn - I got into his house and he damned me with praise. He listened to two or three of my songs, and his summation was roughly that I had undoubted musical ability, I was a good piano player. And he said what I should do was to get immersed in Tin Pan Alley, what I needed was more experience. He said, "You've got to do a bit of growing up. How old are you kid?" I said, "I'm about twenty-two." He said, "Well you know, you've got to mature. But you've got talent all right," he said, "I tell you what I'll do, you go to New York, you go to my publishers, Leo Feist and introduce yourself to Mr Bloom," he said, "I'll contact him in the meantime. Mr Bloom can probably help you." So I walked away from his home with mixed feelings. On the one hand he'd turned my music down and on the other hand he'd offered to put me in touch with Leo Feist. Then the question arose, did I want to go and see Leo Feist? Did I want to go into the music business and desert the film industry? No I did not! However, I decided that since I was only a thousand miles from New York, as against two thousand miles from Hollywood, that I would go to New York and at least meet Mr Bloom of Leo Feist Incorporated, and see where it led. So I'd also spend a week or two in Manhattan before going back to Hollywood, that was the idea. So on to Manhattan I went and I met Mr Bloom, who was very - gave me all my short shifts. He said, "Let's see you play the piano." So I played him a couple of tunes. He said, "I'll get you some work if you're interested in playing for very relaxed, rehearsing - playing in rehearsal rooms. [Break in Recording] He said, "I'll get you some work, playing in rehearsal rooms for local acts who are rehearsing their acts, getting them ready for the tour. I didn't want to play the piano for bloody rehearsals! I didn't want to be a rehearsal pianist. So I just walked out of his office and that was the end of that.

I then went to Universal to see a man called Paul Geelick[?] who was in charge of publicity for them, a very nice fellow. And I sort of told him who I was and asked him if he could give me any work. And he said that he couldn't at the time, he said he didn't need any help as they say, "at the time" but that he'd "bear me in mind." I said, "Well you know, I want something at once. I'm in town and either I stay in town, working, or I go out of town looking for work." "Well" he said, "I can't promise you anything definite at this moment, Ed, but I'll keep you well in mind I promise you." I then met David Bader with whom I became a great friend. David Bader later came to London; he was a very fine fellow. He worked with Universal - he'd at one time been Carl Laemmle's personal assistant. It was through him that he got Drinkwater to write down his biography - John Drinkwater I mean. Anyway David and I became very friendly.

Then an extraordinary thing happened, I was on Broadway one Saturday afternoon alone, wondering what the hell to do with myself. I remember an old saying in America, you may have heard it - it said, it doesn't matter who you were or where you came from, you couldn't walk the length of Broadway without meeting somebody you knew. So just for the hell of it I thought I'd put it to the test. So I walked out about, oh quite a long way, down to the thirties I think, then I turned round and faced uptown and started walking uptown. Well I didn't see anybody I knew for many, many blocks and I began to get rather tired and hot and I wondered whether I was wasting my time. When I got near Times Square I looked across the street and there was a couple looking in a store window and I thought they seemed familiar. I couldn't see who they were properly because of the traffic. However, I was sufficiently interested to make my way across the street and when I got near to them I saw that they were - he was a man I'd worked with in Bryson's London office, an Englishman, called Tollemache Herriot-Esling[?], that was his full name. He'd married a much younger woman, a blonde called - she called herself Voncille Viking[?], to give herself a touch of the Scandinavian I suppose. But when she talked there was an unmistakable touch of the South London! However, she was a very attractive woman. They were both surprised and pleased to see me, as I was them. They said, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "What are you doing here?" So Esling said, "Well that's a long story, let's go and have a cup of tea somewhere." I took them into the Aston Hotel of revered memory, and we sat down in the big lounge and we had some tea, and I listened, fascinated with interest as Esling told me an amazing story, what to me was...[Break in interview while they fix a problem with the microphone] What he told me briefly was, first of all he told me something I certainly didn't know - not that I'd ever met his wife before that I could remember. He said that she was a very fine equestrienne, she was one of the finest horsewomen in Europe. I said, "My God, she doesn't look it!" She didn't either, she looked very much a doll. However, he said she was. And he said, "I've sold Universal an idea." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Voncille[?] is going to ride horseback from here to Los Angeles." I said, "Three thousand miles?" He said, "Yeah. She's going to stop en-route, publicising Universal's westerns, she's going to be in full western gear." I said, "Christ that is an idea!" I said, "You've sold it to Universal definitely?" He said, "Definitely, they've paid me five thousand dollars for it." I said, "Well that's good."

And he said, "What are you doing?" I told him briefly, and he said "Would you like to work for me for a few weeks? I need some help on publicity. We want to contact the towns she'll be visiting in advance and make certain arrangements, contact the press and so on." I said, "Yeah I'd like to join you." So he said that he'd pay me seventy to seventy-five dollars a week, and I took the job on and we started work in Universal's office on Fifth Avenue. And I had a very happy time with them. I remember it was a time of Yom Kippur, which of course is the Jewish New Year, and the head of exploitation was a Jewish gentleman called Rostein[?]. Mr Rostein sent for me one morning, or I had to go and see him, one or the other. He said, "By the way, this is the time of the year when me and my co-religionists feel generous, we like to be generous." He said, "What's Esling paying you?" I told him seventy five bucks a week. He said, "I'll give you another ten, you get eighty-five as of Monday." And I said, "That's very kind of you Mr Rostein." So I went back to Esling and I said, "What do you think? Rostein's raised my salary ten bucks a week." "That son of a bitch, that's got to be out of my five grand!" So that's Mr Rostein's generosity! Anyway at the end of the time, Voncille as her name was, had become - she had become the full western cowgirl. She'd got the outfit, she looked like it and she certainly knew how to sit on a horse. Well the mayor of New York at that time was a dapper, popular gentleman

called Jimmy Walker and he freely gave us permission for her to start from City Hall. He would see her off, as the mayor, complete with shiny topper. She would cross the river under the Hudson Tunnel I think, and proceed into New Jersey on the start of her trip. And - which was typical of the Americans at that time - they closed off a section of Broadway and Jimmy Walker saw her off at City Hall, she had got all the publicity she wanted, or Universal did. And off she went and I never saw them again since - shortly after they arrived in Los Angeles she was killed in an automobile accident, so that's the story of the Eslings. He must have been - he was certainly old enough to be her father. She was a very attractive girl, what she saw in him I've often wondered, but there you are.

Roy Fowler: What then Edward?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well during this period I got very friendly with a man called Frank Tours who was an Englishman and was head of music for Paramount. Although it was still in the silent era they had a director of music and his job I suppose was to help draw out the cue sheets for the films and all that sort of thing. But when the Plaza opened in London in the early twenties - early thirties was it? - early twenties, he came over here to direct their orchestra for the first six months, and he was very good, a very fine musician. His father before him was a fine musician, Berthold Tours, my father knew him by repute. Anyway Frank and I became very friendly, I don't know why because I was young enough - well I was a kid compared to him. He was a mature man, I was virtually a boy. However we did, and he had very good entrance in New York, everybody in New York knew him, everybody who was anybody. He was a member of the Lans Club[?] and he used to have lunch at The Algonquin and that sort of thing. And The Algonquin as you may or may not know is the popular hotel in New York for the literati and theatre people. It was then run by a man called Frank Case who was well remembered. And Frank used to take me into The Algonquin for lunch and to the Lans Club[?]. I met a lot of very famous people, but I was too young to realise how lucky I was. I mean I met George Gershwin, I met George Kaufman and all kinds of people, Dorothy Parker I met. Because they had a round table at The Algonquin where these people used to congregate.

Roy Fowler: Did you ever join 'The Vicious Circle'?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I knew all about it though - I didn't join it but...

Roy Fowler: Yeah, well I mean did you have lunch with them ever?

Eddie Dryhurst: I knew all the members. I was probably in the hotel when they were lunching.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: But as I say, I was too young to realise how lucky I was to meet all these people. Now by this time I was not working and I was looking for something to do, I needed something to do, and I was thinking of going back to the coast. Not that I had anything to go back to but I thought that I would be better off there than New York. And Frank had a very nice house out on Long Island, his wife and kids were away somewhere, and he asked me to spend the weekend with him, so I was very glad to. On the Sunday we were talking and he said, "What

are you going to do now?" I said, "Well I was thinking of going back to the coast." He said, "You got anything in mind?" I said, "Not a thing, no I haven't got anything. I wish now I'd never given up on the publicity business but it's too late to get that started again." So he said, "I've got a better idea - go back to London." I said, "London? Me? I don't want to go back to London, what do I want to go back there for?" He said, "Well I don't know whether you know, evidently you don't, but they've just passed an act called 'The Films Act' of 1927. And what it means is that distributors or renters have got to acquire so much British film, commensurate with the amount of footage they're importing from this country or anywhere else - importing. That means pictures have got to be made in England. That means they want people to make 'em. That means that a boy like you with Hollywood experience will be snapped up." So as a result of this talk with Frank Tours I did come home and as a result I got established in the British film industry. And um, I'd often said, in fact I meant to return to Hollywood, but by the time I could have gone back, for one reason and another, the war had come and that was the end of that. I was working for Warners when the war broke out, I could have gone and worked for Warners at Burbank but I couldn't get over there.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: So I had to stay here perforce.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: But I had some very interesting times at Warners and at Fox...

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...where I went before I went to Warners. I was with Fox from 1936 until - virtually until the outbreak of war. It was the war that killed that outfit, they closed down when the war broke out.

Roy Fowler: How did you occupy the years between, what - 1927 when you came back and until you went to Fox British?

Eddie Dryhurst: The first thing I did here when I came back was to join a firm called British Screen Productions who took over Worton Hall, and I was their script editor. And working down at Worton Hall after Hollywood of course was a hell of an anticlimax, as you can imagine, because the whole place was - well it had been thrown together really. A couple of rather cheaply built stages, the usual workshops and things, but at the bottom of the grounds. The house was used as offices. The house had been a very nice old country house. And er - but working there, that atmosphere, after Hollywood was enough to drive you to drink believe me, that's the way I felt about it.

Roy Fowler: Edward, when I read your book you suddenly were writing it seemed to me. Had writing been an interest of yours as a child and as you grew up?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well writing had always come easily to me, I liked writing. I was much happier writing than talking. I wanted to be a writer, a screenwriter, I liked writing movies. Although I didn't have writing as such in Hollywood, I wanted to, I did a lot of publicity writing, you know magazine articles and that sort of thing, even in America. But they offered me this job and I took it gladly because I thought that it would open the door to me as a writer.

Roy Fowler: So you hadn't done writing on spec?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no.

Roy Fowler: So how did you, as it were, learn the craft of screen writing? By observation and...?

Eddie Dryhurst: It came naturally to me.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: I could think in pictures.

Roy Fowler: Right. And obviously your experience as an editor affected your sense of construction.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes that helped me very much. I was always told in Hollywood that the best places to learn the movie business was to start in the editing rooms, that's where you learn the director's mistakes they said. [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: Indeed. And in a sense it was a different style of writing because dialogue was not required.

Eddie Dryhurst: No it was indeed, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Did you, as a writer, write your own titles?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, because in the States, in Hollywood certainly, there were specialist writers weren't there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well there were sometimes, but I used to write my own yeah.

Roy Fowler: Anything memorable to say about Worton Hall, your time there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it was - my feelings about it were ambivalent. I liked Worton Hall in a way, I liked the old gardens there and I liked the house. As a place to make pictures in, I found it wanting. The directors they had - they had two, one was called Frank Miller. Frank Miller looked like a farmer, he dressed to look like one and he talked like one. He had a brother called Jack who was a cameraman, I liked Jack the better of the two. Frank was inclined to be very self-

opinionated and he had a very high opinion of himself. Well Frank's first assignment was the direction of a picture called Houp-La, a circus story which he had scripted and which was turned over to me for editing. And I thought, I'd never read such a Goddamned lousy script in my life, I couldn't believe it! The story, the construction, the whole thing was terrible. And I was tempted to go to Pearson and say, "Good God if you make this you're going to lose an awful lot of money." But I thought, "If I do that, what am I going to gain by it? I shan't gain anything, I shall probably annoy Pearson like hell and he'll probably find ways and means of terminating my engagement here. What's the good? He's decided he wants to make it, who am I to try and stop him?"

Roy Fowler: You were boxing a little more cleverly or subtly these days were you?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I didn't see the point in antagonising him because it wouldn't have got me anywhere and it certainly wouldn't have stopped the picture being made, so what was the point? So I held my horses. But I was quite right, it turned out to be an awful flop. The worst trade show in the Palace Theatre. I haven't felt more embarrassed in my life. Terrible picture it was, badly made, badly everything.

Roy Fowler: How did these people achieve these positions then, as directors? I mean...

Eddie Dryhurst: That's a good question.

Roy Fowler: Were they just con men?

Eddie Dryhurst: ...and I really don't know the answer. Because the whole thing, I think really what it boiled down to was that people were accepted on their own valuation, very largely, by people like Pearson who was running British Screen Productions. Who had no knowledge whatsoever of picture making and picture makers, so he was easy prey wasn't he?

Roy Fowler: Yes. So really they were more-or-less con men who talked their way into a position?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, opportunists let's say.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, well.

Eddie Dryhurst: George Cooper had made some quite good pictures, he was the other director, but he was rather corny in his approach and um...

Roy Fowler: You were saying about Pearson...

Eddie Dryhurst: George Cooper - oh, was I talking about Pearson?

Roy Fowler: Well only briefly, you were saying he didn't really know anything about making films.

Eddie Dryhurst: No he didn't, no, and I say that in my book.

Roy Fowler: No, and didn't know how to hire people who did.

Eddie Dryhurst: He'd had some superficial experience on the distribution side in Wardour Street I think and that was the beginning and end of his experience. However, the other director that he had under contract was a man called George Cooper and Cooper was a different man to Miller. He was a man of some education and sensitivity. He had made one or two pictures, which had earned plaudits from the press before - cheap ones, modest ones. But he was given a picture called Master and Man to make. Now this is typical of the way they went about things in those days. Who wrote the original story I don't remember, but basically it was a story of a young married couple who were very devoted, and the husband was killed in an accident and the wife's going to have a baby, and it's all supposed to be Kleenex stuff you know. Cooper wrote the script, I didn't really think very much of it, and I couldn't see this picture making any money either. But Pearson, for the leading lady got hold of some Jewish girl of nineteen who called herself Sarah Simms[? NB possibly Betty Siddons?]. And she had been recommended to him, I believe, by George Atkinson, who was then the film critic of the Sunday Express. A very widely read critic and a very nice fellow, a very sincere man he was, I remember him well. And I'm quite sure that Atkinson's recommendation wasn't engendered by any er - I don't think he was interested in the girl physically, in fact I'm sure he wasn't, I'm sure he'd have - he was a model family man. No, he just thought for some reason or other this girl had acting talent, and Pearson, on the strength of that recommendation signed her to play the lead. Well she didn't have a clue as to what it was all about of course. The leading man was a young man called Finden[?] whose father was a Fleet Street editor, the editor of one of the Sunday papers. He too was a callow youth, he knew nothing whatever about acting. And that was the way they went about their business. Pearson probably thought that the combination of Atkinson and Finden would ensure the picture a lot of gratuitous and valuable publicity and that he was therefore insuring it. Well, a character actress who was very popular at the time called Thelma Murray - who was a bit of a lad - she was employed to coach this girl. And they used to sit for hours on end on some steps in the garden, I could see them from my office, with the scripts open on their laps. And one day I saw Thelma get up and - no I saw the girl get up, evidently in a huff. It was on a Saturday morning, and she came walking towards the building, in a great hurry she was, walking very quickly, and she looked upset, I think she was crying, in fact I was sure she was crying. And she disappeared from my line of vision, and then, more slowly, Thelma got up, closed her script and made her way slowly towards the building. I went out to meet her and I said, "Thelma, what's the matter with your pupil? She's hurried into the house, looking very distressed, what's up?" "Oh" she said, "I lost my patience with her! She's supposed to be a young married woman with a baby and a husband, or dead husband? She knows bugger all about marriage! She's never got herself laid yet! So I told her to go away for the weekend, get herself laid and come back on Monday morning and we'll carry on," she said, "I expect she'll report it!" She did and Thelma lost her job, but she didn't mind! [Chuckles] She said that it was hopeless trying to train this woman, she was so completely bereft of any knowledge, anything that would help the part.

Roy Fowler: There seems to have been a division, which, to some extent but less so, exists maybe today. And that is the division between the professionals, the people who cared and at

least thought they knew what they were doing and had some experience, and these other characters who wandered in for whatever reason.

Eddie Dryhurst: The amateurs.

Roy Fowler: The amateurs, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah that's true, that's true. Anyway apart from that...

Roy Fowler: And that seems to have been the problem with so much of the production staff and the money people.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes indeed.

Roy Fowler: They didn't know their arse from their sprocket!

Eddie Dryhurst: Master and Man turned out to be an abysmal flop, although it wasn't quite such a flop that Houp-La had been I suppose.

Roy Fowler: They got shown did they? They got distribution?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the company was distributing their own pictures.

Roy Fowler: Yes, but they got bookings? [Chuckling]

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yeah, not many though.

Roy Fowler: [Chuckles] These were quota pictures, were they quickies? Or...

Eddie Dryhurst: No they weren't quickies, no they were made I think six-week schedule, something like that.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: But they certainly weren't booked to any extent that I remember, the exhibitors really 'cold shouldered' them, and understandably - they weren't worth booking. And they only made the two pictures then they folded.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...having gone to the public collectors for about two hundred thousand pounds, which in those days was a fair amount of money.

Roy Fowler: They were floated companies were they?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes oh yeah, they were floated on this Quota Act you see. And the company laws in England were much more lax then they are today, much more.

Roy Fowler: Now at this point presumably in the States, the sound revolution had begun, talkies were playing there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well that's another reason. I omitted to say that when we were in New York, Frank and I, talking about going back, Hollywood was then in the middle of the sound revolution and had been thrown into complete disarray. Moreover, the Wall Street Crash I think had happened hadn't it? No it hadn't happened yet, er, the whole place was in turmoil. There was a great deal of unemployment. Studios - the majority of the studios hadn't wired for sound yet. At Warner Brothers of course they had, they were there in the vanguard. But large companies like Paramount lost millions of dollars on pictures, silent pictures they couldn't release, and the place was in an awful state. So I knew it was a bad time to go back and I'd only be joining the unemployment queue, so that was another reason which made me come back to England. When there was a dire slump in Hollywood, there was a lot of activity here.

Roy Fowler: Hmm, right. So I was going to ask you, the first manifestations of sound here in the studios?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I think the first manifestations that I ever remember were in fact at Worton Hall because I worked independently there for a while in 1930, that period. And they'd got some sound system in there, I don't know what it was, it was certainly not Western Electric or RCA that's for sure. It was a little pirate system they'd picked up.

Roy Fowler: A non-royalty system?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah that's right.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: And it didn't function very satisfactorily. But that was my first recollection of sound. And I made a sound picture at Worton Hall in 1933 I think it was, or '32, a comedy called He Walked in Her Sleep which never got finished for reasons I explain in the book.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: And the sound system I used then was not a very good one, it was a botch-job really I think. I remember we used to have a lot of trouble with the microphone dropping into close-up's you know, at the top of the close-up you'd see the mic. And my cameraman was Stiffey Cooper[?]. Do you remember him, Stiffey Cooper?

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Wonderful character.

Roy Fowler: Well I don't remember him, I know of him.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah. He was a wonderful character. You'd say, "Are you ready to shoot?" And he'd say, "Yes I'm all ready." "There's no mics in the picture?" And he'd look at one indignantly and have a squint through his viewfinder, "No, all clear. You can take it up a couple of inches if you like." It was taken up a couple of inches. Sure enough when we saw the rushes the next day there was the bloody mic!

Roy Fowler: The camera was what, blimped or barneyed or in a box?

Eddie Dryhurst: Blimped.

Roy Fowler: It was blimped, you had a blimp?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm.

Roy Fowler: When sound first arrived at Worton Hall, what happened to the camera? Was it put into a box?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember. I remember seeing the boxes, as you call them.

Roy Fowler: Well I can't think of the word they used, a sort of cubicle.

Eddie Dryhurst: Cubicle yeah, sound booth.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: They had them at Elstree when I went over there and they were - Hitchcock was trying to use them, he didn't like them.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: And of course they slowed production down tremendously. They were cumbersome and the whole operation was cumbersome. So, the first blimped cameras were greatly welcomed.

Roy Fowler: Edward, at Worton Hall] you were scenario editor, script editor?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes when I was with British Film Productions.

Roy Fowler: Right. Now you saw yourself as an all-round filmmaker by this time presumably?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. I joined up with Eddie Whiting whose father had built the big cinema in St Albans, the Grand Palace, and we started making quota quickies, with me writing and directing them and he was producing them I suppose. Not that he knew anything about filmmaking, but he had a quick little mind and he picked it up. And he found the money and

found the contracts and that sort of thing, cause he knew nearly all the distributors cause he'd been buying films from them for years, so he was very handy from that point of view.

Roy Fowler: Where were you based?

Eddie Dryhurst: Worton Hall

Roy Fowler: Still at Worton Hall, ah hmm...

Eddie Dryhurst: For our first year or two, yes.

Roy Fowler: Well describe the films that you made. Are we into the thirties yet because I do have in - I looked up in Rachael Low's book your credits.

Eddie Dryhurst: Where did you get it from?

Roy Fowler: It's Rachael Low's volume of 'The British Film History in the Thirties' and indeed I see, 1930, The Woman from China, Edward G Whiting, producer, director...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah Whiting was his name, yes.

Roy Fowler: Yes. Another one in the thirties, Three Men in a Cart, you made at Isleworth. Did you write that? That was directed by Arthur Phillips.

Eddie Dryhurst: Arthur Phillips, yes he was an old colleague of mine from British Screen Productions.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. The Dizzy Limit.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I wrote that.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, and that was both silent and sound, direction and script by you.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: And there's one in '31, 1931, Dangerous Seas, the production company was Filmophone and you wrote and directed that. Do any of those stir memories?

Eddie Dryhurst: I didn't direct Dangerous Seas.

Roy Fowler: Did you not? Ah, she's got you credited as directing it.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I was supposed to direct it but I had a row with Whiting. To cut a long story short, he was very enamoured with Julie Suedo, an actress who had been in The Woman from China and had worked with us, and he wanted to star her in this picture. And Julie and I were at loggerheads because she didn't think I gave her enough close-ups or some bloody

nonsense. In other words she was a bit of a prima donna, or wanted to be and she wanted to rule the roost, and I wasn't having it. And I didn't like the story anyway and I said to Eddie, "You find somebody else to direct this, I don't want to do it." And we were really at loggerheads for a time. And when the picture was finished - it was a flop I remember - we got together again and made a picture called Commissionaire at the old Stoll Studios in Cricklewood. That was all-talkie.

Roy Fowler: Edward, what I'd like to do is to go through the thirties both in general and also specifically, with films and people. And it seems to me such a big and broad subject that maybe you're getting a little tired now, maybe we should start afresh?

Eddie Dryhurst: I agree with you.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, okay. So we'll wrap it for today and we'll resume and we'll start...

Eddie Dryhurst: Is the machine on or off at this moment?

Roy Fowler: It's on.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, I'm doing this so we'll know where to pick up, we know where we left off.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, okay.

Roy Fowler: But we'll now move onto the next session, and we'll move into the thirties with a vengeance. It's almost the end of the tape anyway, good. Thank you very much thus far.

[Break in Recording]

Roy Fowler: We're picking up a week later, the date is May 3rd, 1988 in the EC Room at 111 Wardour Street. Edward Dryhurst and Roy Fowler. Edward, right, we're going to talk about the thirties, so where shall we start?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the beginning of the 1930's found me at Worton Hall Studios, Isleworth, where I was to make a picture for - well in association with Edward Whiting for MGM, quota purposes of course. It was to be shot without sound, and I think I'm right in saying it was about the last silent feature picture to be shot in this country. However, Worton Hall, while we were preparing the picture, I became increasingly aware that there was a great shortage of funds down there. The studio manager, a fellow called Dick Pankhurst who was there I think through nepotism of some kind or another, he looked increasingly worried. However, the time came to start shooting and start shooting we did, but after about two days, I got a warning, I forget through whom, that the electricity supply was about to be cut off because the studio hadn't paid the bill! That was a bit disconcerting. Well indeed it was cut off one Friday evening I remember, just about the time we finished shooting for the weekend. And I was in a hell of a state about this

of course, so was Whiting. We went to Pankhurst and asked what the hell was he going to do about it. We would be in on Monday as usual and we would expect to be able to shoot. He said, "Leave it with me, you'll be able to shoot." He said it in a very worried voice. And I said to Whiting on the way back to town, I said, "I don't like this much. I think we're going to find this studio is going to be closed down or something." However, when Monday morning came Whiting was there ahead of me and he met me coming into the building. He was flushed with excitement, and he says, "It's all right Edward, we're going through it all right, nothing to worry about." I said, "Oh they've paid the bill have they?" He said, "No they haven't paid the bloody bill! What do you think? They've rented a fairground engine!" You know one of those old things with the high funnel? And the engine, a steam engine. He said, "They've got that." I said, "What do you mean? A thing like that won't generate enough electricity for us." He said, "Well apparently it can. It's chugging away now and everybody's happy." Well when I got down nearer the sound stage I saw this thing, chugging away, belching smoke [chuckles] and I had to accept it there was no other alternative. So we started shooting that day and in the afternoon a worried Stiffey Cooper[?] who was on the camera came to me, he said, "Look, the smoke's getting in here, it's getting to be very foggy," he said, "I can't shoot from here if it gets like this much more." So I said, "Oh gawd!" So we decided to move the engines into a different position so the wind would blow the smoke in another direction. Anyhow to cut a long story short, after about two days of this I'd had enough. The artists were having to use oil lamps in their dressing rooms and so on. And I went to Eddie Whiting and said, "Look this has got to stop, we've got to have the electricity supply restored." He said, "Well what can I do about it?" I said, "I'll tell you what you can do. I don't know how much the bill is, it's presumably a few hundred quid, you can go to Dick Pankhurst and pay him half a week's rent or a week's rent in advance so that he can use the money to pay the bill with!" He didn't like that idea but I finally persuaded him that was the only way out of it, and that was what happened. It came to the day when the engine belched its way out of the building, much to my relief! [Chuckles] That's a true bill, though it sounds incredible today doesn't it!

Roy Fowler: Well I'm wondering, was that typical of the smaller studios in those days? Were they all operating on a knife-edge of solvency, hand to mouth?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I must say it was resourceful, I would never have thought of it, but Pankhurst did. I don't remember anything quite as drastic as that.

Roy Fowler: Who owned Worton Hall then, do you remember?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember who owned it at that particular time. I do know that it was later taken over by a French-Canadian called Edward Gourdeau he had some money and he bought it and he renovated it and put sound in and so on, that was in about 1933 I think.

Roy Fowler: Yes. And was it properly sound-treated or again...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Pardon?

Roy Fowler: Was it properly soundproofed?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes as well as they could, yes it was I suppose.

Roy Fowler: Yes right. So there was a serious effort to run a small studio?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes indeed, yes.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. Well following that, what happened to the film?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the film was made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. I don't know what they did with them, they were delivered to them, after that what happened to them nobody knew.

Roy Fowler: You didn't go to see it?

Eddie Dryhurst: No. Well I can tell you this much, that the Empire, Leicester Square, they had about five screenings a day of their pictures. They started in the morning, about eleven o'clock I think and the first, there was one screening only of Woman from China that was at ten a.m.

Roy Fowler: To the cleaning ladies?

Eddie Dryhurst: To the cleaning ladies, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. What other aspects of quota do you remember?

Eddie Dryhurst: What was the quota?

Roy Fowler: Well not what was the quota, but how it affected production and er - I mean this rather crazy system that came in?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it gave production a fillip because as I explained in my book, what the people who drafted the legislation didn't think of was quality. And the result was that the quality was often very, very poor indeed and of course it had a deterrent effect on British production. The leaders of the film industry in those days, Mickey Balcon and Maurice Ostrer and others were very perturbed about it and they banded together to try and force the government to change the quota act, which indeed they did later.

Roy Fowler: Right. Was that a pound-a-foot film?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, and Metro really had no interest in doing anything other than satisfying the quota?

Eddie Dryhurst: That's right.

Roy Fowler: Just legally?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. But some of the other companies really were more enlightened than that.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, Warners in particular, but then again Warners - I'm talking about later now, during the war - Warners sterling was blocked, they weren't allowed to send any money to America. The result is they built up enormous amounts of sterling here, and they could see the idea of spending money on films which were good enough to be screened in America. Of course they couldn't send any actors over from Hollywood and we couldn't - a lot of our actors here had gone into the army, into the forces. And we were being bombed, so we were working under a considerable disadvantage here. In spite of that, however, we made some pretty good pictures at the time.

Roy Fowler: Right. So the distributors, especially the American distributors here at the beginning of the decade regarded quota as a nuisance and they...

Eddie Dryhurst: It was a nuisance, they regarded it as a form of taxation and er.

Roy Fowler: Right, they did the minimum that they needed to, to satisfy...

Eddie Dryhurst: That's it yeah, and the worse the pictures were, the better they liked it.

Roy Fowler: Was there a change in attitude as the decade went on?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember, no I don't think so.

Roy Fowler: No. But some of the companies tried to make better films, Paramount I think, and Fox, and Warners you say.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, Paramount, Fox and Warners, yeah...

Roy Fowler: And eventually after the, what was it, 1938, or '37 Quota Act when there was double and tripe quota, then Metro began to make very serious pictures in this country.

Eddie Dryhurst: That's right, yeah.

Roy Fowler: But that came ten years later, after the '27 Act.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Right. What was the next film then that came along?

Eddie Dryhurst: Er, I'm trying to think. I think that Commissionaire was. [Break in Recording]

Roy Fowler: Just do the overlap - that was Commissionaire at Cricklewood.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, 1933 I made Commissionaire at Cricklewood, with Desmond Dickinson on camera, and I scripted it and directed it. And it wasn't a bad picture, the story was a bit trite. However...

Roy Fowler: Tell me, Edward, you say you scripted it. Now did you write on spec? Or did you write a script and then try to sell it? Or did someone come to you?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no, no, no, we'd bought the story from - as I explained in my book - from a man called Cyril Ayres, Bert Ayres [Herbert Ayres] who used to commission these pictures. Although his job at MGM was not very high really, he was in charge of prints.

Roy Fowler: Oh yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: His job really was to see that prints arrived at cinemas in a screenable condition...

Roy Fowler: And he was on the fiddle, I remember.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...and on time. Well yes, in a quiet sort of way he was. He "wrote the original story". Of course he didn't write stories, so yes he was lining his own pocket.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, to any great extent? I mean or...

Eddie Dryhurst: No I don't think to any great extent.

Roy Fowler: ...or were they just modest?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think we paid him a hundred pounds for this story, which was written on...

Roy Fowler: Well yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: ...exercise book paper, if I remember.

Roy Fowler: Well I suppose a hundred pounds went quite a distance in those days.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes it used to very easily, yes. I don't suppose his salary was more than a tenner a week.

Roy Fowler: Was that typical? How bent was the business?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I don't know, that was my only personal experience of that sort of thing, I didn't know anybody else doing it.

Roy Fowler: Right. When did you first encounter creative accountancy?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh much later.

Roy Fowler: Much later, right. But was it going on then, do you think?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I don't think so, I don't think it was.

Roy Fowler: It was different I suppose, in that the distributor had absolute control anyway didn't he?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Were they negative pick-ups? Did um - how much money did they put up front?

Eddie Dryhurst: The distributors?

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it depended on the production. I mean if it was a feature film er - well I didn't do any of those sort of deals until after the war. But after the war Rank would put up say seventy per cent, they would guarantee you seventy per cent let's say of the negative costs within so many years of delivery, one or two, whatever it was. It was therefore incumbent on the producer to find the other thirty, which wasn't always easy. Plus a completion bond.

Roy Fowler: On Commissionaire as an example, how was the budget operated? Did you get weekly advances from the distributor or...?

Eddie Dryhurst: No we didn't get anything from the distributor until it was finished.

Roy Fowler: How did you - you discounted their contract?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, we had to find about five thousand pounds and we got an introduction to an accountant in Lancashire, in Oldham of all places, a man called Granville Mills who eventually coughed up the money, through his clients I suppose. He used to let us have it in instalments.

Roy Fowler: Bags of brass, hey?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Okay, so nothing particular to say about financing pictures, other than, what, a lot of it was private money funnelled through professional advisors, was that it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes. Of course MGM were committed to pay so much money on delivery of the film, so that was protection in a sense for the financiers.

Roy Fowler: Yes. But what possible return could there be on that? How did those who made the loan, how did they make money on that loan?

Eddie Dryhurst: I very much question if they did make money, if they got their money back they were lucky. The fact is the distributors were only interested in getting their money back on the film, when they got the money back they stopped selling it.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, right.

Eddie Dryhurst: So if you had money - if you were relying on the sales to make you a profit, you were out of luck. They had no consideration at all for anybody except themselves.

Roy Fowler: But how did you work with the people who financed you, who financed the production? I mean what was their return?

Eddie Dryhurst: What did they get do you mean?

Roy Fowler: Hmm, financially.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well as far as I remember they got nothing. They got their money back if they were lucky but that was it.

Roy Fowler: A weird investment!

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they would also have had an experience!

Roy Fowler: Yes! [Chuckling]

Eddie Dryhurst: They would see a movie being made and that sort of thing.

Roy Fowler: I see.

Eddie Dryhurst: They would talk to their pals down the local about it, so...

Roy Fowler: Was that part of it, the glamour of show-business?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think so yeah, oh yes, undoubtedly, unquestionably.

Roy Fowler: Right yeah. So, what, did you have a procession of bowler-hatted men from Oldham wander in and er...

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't know about a succession no, just this one man in that case.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha. And he put up the whole five grand?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well he found it, I don't say that he put it up, I think he had clients who just chipped in you know.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. You say Desmond Dickinson was cameraman on that?

Eddie Dryhurst: Cameraman, yeah, and Lance Comfort was soundman.

Roy Fowler: Ah! Now that's interesting. Tell us about both of them as you remember them at that stage.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well Lance I remember as a very modest sort of chap, he didn't talk very much. He had sort of a shy smile. And Desmond Dickinson was always cracking gags, he was a humorist, he was a very nice chap. I don't know if he's still alive, is he?

Roy Fowler: No, no, no, no. He died a while back, yes. A rather sad death, he died of Alzheimer's disease.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh how sad.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: I was in touch with him about three years ago if I remember. He lived down near er - well between Hammersmith and Fulham, that way.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Near Fulham Palace Road, somewhere out there.

Roy Fowler: Was that the one time you worked with him?

Eddie Dryhurst: The only time I worked with him, yes. We often said we'd like to make a picture together but we never did.

Roy Fowler: Did you find that he was rather special in those days, as a lighting cameraman?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes his work was consistently good and he was a very nice chap to work with.

Roy Fowler: Right, yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was never in a panic or anything, he took life very coolly and he'd got a lovely sense of humour. He was a nice chap, a very nice fellow to work with.

Roy Fowler: The schedule was how long, roughly?

Eddie Dryhurst: About six weeks I think.

Roy Fowler: Oh as long as that, oh that wasn't bad. And six days a week presumably?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes we worked Saturday mornings.

Roy Fowler: So were the crew-members particularly pushed?

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: I mean Des Dickinson on camera had time to light?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes indeed he did, yes, there was no rush.

Roy Fowler: And when you went into Worton Hall was there adequate equipment there? Because presumably you used the in-house equipment, lighting equipment, sound equipment?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I think we had to at times hire additional equipment. Camera equipment I think we hired.

Roy Fowler: You'd budget for...

Eddie Dryhurst: ...at Worton Hall we had - it was nearly a four-wall operation there at the time, they were very short of money.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. And Lawrence Huntington, er...

Eddie Dryhurst: A great chum of mine who unfortunately died about twenty years ago.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was a wonderful guy.

Roy Fowler: How did he start out?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well he was originally a drummer with the Savoy Orpheans Band, originally.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, right, with Carroll Gibbons?

Eddie Dryhurst: With Carroll Gibbons - before I knew him. And he was bitten by the film bug and he got some money together and he made a silent film with the Savoy Orpheans Band if you please, with the members of the band. I saw it, I thought it was terrible! But it got him into pictures.

Roy Fowler: When you say it was made with members of the band, were they actually playing, silently?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, acting in it.

Roy Fowler: [Chuckling] Right, very interesting!

Eddie Dryhurst: "Acting" in quotes! [Chuckles] But it got him launched and er, after that he got a job with Fox at Wembley and he made quite good pictures later on, for what they were. And he was a prolific writer. He used to write a lot of screenplays and usually crime stories. And I see

he's on this list here. Dial 999[?], production manager, ED, director, Lawrence Huntington. He was a very close friend of mine...

Roy Fowler: Right, yes that's '38.

Eddie Dryhurst: He had a wonderful sense of humour too, deadpan.

Roy Fowler: Yes. What was he doing on sound? Was he self-taught as a soundman?

Eddie Dryhurst: Who?

Roy Fowler: Huntington.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was nothing to do with sound.

Roy Fowler: You told me he was on sound I thought.

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: Oh I misunderstood.

Eddie Dryhurst: No I said that he made a picture of the Savoy Orpheans Band.

Roy Fowler: No before, much earlier when you said Dickinson was...

Eddie Dryhurst: No much earlier he was a drummer with Carroll Gibbons.

Roy Fowler: No sorry, when we first began to talk about Commissionaire you said Dickinson was on camera and I thought you said Huntington was on sound.

Eddie Dryhurst: With the greatest respect I didn't even mention Huntington, I said Lance Comfort was.

Roy Fowler: Lance Comfort, I beg your pardon, I beg your pardon. Put it down to the hour of the day.

Eddie Dryhurst: It's all right.

Roy Fowler: Right back to Lance Comfort then, yes you say he was on sound.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Tell us about Comfort.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh Comfort, yes well he was a nice chap. I became friendly with him later in life. He was a quiet little chap, he used to sit there with a beatific grin on his face. And you knew

if a take was all right with him because he sort of beamed at the end of it, he'd sort of look over at us and beam.

Roy Fowler: Do you know how he'd become a soundman?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, no idea at all.

Roy Fowler: No.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was still there when we went - how he got there and when I've no idea, I never asked him I don't think.

Roy Fowler: Some people generally were what at that stage? Engineers or self-taught people, or had they been recruited from...

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't really know, they were a source of mystery to us really.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. There are lots of stories about how sound people used to tell everyone else what and how to do things.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh they did.

Roy Fowler: They did, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yeah.

Roy Fowler: Such as?

Eddie Dryhurst: They were the mystery men who held the key to this new invention and you did what they said or else they didn't have any time for you.

Roy Fowler: How long did that last?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh a few years.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: 'Till the novelty of sound wore off.

Roy Fowler: Right. Did that seriously affect what you did?

Eddie Dryhurst: Not that I remember.

Roy Fowler: I mean would it for example have been a problem...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, one would say, "I want her to open a newspaper." And the soundman would say, "Oh Christ! Bloody noisy, newspapers - you'll have to have it damped down." So we'd have to have it damped down with water on it, that sort of thing.

Roy Fowler: I see, yes. Did it affect lighting? Because they - you didn't start out with booms did you?

Eddie Dryhurst: As far as I remember the only way it affected lighting was the bloody mic throwing shadows or getting in the camera of something of that kind.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. Who won? Would it be the soundman or the lighting man?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very often the soundman I would say.

Roy Fowler: Right, ah ha.

Eddie Dryhurst: He'd say, "Well move your bloody boom." "Not me, move your mic!" So the soundman had to move it.

Roy Fowler: And was there antipathy between the various crafts?

Eddie Dryhurst: I wouldn't call it antipathy - rivalry if you like. I don't think there was any bad friends about it. Depending on the soundmen, some were nicer than others. I mean a fellow like Lance who of course was a nice chap and we got on with him and he got on with us. Some of them used to throw their weight around.

Roy Fowler: Any particular memories?

Eddie Dryhurst: And we had the same thing again in a sense with colour, when colour came in.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: We had the colour experts there who took the place of the soundmen, telling us what to do and what not to do, and generally throwing their weight around.

Roy Fowler: Yes, especially Mrs Kalmus!

Eddie Dryhurst: Mrs Kalmus yeah, I knew her well.

Roy Fowler: We'll come on to her if we may. I was going to ask about the Stoll Studios at Cricklewood. Any particular memories of them? Because that was a purpose-built studio and really rather good in its day, wasn't it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well no it wasn't purpose-built, it was originally built as an aeroplane factory.

Roy Fowler: Ah.

Eddie Dryhurst: It was an aeroplane factory during World War One. But it lent itself to conversion because of the length of the buildings you know.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the studio manager when I made Commissionaire was er - I think it was Joe Grossman, or maybe he'd left by then, I'm not sure. I remember Joe Grossman, who of course was the manager at Elstree for years.

Roy Fowler: Yes, he went from Cricklewood to Elstree?

Eddie Dryhurst: He did indeed, yeah. He was a character! [Chuckles] A real cockney you know, Joe-Boy.

Roy Fowler: There are lots of stories about him!

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh he was a marvellous character.

Roy Fowler: We must get yours. Do you want to tell them now, what you remember of Joe Grossman, or...

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I think I'll come to him when we come to Elstree because that's where I really knew him.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay.

Eddie Dryhurst: I think when I made Commissionaires I think he'd left Cricklewood then and gone to Elstree - just.

Roy Fowler: How about Sir Oswald? Was he still...

Eddie Dryhurst: Oswald Mitchell?

Roy Fowler: No, Sir Oswald Stoll, was he still active in the business or had he withdrawn by this time?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think he still owned the studios as far as I remember.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oswald Mitchell, do you remember him?

Roy Fowler: No I don't.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well he made the early um - you know the Irishman who used to dress up in women's clothes, what was his name?

Roy Fowler: Oh, Old Mother Riley.

Eddie Dryhurst: Old Mother Riley, well he made the original Old Mother Riley pictures, Ossie did.

Roy Fowler: Yeah?

Eddie Dryhurst: In those days Oswald Mitchell was manager of Stoll Studios - now it's come back to me - he succeeded Joe Grossman. And he went from studio management into directing the Old Mother Rileys.

Roy Fowler: The Old Mother Rileys were when, early thirties?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: ...or middle thirties? Early thirties...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah that period - mid thirties.

Roy Fowler: Right. Shoestring productions?

Eddie Dryhurst: The Mother Rileys?

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they made them on low budgets, I don't know what they spent on them, not much. But they made money I think.

Roy Fowler: Right. You had nothing to do with them in any way?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, didn't want to either. [Chuckles]

Roy Fowler: No [chuckles] I can understand that! Okay. Anything else about the studio? You enjoyed working there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes I liked working there. They were roomy and one didn't feel that one was in a makeshift studio like Worton Hall was.

Roy Fowler: Was sound any problem in terms of the system they used?

Eddie Dryhurst: No, not that I remember, sound was all right, no problems.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. How did you take to sound yourself? I mean how...

Eddie Dryhurst: Rather unwillingly at first, because I liked the music in pictures you know, the musical accompaniment. But er I gradually adapted myself to it.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: One had to, it was either that or quit you know.

Roy Fowler: Technically was it a pain when you came to editing and you...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes I found it rather annoying, it slowed me down terribly, overlaying tracks and that sort of thing. I used to push that on to assistants if I could! [Chuckles] Tell them what I wanted and leave them to do it.

Roy Fowler: Do you recall when you started to mix tracks, when things were not directly recorded on the stage but there was re-recording and post production with optical?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I think by the time I got to Wembley in 1935, that sort of thing was coming in.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. So at this stage it was all really direct sound, was it?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Or sound sections edited in, presumably.

Eddie Dryhurst: I remember as late as 1948 I was making a picture called Noose at Teddington, and we were shooting a fairly long scene from a distance, you know it was a long-shot, or a Mitchell. And one of the principle actors in it was the late Stanley Holloway and he had to do most of the talking, and he kept stumbling over one line. Every time he came to this line, we used to wait for it, he'd stumble over it. And Greville kept re-taking it and finally I went up to Greville and I said, "You know Stanley's going to do it every time he comes to this line, he's going to do it. Because, like us, he's waiting for it himself, and he can't disappoint himself can he. So I think you're wasting your time retaking it." I said, "Why don't you let him say the line, wild into the mic and cut it in later, nobody will know, you're too far away to read the lips." He said, "That's a good idea," so he did it. We cut it in and of course nobody ever knew. And that saved quite a bit of money, it would have saved even more if I'd have thought of it earlier! [RF laughs] But we were doing that sort of thing then, that's the point of the story.

Roy Fowler: Yes. They began to wild-track quite early on, do you mean?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes that was about the time when we started shooting wild-tracks and cutting them in.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha, right okay. So does that dispose of Commissionaire?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think so yes, really.

Roy Fowler: What came after that?

Eddie Dryhurst: I think after that...

Roy Fowler: Actually um...

Eddie Dryhurst: ...I think I did another picture at Cricklewood, but not as director. Lupino Lane made a picture there called Never Trouble Trouble it was a feature comedy, starring him of course. And I was a general sort of assistant on it and there was a lot of piano playing in it. There was no playback in those days so you had to record it direct. And he was supposed to be a composer who composed songs and sang them, and I did all this piano playing offstage. He'd be playing at a dummy piano and I'd do the piano playing offstage. And the sequel to that is, I remember walking into a pub in the West End some time later and as - I'd been around the West End a bit that night, and when I opened the door of this pub I could hear myself playing the piano. I thought, I'm going crackers! But I wasn't, it was the same soundtrack being broadcast by the BBC.

Roy Fowler: Extraordinary. And you recognised your touch?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I naturally recognised the tune right away and, I reckoned how funny it was me.

Roy Fowler: Right, okay. You've got no credit on that because that isn't listed as one of yours by Rachael Low.

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember.

Roy Fowler: I, yeah, I got your credits from that. You deal with Lane, Lupino Lane.

Eddie Dryhurst: In the book...

Roy Fowler: ...in the book. Anything to add to what you say about him or the family?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I don't think so. He probably didn't give me any credit for that picture, he was like that.

Roy Fowler: Yes, what possessive or mean, or both?

Eddie Dryhurst: He was a bit mean when it came to money and he liked to take all the kudos himself.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: But I used to do a lot of writing for him and I had to do a lot of writing for a fiver I tell you, as I say in the book.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was inclined to be a bit mean, yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha. This was film writing or did you write also for him on the stage?

Eddie Dryhurst: All gags for him, all comedy, all rewrites or whatever, yes, it was work anyway.

Roy Fowler: Is that the kind of existence one was forced to lead in those days?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very largely, yes.

Roy Fowler: Anything that came along one did?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, one did. Before I went to Fox at Wembley I had had some very bad luck at Worton Hall. I set out to make a picture called 'He Walked in Her Sleep.' It was a farce by a man called Norman Cannon[?]. It had never been staged in this country but I was asked to read it by an agent called Hubert Woodward[?]. And I thought this thing was very funny and I thought it had a good title and I thought that I would make it. How I raised the money is a story in itself and I deal with that in my book. But we were down at Worton Hall shooting this picture and the money ran out. Two things happened when we were about two thirds of the way through, and we were very pleased with the rushes I may say. The money dried up, one, two, we found that the rights of the play, the author Cannon was then living in Vancouver, British Columbia - he'd made a deal with a stage producer in New York which included the film rights. So that we were filming the thing, having bought the film rights, as we thought. We were filming away in Worton Hall, blissfully oblivious to the fact that the rights had been sold to a man in New York. But when we discovered this of course I was heartbroken. And I said, "Well it's no good fighting it because we'll be dealing with three different countries. This country of course, Canada because Cannon lives there, and the State of New York, because this other man operates from there." And we were advised even by our lawyers to forget it. So the man who put the money in that lot certainly lost it - a drunk called Charlie Young. And the sequel to that was that a year or so later, whenever it was, I was working as a sort of general factotum on a picture called Skylarks starring Nervo and Knox who owned the er...

Roy Fowler: The Crazy Gang.

Eddie Dryhurst: The Crazy Gang. It was produced by a man called er...an American called Joe Bamberger[?] and directed by another American called Thornton Freeland. Now Bamberger, like me, ran out of money before the film was finished. And he engaged me, or ordered me cause I was already working for him, to go down to the Gate Studios and sever all the cut stuff, all the shot stuff into some coherent order, in the hope that some distributor would see it enough to undertake to finance the rest of the picture. And I was working on that when the phone rang one day, and it was Ernest Gartside at Wembley. I'd only met him once before and I hadn't like him much. I thought him rather abrupt and abrasive. And he was abrupt and abrasive on the phone now - he didn't sound very cordial. He said, "Are you doing anything?" I said, "Well I'm working on a picture out here at Elstree." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well I was going to offer you, if you're interested, a first assistant director's job." I said, "Well I am interested." He said, "Well can you

start on Monday?" And I thought, "Well I don't have to stay on and do this bloody job!" so I said, "Yes." He said, "Well come and see me in the morning." I went and saw him in the morning at Wembley, and he was very uppish. And er, it emerged during the course of our conversation that he was holding against me the fact that I hadn't finished *He Walked in Her Sleep*. And I said, "Well it wasn't my bloody fault, the money ran out!" He said, "Well you should have made sure it didn't." And I explained the whole thing to him and after that we became very good friends. Anyway he engaged me to do this one picture, but I felt in my water that I'd be doing far more than one there, and of course in that I was right, I worked on several mini pictures down there. But the fact of the matter is it had done me no good in the business to have been associated with this film that didn't do, you know, that folded, through no fault of mine. But such is life.

Roy Fowler: Edward, you mentioned two names there I'd like to enquire about. One is Thornton Freeland and the other is Joe Bamberger. Your memories of both of them, because they're names that crop up continually.

Eddie Dryhurst: Do they?

Roy Fowler: Well when I say I was reading a book recently and Bamberger gave, as I understand it, Maurice Elvey his first directorial job.

Eddie Dryhurst: His first what?

Roy Fowler: Directorial job, believe it or not.

Eddie Dryhurst: I doubt that because Maurice Elvey was directing pictures back in the silent days and during the First World War.

Roy Fowler: This was 1913 - you mean that wasn't the same Joe Bamberger?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh! Oh well it could have been, I beg your pardon, I didn't think Bamberger, being American, would have been in England then.

Roy Fowler: Well it was a company called Motoscope and I'm assuming it's the same Bamberger.

Eddie Dryhurst: Joseph Bamberger?

Roy Fowler: Joseph, yeah Joe Bamberger.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh that's him all right, yeah well there wouldn't be two men of that name...

Roy Fowler: I wouldn't have thought.

Eddie Dryhurst: Joe Bamberger, really? I didn't realise he was in England then...I assumed he'd only been here a few years. Thornton Freeland had done some quite good work in Hollywood, don't ask me what, I don't remember. He must have been badly in need of a job to come over

here and work for Bamberger I would have thought. Anyway he did - and he was quite a nice fellow, what I remember of him.

Roy Fowler: A lot of Hollywood 'has beens' were around at that time weren't they? Both...

Eddie Dryhurst: Ralph Ince.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes there were several.

Roy Fowler: Both in front of and behind the camera. Had the great influx of Europeans started at that point?

Eddie Dryhurst: No that really started with...

Roy Fowler: With Hitler?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well, it started with Korda. And er, well before Korda started, BIP, they imported a lot of Europeans. Dupont for instance, and many others started working there.

Roy Fowler: Yes, er, Courant, Junge - I don't know when Junge came over.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, Alfred Junge, he was an art director.

Roy Fowler: That's right, a great one, marvellous one.

Eddie Dryhurst: A very fine one.

Roy Fowler: And lots of cameramen, Mutz Greenbaum, but I suppose quite a few of them came later after Hitler?

Eddie Dryhurst: Mutz Greenbaum, yes he changed his name to Max Greene later.

Roy Fowler: That's right, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: I worked with him. Um...

Roy Fowler: Was this noticeable to people at that stage that this foreign talent was coming in? And how was it felt about?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh you couldn't help noticing it, yes, Elstree was almost like - it was almost polyglot you know.

Roy Fowler: Was it a good thing, as they say?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I don't know, that's a matter of opinion I suppose. I don't think it was particularly a good thing, they were not men who had any great contribution to make to the business, most of them, I don't think.

Roy Fowler: What did the indigenous technicians...

Eddie Dryhurst: Some of them were opportunists, to say the least.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: The indigenous? Well I think they had to put up with it and like it or leave it.

Roy Fowler: Could you give us a little word picture of Joe Bamberger?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember him very well. He was a man of medium build, he always had a hat pushed on the back of his head. And he always looked as if he was rather harassed, he used to go about in his shirtsleeves a lot, didn't matter if the weather was hot or cold. Um...

Roy Fowler: Was he a stereotypical American motion picture producer?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I'd say he was very Anglicised American because he used to wear a waistcoat. Well you and I know that Americans don't wear waistcoats.

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Englishmen do. I remember when I was in Hollywood in 1935 I think it was. Sir Henry Wood was over there for a short time, conducting the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, and in my usual pushy way I decided that I would see him - not that I knew him but my father knew him and so did my Godfather Edward Jermyn[?] of course. And I went to rehearsal one morning and he was standing there, and was working in his shirtsleeves and talking in his very Cockney voice, I'm sure they didn't understand half what he was talking about. And I thought, "My God you're a real Englishman, you've got a waistcoat on," which he had. Anyway I had tea with him that afternoon at the Beverley Hills Hotel in Santa Barbara.

Roy Fowler: Yes. Anyway, Joe Bamberger for better or for worse had a waistcoat, but was he aggressive or...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Was he what?

Roy Fowler: Was he aggressive? As I say...

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh no, no.

Roy Fowler: Was he this stereotypical producer?

Eddie Dryhurst: No he wasn't aggressive, no.

Roy Fowler: No. A cultured man?

Eddie Dryhurst: I wouldn't say cultured, but he was quite well mannered.

Roy Fowler: Ah ha, right. Because the received image of the movie producer at that era, at that time was ignorant, aggressive, cigar smoking - right? Would you agree it was the image?

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't remember him smoking anything.

Roy Fowler: No, okay. Well there's not er...

Eddie Dryhurst: He'd obviously been over here a good long time, as you say he was here in 1913 so he'd become Anglicised to a large extent.

Roy Fowler: Well he's credited with being Elvey's first producer.

Eddie Dryhurst: Is he?

Roy Fowler: Yeah, hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well we live and learn. I knew Elvey well, we were quite friendly, up to the time he died.

Roy Fowler: Well if you didn't work with him - did you work with him?

Eddie Dryhurst: Elvey?

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: No I never worked with him.

Roy Fowler: Well then we'll leave him to the very end when we go over...

Eddie Dryhurst: But we were great friends you know, we were members of the Savage Club and all that.

Roy Fowler: Yes, he'd be interesting to talk about but we won't interrupt the story of the films, we'll come to him when we start to conclude, wrap up. Um, okay, obviously nothing much to say about Thornton Freeland?

Eddie Dryhurst: No I didn't have much to do with him really.

Roy Fowler: No, all right.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was a youngish man, thirty-five, forty. He seemed to know his job, he did some quite good work in Hollywood, I was surprised to see him over here bugging about with a Nervo and Knox comedy.

Roy Fowler: Yes that is - because he made some quite respectable pictures over here I think, one way and another. I mean they were very professional jobs for the time.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah, oh he knew his job, he certainly did.

Roy Fowler: Okay, what follows?

Eddie Dryhurst: Where was I?

Roy Fowler: I've forgotten the name of the picture, the incompleated one.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh He Walked in Her Sleep.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes, well soon after that I joined Fox at Wembley, Fox-British, under Gartside.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: I mentioned the interview I had with him, didn't I?

Roy Fowler: You mentioned it, but do you want to expand on it?

Eddie Dryhurst: After all this time I don't think there's much more I can say about it. But I do remember he was rather acerbic in his attitude at first. Then as we - he thawed. But I very much enjoyed working with him overall, we became first-class friends - later you know in the - when I had my own company after the war he was on the board and that sort of thing, we became very close.

Roy Fowler: Fox-British has been, as far as I know, rather neglected in terms of history.

Eddie Dryhurst: It has, you're quite right, I think so.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Why don't we remember what we can about it and the people there and how they operated? First of all, again it was a - do you know when it was set up? Was it set up after the 1927 Quota Act?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes, it...

Roy Fowler: By William?

Eddie Dryhurst: It really started with a picture made by Al Parker starring James Mason, it was James Mason's first starring vehicle, which was called Late Extra and that was shot in 1935. That was their first picture, at Wembley.

Roy Fowler: Right, so.

Eddie Dryhurst: They had some other quota pictures at Ealing and other places

Roy Fowler: So already it is Twentieth [NB Twentieth Century-Fox], not William Fox?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh it was Twentieth, but Fox-British...

Roy Fowler: Yes, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: It was a separate company. Yeah the distribution company was Twentieth then, it had just about become Twentieth I think.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: When Zanuck sort of joined, you know.

Roy Fowler: Yes, the merger. William Fox was broke and he was over-extended and Darryl Zanuck took over as production chief. Right, the studios were at Wembley, were they conversions or were they...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well they had been built I think by a firm called Associated British Film Industries, ABFI. I think they built them before the war. Anyway Fox took them over as a going concern in 1935, that is for sure. Al Parker had been a fairly - he'd been working with Fox in California. They'd sent him over here to work on the casting of Cavalcade the Noel Coward picture of course, which he filmed from both sides of the Drury Lane stage.

Roy Fowler: As a reference?

Eddie Dryhurst: ...the head of production then.

Roy Fowler: As a reference?

Eddie Dryhurst: As a reference, yeah. Well, it cost a lot of money.

Roy Fowler: Indeed.

Eddie Dryhurst: And it didn't endear him to the Irish American gentleman who was in charge of production then. Anyway Al decided that he liked London and he wanted to stay here. So he wired to the coast asking if he could stay in England and work at Wembley. Back came the reply, "By all means remain in England if you wish, so I can rub your nose in it." And that was Winfield I. Shin[?].

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: So Al stayed here and rubbed his nose in it. As I say he started off by making a picture with Jimmy Mason at Wembley called Late Extra a newspaper story - you can probably tell so from the title! Others I remember at Wembley at that time, Reggie Beck who was a sort of senior editor. Under him he had Peter Tanner I remember and others whose names I forget. The cameramen principally were a man called Williams who later became associated with some a little studio in Marylebone Road called Marylebone Studios. What was his first name? Derick - Derick Williams.

Roy Fowler: Oh yes, yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: And Stanley Grant was his sort of operator and he became a lighting man. We had Ronald Neame, who of course has gone on to do very good work in Hollywood as a director.

Roy Fowler: Neame was then lighting?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes in those days.

Roy Fowler: Yes. He was quite young to be lighting?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes, he was only a boy then.

Roy Fowler: So what was that? Was that nepotism or talent will out? Because did...

Eddie Dryhurst: I don't think it was nepotism.

Roy Fowler: Didn't he have a father in the business?

Eddie Dryhurst: He had a father, Elwin Neame who was a very fashionable society photographer when I was very young. Well he got killed in an accident, in a car accident I think. He was married too and she was therefore the lady who was the mother of Ronald, her name was Ivy Close, do you remember her?

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well she was a big film star when I was a boy, in this country, Ivy Close, and she was Mrs Elwin-Neame, therefore she was the mother of Ronnie Neame, yes. Ronnie Neame was there as I say, I've got a group photograph at home taken at Wembley at that time. I mean it's very interesting, I'll dig it out and show it to you, and it will help me to remember the names of some of the people who were there at the time.

Roy Fowler: Let's do that and we'll have it copied for the BFI, we'll ask the BFI to copy it so that it can go into their library.

Eddie Dryhurst: Right-oh, yes.

Roy Fowler: And any other stills that you've got, they'll do.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes I will I'll dig it out.

Roy Fowler: Good, okay. It's interesting these things do turn up for example when...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes and they're very useful aren't they, when they do?

Roy Fowler: When we interviewed Alfie Roome

Eddie Dryhurst: Who?

Roy Fowler: Alfred Roome who was a cutter for many years, editor.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: He has stills of himself as a number board boy with Hitchcock...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: ...going back to '27, '28. Anyway, settling into Fox, well we're still talking about the studio and the corporate set-up, what you can recall about that.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well Gartside of course ran it, he was an accountant by trade. He had been the secretary, company secretary of a distribution house in Soho Square. He knew nothing about production. Normally one would say, "Well what a strange thing to do to appoint him to run a studio." But he was a Lancashire man, a very hard working, perceptive man and he quickly mastered it and he became very successful studio administrator, very good. He was in charge of production there. He was very good, turned out very well. Of course he was only too quick and willing to learn.

Roy Fowler: How old was he, would you judge?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well when I joined them I should say - I'm only guessing - I'd say he was a man of about fifty then, very vigorous and alert. He died some years ago of cancer I think. He died relatively young, I think he was less than seventy - shame. Er, where am I?

Roy Fowler: Well we're talking about Wembley and the people there. How many stages were there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Two.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Eddie Dryhurst: One large, one small.

Roy Fowler: Did it have a good reputation, Wembley? In terms of its - well you say it was efficient, how about the shops, the construction shops?

Eddie Dryhurst: They were quite good, yes it had quite a good name in the business. And of course some quite well known actors started there, like George Sanders for instance, Jimmy Mason.

Roy Fowler: Would you guess how many people were on the payroll?

Eddie Dryhurst: What including everybody?

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: The hourly paid people as well?

Roy Fowler: Well if we can sort of sort them out to some extent.

Eddie Dryhurst: Well I can only make a guess, I would think probably about seventy-five, eighty, something like that.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. That was a fully crewed.

Eddie Dryhurst: It was only geared to make one picture at a time.

Roy Fowler: Yes. But was there always continuity of production? Or were people laid off in between?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well usually there was continuity of production because you know Gartside had to watch his overheads and it was no good to have empty stages doing nothing. But there were times when a hiatus was inevitable for one reason or another. Then they used to drop the hourly paid people and pick them up again when they wanted them, which I thought was very unfair, and indeed it was.

Roy Fowler: The hourly paid people were who?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the chippies and the electricians and those sorts of people - plasterers, you know.

Roy Fowler: Yeah. And what sort of notice would they get? That day, or the end of the week?

Eddie Dryhurst: The end of the week. They'd say, "We don't want you any more, we'll let you know when we do." Which they did, if they wanted them again in three weeks, they called them in.

Roy Fowler: Was it er...

Eddie Dryhurst: That was when the ACTT was really starting to get born you know, because of those sorts of practices.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. But even ETU.

Eddie Dryhurst: Of course speaking as a producer I was against that sort of thing, I thought it was very unfair, and we would work until midnight very often just for a three and six supper voucher or something, which I thought was very unfair. But then again, when the unions came in I thought they'd gone from one extreme to the other. I became anti-union, I admit it, I was very much against it, ultimately, because of restricted practices, which I thought was sending production costs up over-manning and that sort of thing.

Roy Fowler: I don't want to stop you on it now because we'll certainly come onto that in detail at a certain stage, your connections with the unions. But let's stay with Fox for the moment. What you're saying in effect is that even those that had a union, the hourly paid people that had a union like ETU and the NATKE members, they just accepted the fact that they would be laid off at the end of it.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah well, they were glad to get taken on you know, work was very hard to find in those days.

Roy Fowler: That was both the state of the British film industry and also the depression?

Eddie Dryhurst: The country generally, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Hmm, okay. Right, what more is there to say about the studio, the lot?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very little more that I can think of really. We were very happy there. It was one of the happiest places I ever worked in.

Roy Fowler: We talked about the hourly paid people, how about the creative people, the production people and er...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah.

Roy Fowler: How many of those were actually under contract or er...?

Eddie Dryhurst: Very few I would say. I, for instance, was [not] - I worked on a weekly basis, I was paid a weekly salary and a week's notice on either side sort of thing. And we used to go on month after month, year after year, but we were not under contract.

Roy Fowler: So who was hired for the picture? Who was brought in for each individual picture?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well the director as a rule, the producer, very often, and the rest of the people were drawn from the staff, like me.

Roy Fowler: Now the producers, were they in effect line producers for Fox, or were they independent producers who had sold a deal to Fox?

Eddie Dryhurst: No they were freelance producers who were available as and when wanted.

Roy Fowler: In modern day terms were they entrepreneurial producers?

Eddie Dryhurst: No.

Roy Fowler: They were just line producers?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hmm.

Roy Fowler: Yeah, right - I don't mean 'just' line producers...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah I know what you mean.

Roy Fowler: But they were line producers.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes, they weren't men who set up their own pictures, no.

Roy Fowler: Okay. Well Al Parker, now was he a fixture there?

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh yes he was. I remember, it's funny how you remember little things, I remember being in a conference with Gartside one day and he said, "I must find a picture for Alfred, he's complaining of being short of money." Which gave me the impression that Al was somehow tied up with him in that venture in some way. He wasn't an ordinary freelance director, that's what I'm trying to say.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm. Parker had been quite a power in Hollywood hadn't he?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes he er...

Roy Fowler: He'd been one of Fairbanks's directors.

Eddie Dryhurst: I remember working with Lupino Lane at the old Educational Studios, at Santa Monica and Highland, which was next door to the Fairbanks Studios. And I can remember the sets for the - I forget the name of the picture, Black Pirate, which Al Parker directed. He was a waspish little man, as I said in my book he seemed to enjoy intimidating people, I didn't like him.

Roy Fowler: Yes I think he was universally loathed wasn't he by actors and by technicians.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was, but as I say in my book again, what he certainly had was a great flair for spotting talent, he had that all right. But he was an ignorant little man, you know, he ruined the King's English every time he opened his mouth!

Roy Fowler: Yeah. Any other people there at Fox that you remember before we get onto the films?

Eddie Dryhurst: I'm just trying to think. I remember a little man called Bernard Mainwaring, do you remember him?

Roy Fowler: I remember the name.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was a director.

Roy Fowler: Yes I've seen the name.

Eddie Dryhurst: Worked for dear old Lawrie Huntington who used to come in and direct pictures. A man called Manning Haynes.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Eddie Dryhurst: He was an old silent director, he used to come in quite regular. I think er - yeah "Director M Haynes", you've got his name down here.

Roy Fowler: Oh that's right, yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: I wrote the script for that apparently.

[Pause]

Roy Fowler: So they brought you in for a specific picture or...

Eddie Dryhurst: They brought me in originally to be first assistant director on one picture, it was called Dark World. The stars were Leon Quartermaine, you remember him?

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: The sister of Fay Compton, I forget her first name - it was quite a good cast in its day.

Roy Fowler: Another Compton was she?

Eddie Dryhurst: Hey?

Roy Fowler: Was she another Compton?

Eddie Dryhurst: Her sister.

Roy Fowler: But her name was also Compton?

Eddie Dryhurst: I'm not sure whether she called herself Compton or something else. [NB. She was called Viola Compton]

Roy Fowler: No it doesn't...

Eddie Dryhurst: She was a very nice woman, I know that. She was older than Fay I think.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Eddie Dryhurst: Compton McKenzie was the brother of course.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Eddie Dryhurst: Morton Stelten was another actor.

Roy Fowler: Oh yes, grand old man!

Eddie Dryhurst: He was, yes. We had quite good casts in those pictures.

Roy Fowler: Any idea what they got paid? Were you hiring actors at this stage then?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well Morton Stelten at that time was getting twenty-five pounds a day, I can tell you that because I have a very good reason for remembering it.

Roy Fowler: On a daily rate?

Eddie Dryhurst: Yeah. Well they'd very often get a flat sum and a daily rate if they...

Roy Fowler: If they went over? Ah hmm, okay. What would a flat sum be for this kind of film?

Eddie Dryhurst: Well it depended on the actor, obviously.

Roy Fowler: Well I was thinking of someone of his standing, a good character man.

Eddie Dryhurst: Oh of his standing - well I would think for a week, if they wanted him for a week, say three or four days out of a week, they'd probably pay him about two hundred and fifty quid, something like that.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm, not bad.

Eddie Dryhurst: No not bad in those days.

Roy Fowler: And chances are he was in something in the West End at the same time.

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes that's right.

Roy Fowler: So they did quite well...

Eddie Dryhurst: Yes.

Roy Fowler: We're almost to the end of this tape so rather than embark on...

Eddie Dryhurst: We can go out and have a breather then can't we?

Roy Fowler: Okay, I'll run it on and flip over.

[Tape Ends]