

HP0050 Robert Beatty-transcript.

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Interviewer Roy Fowler. Interview Date: 18th August 1988.

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Roy Fowler: You've been in this country 50 years now.

Robert Beatty: More now, I came over in 1937. I went to Toronto for a year and in 1939 I got a job understudying Ray Massey and walk on in *Idiot's Delight*, that ran till the end of '38, then I went back to Canada to visit my family for a few months, and then I came back and did *Grouse in June* at the Criterion right to the beginning of the war, I think we were the last play that closed in the West End.

Roy Fowler: You were almost from the beginning a West End actor.

Robert Beatty: I was. I regret that in some ways, I think it would have done me a lot of good to go into rep for 6 months or more. Because I always think it's a good training for people on the stage.

Roy Fowler: What did RADA give you?

Robert Beatty: Not a great deal, it did help me what was going on in the scene, what agents one should approach and go and see.

Roy Fowler: So it was more business oriented.

Robert Beatty: I think it was in some ways, perhaps I'm being unkind to the people who were there, perhaps one was subconsciously taking in the stuff when one is rehearsing stuff, doing plays, being directed by people at RADA, but I was only there about three terms I think.

Roy Fowler: The most noticeable thing that RADA gave a lot of people was the RADA accent, did they try.

Robert Beatty: I think they did try up to a point but it was a bit of a hopeless task really.

Roy Fowler: One of the most noticeable thing to me in British films at that time are the extraordinary cut glass accents which especially the women had. Real white telephone stuff. Those two shows in the West End. How did a rising young actor regard the motion pictures?

Robert Beatty: I was all for learning as much as I could, and when I was understudying Raymond Massey he was doing a thing called *Black Limelight* out at ABC Studios, Boreham Wood, I said any chance of getting the job of your stand in. He said you'll have to go along to the casting director. He said I'll speak to him. He came back the next night and said go along and see somebody called Anderson, and this chap obviously didn't want me to start with, he maybe had somebody else in mind. He said how tall are you? I said just about, Ray Massey might be about an inch taller than me, I was about 6 feet then. And he hummed and hawed around, so I went back that night and told Ray about it. I said he didn't seem too keen, oh that damn son of a bitch what does he think he's playing at! So he comes back the next day and I have to see him again and he still wasn't keen on me and he said you'll have to see, what was the name of the director of ABC, a little hunchback Jewish boy?

Roy Fowler: Walter Mycroft.

Robert Beatty: He said you'll have to see Mr Mycroft so we went up and Walter Mycroft was in the viewing theatre and we waited around for about half an hour and then Mr Mycroft came out with a couple of other guys, he said "oh Mr Mycroft this is the chap standing in for Mr Massey", he just sort of vaguely looked round and said alright and that was all that happened. I didn't sit down and talk to him, just alright, which made me feel a bit of a fool, I thought it was all unnecessary. Pointless.

Roy Fowler: Mycroft was a much-hated man. There was nobody who liked him, detested. He had a particularly unfortunate manner.

Robert Beatty: There was a story about him and some American actor who came practically to blows. He went down and Walter Mycroft was sitting, no, standing behind his desk, a very short man, and they apparently came to blows and the actor said look get out from behind that desk, get off that chair and come in front of this desk where I can hit you, and Walter Mycroft, said I am standing up, the other guy collapsed practically with shock, he was less than five foot particularly with this stooping thing.

Roy Fowler: Do you remember who it was.

Robert Beatty: No, I was just told it was an American actor, it was probably over finances.

Roy Fowler: *Black Limelight* then was your introduction, did you have a part in it?

Robert Beatty: No just stand-in and occasionally I'd walk through some of the positions for the other actors.

Roy Fowler: How did one get a part in a film, did you have an agent?

Robert Beatty: I'm trying to think if I had an agent.

Roy Fowler: Do you think being a stand-in for Massey provided an entrée?

Robert Beatty: I think it probably did, I'm sure it did, and it gave me a bit of experience because I'd never been inside a film studio before. And it was great for me.

Roy Fowler: Do you remember who directed that?

Robert Beatty: No. [They check reference books]. It was Paul Stein.

Roy Fowler: You're listed as being in the cast.

Robert Beatty: I'm almost certain I didn't play a part in it, I did double for Massey once or twice but I didn't speak for him

Roy Fowler: He had a very distinctive presence and voice, did that affect you at all?

Robert Beatty: I don't think so, but he was a nice man. I liked him very much.

Roy Fowler: Rather a formidable one.

Robert Beatty: I daresay he could be. But we always got on well together and he was very kind to me. He used to drive me up to the studios. He was living in Bolton Gardens then, he said I'll take you up to the studios, it was difficult getting trains and all that sort of thing, he said get yourself down to Bolton Gardens by such and such a time and you can drive up with me

which was great, very sweet of him, and he'd drive me back at night, back to the theatre.

Roy Fowler: Was it a continuing association?

Robert Beatty: Unfortunately, no. I looked him up in New York once, I think he was doing one of his Abraham Lincoln jobs.

Roy Fowler: I once worked with an odd director who used to do a great Ray Massey imitation...

Robert Beatty: I did a play with his son Daniel. That was about 1946 or 7.

Roy Fowler: You're listed in the film encyclopaedia as being in *Murder in Soho* in 1938 and that's listed as your first picture. Director Norman Lee, also Walter Mycroft, again Claude Friese-Green with Jack Larue, does that ring a bell?

RB: Only vaguely, it was a real B picture that thing. I remember Jack Larue by name, but I didn't think I'd met him.

Roy Fowler: The next one I have listed for you for 1940 is *After Mein Kampf, Mein Crime: The Story of Adolf Hitler*, again Elstree, Norman Lee, and it says Herbert Lom [uncredited but present. DS] and Peter Ustinov were in the cast.

Robert Beatty: A very small part whatever it was, because I might have joined the BBC at that time, I was working at night and living in London, eventually I got moved out to Evesham after the BBC got bombed, but that was towards the end of 1940, we got moved out somewhere round October.

Roy Fowler: You were part of the BBC rep?

Robert Beatty: No, I was reading news. I was doing Radio Newsreel. I was in it for about a year and a half.

Roy Fowler: This was auntie unbending from the dinner jacket and black-tie image.

Robert Beatty: Very much so.

Roy Fowler: Were you a colleague of Wilfred Pickles?

Robert Beatty: Not really, I used to run into him occasionally.

Roy Fowler: Were you part of that loosening up of the image?

Robert Beatty: I suppose that's possible. But being overseas staff, they wanted an accent which was a bit more acceptable. It was supposed to be the North American transmission. So, I wasn't really in newsreel as far as Britain was concerned, CBC, Canada took it and used to broadcast live, like we would be broadcasting at, say, three o'clock in the morning and CBC would take it for say ten o'clock in the evening. With the five-hour's difference, and it used to go out live on CBC which was quite a consolation to my family. He's still alive, he hasn't been bombed.

Roy Fowler: I should ask you whether you have any recollections of Elstree when you went out there in 1938?

Robert Beatty: The place was completely new to me, I had nothing to compare it with, I just took it in my stride that you do this and you do that and it was quite friendly, people on the whole.

Roy Fowler: Did you find the directors you worked with competent?

Robert Beatty: Yes, but there again I had nothing to compare with.

Roy Fowler: I was thinking in comparison to the West End directors.

Robert Beatty: There's always a difference between a film and theatre director.

Roy Fowler: How did you accommodate this difference in technique yourself?

Robert Beatty: Probably instinctively, and probably overacting much too much, because I never had a director who told me to, Carol Reed was the first one that really taught me something about film acting, he was a marvellous director, you'd do something and he'd say that's great Bob, but just cut it down a little bit, this was in *Odd Man Out*, I eventually got to the point where I wasn't acting at all, just saying it, but when it came out on the screen I could see exactly what he was up to. Underplaying, especially in close up. He was marvellous.

Roy Fowler: We're coming into the period when those terrible quota films of the 30s were being displaced and replaced by much more serious movies of the war. The next one I've got is, 1941, *Dangerous Moonlight*.

Robert Beatty: There again a small part, I think I was playing an American reporter, this was when I would come down from Evesham on my days off and do a couple of day's work if I could find it, because the BBC certainly weren't paying me very much money.

Roy Fowler: How much were the BBC paying?

Robert Beatty: At the most £18 a week.

Roy Fowler: And that was a weekly contract?

Robert Beatty: Yes, but I was paid £18 a week, possibly less, might have been £15.

Roy Fowler: It wasn't badly [paid] generally.

Robert Beatty: But I had to pay my own rail fare down. I had to stay overnight, I used to stay with friends, do a day's work in the studio and then go back to Evesham again, I usually missed out on a day's sleep, because I would be working all night in Evesham, catch a train in the morning, work the whole day, and come back and on schedule.

Roy Fowler: *Dangerous Moonlight* was directed by Brian Desmond Hurst, he was a wild man in many ways.

Robert Beatty: I never got to know him that well, it was one or two days.

Roy Fowler: The producer was an American, [William] Bill Sistrom, do you remember him at all?

Robert Beatty: I remember the name but I don't recall him.

Roy Fowler: The script was by Terence Young.

Robert Beatty: I think he was a protegee of Brian Desmond Hurst. I don't know if there was any of that connection, Brian was gay, but he may just have been a protegee of Brian's.

Roy Fowler: He had lots of protegees.

Robert Beatty: But Terence was quite a nice chap. I have a feeling I worked with him somewhere down the line again. He still works, doesn't he?

Roy Fowler: He's resident in either the States or France, he has made pictures in the States in recent years, very, very, bad ones, he made an enormous amount of money out of some of the Bonds, but for some reason he's a rotten director now.

Robert Beatty: I remember meeting Richard Burton out in Nice and he was making a film which I think Terence Young was directing or producing and then the whole thing went up the spout, they ran out of money, I know Richard was rather upset because he had to pay off various people himself, that he got stuck with. Not very much, but some of the people who worked for him like his make-up man, he had to pay them personally.

Roy Fowler: I remember once on a film called *Triple Cross* which Terence Young made at Victorine, I was down there, Christopher Plummer was in it and Yul Brynner who was a great mate of mine and the three of us got outrageously drunk one night and Yul would occasionally just disappear and play a scene or two and come back even drunker. I remember that through a haze but fairly clearly. The next one is *49th Parallel*.

Robert Beatty: I did a scene where I was supposed to be the Royal Canadian Mounted Police finding the body, somebody.

Roy Fowler: Was it Olivier?

Robert Beatty: It could have been. But for some unknown reason they cut that scene and I ended just dubbing a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman out at Banff, in the Rockies, telling them to look carefully at their neighbours, this was towards the end when they were on the run. Eric Portman and somebody else.

Roy Fowler: You were there in Canada on the shoot?

Robert Beatty: No, I just dubbed it here, they shot it in Canada I think, it's this scene of this RCMP practically in the hotel at Banff telling people to look at their neighbour, they were describing what they looked like, these two German mariners on the run.

Roy Fowler: I thought you said you had a part.

Robert Beatty: That was shot here. Just an Indian interior.

Roy Fowler: Any memories of the people on that. Mickey Powell was the director.

Robert Beatty: Pressburger I think. I did another film. Mickey Powell, was he a difficult man? He would take a hell of a lot of takes.

Roy Fowler: I'm not too sure about that, I used to see him as a visitor on a couple of films, I remember *A Matter of Life and Death*, it was being shot at Denham, I don't know if he was too extravagant on takes, he was very unpopular with the unit.

Robert Beatty: I wonder if I was mixing him up with somebody else. I think it was Mickey, he would start riding an actor without too much experience and clout and he would keep going over and over saying do this and do that, and the actor not being able to mouth a word in the end and being screamed at, reduced the poor guy to tears, absolute silence, he couldn't even speak.

Roy Fowler: Broadly there are two kinds of directors, there are the very gentle people like Carol Reed, who give nothing but help and are concerned for what's going on, and there are other people who indulge their ego. Mickey Powell is hopeless with actors, there are no performances in his films but technically they're very interesting.

Robert Beatty: I'm almost certain it was Mickey Powell who reduced this guy, I thought, the sod how can you do this?

Roy Fowler: Sidelight: Did you enjoy re-voicing things like that?

Robert Beatty: I didn't mind. I was happy to get any damn thing.

Roy Fowler: The next one is another Powell/Pressburger, *One of Aircraft is Missing*.

Robert Beatty: Not much of a part. It was one of these one or two-day parts.

Roy Fowler: We come now to *San Demetrio*.

Robert Beatty: I think Bob Hamer started that one, and Charlie Crichton took over.

Roy Fowler: Charlie Frend has the director credit.

Robert Beatty: I mean Charlie Frend.

Roy Fowler: Robert Hamer is listed as associate producer. Ernie Palmer was the cameraman.

Robert Beatty: All very pleasant people, everybody was very sweet down at Ealing. It was a real family atmosphere down at Ealing. They ate together in the same dining room, there was a site where the actors and directors ate and the other crew, maybe cheaper, I can't remember, but it was all cosy and warm, really lovely atmosphere.

Roy Fowler: You've probably heard it's been called Mr Balcon's Academy for Young Gentlemen, a very proper British middle-class atmosphere. Have you read Charles Barr's book about Ealing Studios - I'll show it to you later. It might be useful to talk about the individuals there.

Robert Beatty: I never really got to know the technicians that well. I got to know the director and cameraman, but [...] never intimately connected, you never got to know them intimately.

Robert Beatty:

Roy Fowler: Now, Hamer was one of the great unfulfilled talents because he had this problem with alcohol and he was a great loss. You knew him, what are your memories of him?

Robert Beatty: Very pleasant. I'm not certain whether he started on *San Demetrio* and Charles Frennd took over, it was one of those bloody films, and I've a feeling it was that one, Hamer started it and then had to give up, whether it was because of illness, alcohol or what I'm not sure.

Roy Fowler: Let's think about the other Ealing films. The next one on my list is *Against the Wind*, that was Crichton and Sidney Cole was associate producer, then it was the *Gentle Gunman*. *The Square Ring*.

[Robert Beatty] I always got very well with them. Basil had a way of saying bloody awful actor, bloody awful actor, muttering away to himself and he could be a little unkind to the people he didn't really like, didn't think were very good actors, but I always got on well with him.

Roy Fowler: *San Demetrio* would it be fair to say was the one in which you first really made your mark.

Robert Beatty: Yes, it was a reasonable size part.

Roy Fowler: In a way, it's typical of the parts you played around this time, you were the symbolic American.

Robert Beatty: Exactly.

Roy Fowler: In propaganda films being made for foreign and domestic consumption.

Robert Beatty: There weren't so many American actors over here at that time so I naturally got thought about.

Roy Fowler: How did it come about, did the call come out of the blue?

Robert Beatty: No idea. Whether my agent got it, I can't even remember who my agent was, probably Al Parker, he was a character.

Roy Fowler: Ealing as I remember had three stages.

Robert Beatty:

Robert Beatty: Sounds about right.

Roy Fowler: Was *San Demetrio* a big film in terms of the studio.

Robert Beatty: Fairly big. They had a model stage as well, which might have been the fourth stage, model of the boats and things.

Roy Fowler: If you look at it now it looks very studio bound.

Robert Beatty: It's so long since I've seen it. We couldn't get out on location then because there was a war going on. All the stuff of the rowing, and the waves coming over, that was all done on the set with water chutes, when the boat was in heavy weather and water, coming down.

Roy Fowler: You worked in a variety of studios. BIP lot, ABPC lot, British National, Denham and now you're at Ealing. Did you have a favourite studio to work in?

Robert Beatty: Definitely Ealing. Thinking back. I always enjoyed myself there.

Roy Fowler: Did you find technically they brought as much attention and care as Denham?

Robert Beatty: Yes.

Roy Fowler: What about the sets, did they impress you?

Robert Beatty: Very good indeed. But I was very naive in many respects as far as film making was concerned. I, possibly, I wouldn't know. They struck me the sets were good.

Roy Fowler: And it was an efficient studio to work in.

Robert Beatty: Seemingly, yes.

Roy Fowler: Can you remember any characteristics of any of the people?

Robert Beatty: The only thing I remember about Charlie Crichton is that he was a big fisherman, he was very strong on fishing. And when we did *Against the Wind*, we were on location in Belgium down in the Ardennes and whenever there was a Sunday or possibly

Robert Beatty:

because it was during the summer, when we'd finished shooting he'd get hold of his fishing rod and go down and cast out into a stream. He tried to teach me to cast, not very successfully. He loved that.

Roy Fowler: He's just finished another picture, *A Fish Called Wanda*.

Robert Beatty: Do you know anything about it?

Roy Fowler: No, just that John Cleese had to have a co-director credit until they finished it because the insurance company was convinced that that Charlie Crichton would drop dead.

Robert Beatty: How old is Charlie?

Robert Beatty:

Roy Fowler: About 77. As soon as the picture was finished Cleese gave up his co-director credit. [section about some older people still working] How about Micky Balcon himself?

Robert Beatty: Always very pleasant. He asked me to open a fete which was either his church fete or a local thing and they asked him down, and he sent the car for me and I had lunch with him and Lady Balcon, we went over and I opened a fete and I went around and did some lucky number stuff and I won a pig. I didn't know what to do, living in a flat in London. Mickey said I'll look after it for you, then it turned out this poor pig was different from his pigs and he had to separate them. He couldn't put him in with his pigs, it turned out they fight all the time, don't ask me anything about pigs but he knew the various varieties, so he had the job of looking after this pig and not even being able to push it in with his pigs. Eventually it came up to the point where it was ready to be killed. I said you must have half of it so he very sweetly gave me half a pig and I took it down to my butcher. He was very sweet as far as I was concerned.

Roy Fowler: Did you talk shop with him?

Robert Beatty: Not really. Superficial.

Roy Fowler: Was this post war?

Robert Beatty: No, post war, but austerity.

Roy Fowler: Did you know Michael Trueman?

Robert Beatty: I knew him but never worked with him. But you got to know everybody in the studio. Maybe at lunch time and things like that.

Roy Fowler: And Sid Cole?

Robert Beatty: Yes. Sid was around.

Roy Fowler: Sid is involved in this project. And he is still working.

Robert Beatty: Who was the guy very foreign who was around?

Roy Fowler: Alberto Cavalcanti.

Robert Beatty: I think he fell on hard times, he worked out in Brazil I think, he left England and went out to Brazil, and then I ran into him over here once and he looked as if he was getting rather hard up, he was trying to promote something, I think it fell through, I don't know what happened to him, he must be dead now. He was nice enough guy, I felt sorry for him in the end. He had quite a good reputation, and he was searching round trying to raise money.

Roy Fowler: It's a very ungrateful business.

Robert Beatty: But I think it's probably less that way than it is in the States. You're only as good as your last film. And if that was a failure, good bye.

Roy Fowler: Here it's mixed. Some authors are survivors, some go to the wall. Then there are the young Turks, some of whom are very talented. [discussion on the origin of the phrase young Turks...]

Roy Fowler: Well Bob, the next on the list is *Appointment with Crime* John Harlow, I think that was a filmed play. That was at British National. The producer was Louis Jackson. He ran British National for Lady Yule.

Robert Beatty: Oh, Louis. He ran it for Lady Yule.

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Roy Fowler: You were under contract you said.

Robert Beatty: That was in Lady Yule's day. We never used to see much of Lady Yule. I did about two or three and then she decided to sell up.

I remember one Sunday somebody mentioned something, tried to talk me out of them not paying me any more money, the whole thing folded up.

Roy Fowler: Was Al Parker your agent then?

Robert Beatty: Yes.

They should have paid me something, in the end they convinced me it wouldn't go down well with the rest of the film industry if I insisted on being paid some money I thought I was due. I gave in and didn't get any money. I did about two or three films. That was one of them, I can't remember what the others were. *Wings of Danger*, I remember Zachary Scott was in that and the little girl who married Sean Connery, Diane Cilento. And Zachary Scott had a very deep voice and what they did in the end, I was trying to do an Irish accent so my voice went up like that rather high, and instead of in the dubbing at the end of taking a few, some of the lower notes out of him, they took the lower notes out of him and I was talking up here, I ended up with an even higher voice, way up here. They cut out my lower frequencies as well, I sounded terrible.

Roy Fowler: That sort of thing is unforgiveable.

Robert Beatty: I didn't know it until the end.

Roy Fowler: It is probably a reflection on the way they ran the studio where money was the principal concern. A real cheapo outfit. you talk to other people at the dubbing theatre at

Denham and Pinewood and they were vitally concerned with what they did. They brought not just technicality to it but artistic

Roy Fowler: *Green Fingers*.

Robert Beatty: That was where I was playing an osteopath. it had quite a good little story line, people used to mention it a lot, a good little film.

Roy Fowler: This is part of your contract period at British National. Was it an exclusive contract?

Robert Beatty: I can't tell you, I only made about three for British National.

Roy Fowler: Have you become more a motion picture actor?

Robert Beatty: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Are you still doing stage work?

Robert Beatty: Once I went over into television and did that thing *Dial 999* once you were on television some people didn't want to know you, those were the days when you were in competition, if you were starring in a television thing some people didn't want to know you and once I'd been on television for 37 episodes, television didn't want to know me either, because the face became too well known, it was repeated two or three times. I had a lean period from '59 on. Fortunately, I was able to go back on do theatre and voicing documentaries, and that went on for nearly 10 years, it was a tough time.

Roy Fowler: I'm curious about *Odd Man Out* and working with Carol Reed.

Robert Beatty: Certainly. Carol was marvellous and he taught me a lot I'm sure about how not to overact on films. Very sympathetic person.

Roy Fowler: Who's idea was it to cast you.

Robert Beatty: I don't know.

Roy Fowler: Did it come as a strain to play Irish?

Robert Beatty: A bit. I went along to an actor who I knew, who I'd been playing with in *The Story of San Demetrio* was on stage but it wasn't called *San Demetrio*, O'Rourke, he helped me to get

an Irish accent and once you were with all the rest of the Irish actors it came more easily.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of the film. It had a very long shooting schedule.

Robert Beatty: I suppose it must have. We were in Belfast on location.

Roy Fowler: Do you remember why it took so long, was Carol Reed so painstaking, or were there problems?

Robert Beatty:

Robert Beatty: As far as I knew there weren't any problems.

Roy Fowler: They didn't keep rewriting the script?

Robert Beatty: They might have. I disappear about one third of the way through. Then they ran into the famous actor who was a bit of a drunk.

Roy Fowler: Robert Newton.

Robert Beatty: They had problems there, that might have slowed them down.

Roy Fowler: He had a small part.

Roy Fowler: Fabulous cast, a lot of them were the Abbey

Robert Beatty: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Was it happy from the actor's point of view.

Robert Beatty: As far as I know. I was happy enough. I wasn't on it all that long. Then I was off a bit, and then we had to do some location work in Belfast.

Roy Fowler: It was a problem picture for somebody because it went way over schedule and way over budget and it was the reason Carol Reed left the Rank Organisation. It was the last picture he made for Rank and he then went to Korda. There was at this time almost a lack of discipline, almost a lack of concern for getting things out at a sensible price and on a sensible budget.

It doesn't matter now when you look at the films but it made an awful lot of difference to the people who were putting up the money. Bob Krasker was the cameraman. Do you remember him?

Robert Beatty: A little but very good cameraman, he caught the key of that film so well.

Roy Fowler: I think our greatest black and white cameraman.

Robert Beatty: Did he die?

Roy Fowler: Yes, two or three years ago.

Robert Beatty: I suppose it was the first time I was in a really good film in a way.

Robert Beatty:

Roy Fowler: For the part.

Robert Beatty: The part isn't that good.

Roy Fowler: It's noticeable.

Robert Beatty: The guy who gets Johnny out of the air raid shelter and leads the policeman to the street. They were all nice people.

Roy Fowler: There's a film in there called *Counterblast*.

Robert Beatty: That sounds like one of the British National ones to me. Very much a B picture title.

Roy Fowler: 1951: a couple of important sounding movies, one's *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, directed by Raoul Walsh. What was it like working with him?

Robert Beatty: He's not an actor's director. He's a great action director. And I remember once meeting Humphrey Bogart at a party here and he said what did you think of Raoul Walsh and I said I don't think he's a great actor's director, he's all for action, he'll always be looking if the sails filled, rightly enough, and Bogart said let me tell you something, I was doing this film with him and he mentioned this actress' name who I can't remember, we had a long scene of about four minutes and in the background were a lot of houses, chimneys and that sort of stuff, little miniatures, the way they build them up in the background, and there was smoke coming out of the chimneys, and he said we got about three quarters of the way through this scene and we both thinking it's going great and suddenly Raoul says cut, and we both look up and say what's wrong and he said the smoke's stopped coming out of that chimney. Typical. Everything had to be going on, it didn't matter how the scene was going on with the two actors. Bogart and this actress thought it was going great.

Roy Fowler: It's an interesting story because I never think of Raoul Walsh as that visual a director, very gutsy, lots of action, relationships, maybe not performances, the relationship of men to men or men to women but I don't think of his films as being visually distinguished. Could be wrong about that. But you're saying that was something which preoccupied him on *Hornblower*.

Robert Beatty:

Robert Beatty: Certainly, he wanted to see that the sails were all filled. And that sort of stuff. He was not a sympathetic director, there's the scene get on with it.

Roy Fowler: That was Peck.

Robert Beatty: He was a lovely guy.

Roy Fowler: Did he get any help from Hawkes?

Robert Beatty: I don't know. Peck pretty well knew his job by this time . . . Hawkes didn't really care how the scene was going.

Roy Fowler: Walsh goes back to the early days. he was in *Birth of a Nation*. You say Peck was a nice guy to work with.

Robert Beatty: Very pleasant, quiet, laid back, as he usually is most of the time.

Roy Fowler: What are your memories of that particular film, because it was a high budget, using up sterling presumably.

Robert Beatty: We had a bit of location down at the south of France. I remember sitting in the makeup room with Greg and he'd just bought himself a book, and I said what do you have there Greg, he said a new book, the only bloody book I could find in English, and I looked and it was "My life and loves" by Frank Harris, and it was just about the time, you had to be very careful about the books you brought into England, because if they were at all pornographic, and somebody had shown me this book only a few weeks before, and I knew where there was practically this whole page of almost like pornography, certainly very strong stuff, his eyes got wider and wider, I said for heaven's sake don't try and take that book back into England, otherwise you might be in trouble.

Roy Fowler: They still banned "Ulysses" and "Lady Chatterley's Lover" in those days.

Robert Beatty: Greg couldn't have been more surprised. He'd only just got into it, suddenly it got very hot stuff.

Robert Beatty:

Roy Fowler: I've never read it. Any more memories of *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, you say you were in the South of France, did they have the ships down there?

Robert Beatty: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Where had they been built?

Robert Beatty: No idea. I think they must have bought one of the ships.

Roy Fowler: The sea battles were stages.

Robert Beatty: No, it was more when they were trying to get back to England, they take over a Dutch ship of some sort. There's three of us, James Robertson Justice, Greg and myself and we get on this ship and take over. And sail the ship back. It's towards the end of the film.

Roy Fowler: The battle were miniatures.

Robert Beatty: I think so.

Roy Fowler: *Hornblower* was probably your first Technicolor film and that was in the days of the massive three strip camera, did that affect the actor?

Robert Beatty: It didn't worry me. It probably worried the operator.

Roy Fowler: It was tough to operate and it needed a great deal of light.

Robert Beatty: There was the woman from Technicolor, she used to be around at all times.

Roy Fowler: What do you remember?

Robert Beatty: I just remember her being around and being concerned about everything and worrying because I think Technicolor had just come in then.

Roy Fowler: No, it had just two years to go, Eastmancolor.

Robert Beatty: Perhaps she was worried about what Eastmancolor were going to do.

Roy Fowler: Legend has it that it was Dr Kalmus' way of keeping her away from him. And, therefore it was in all the Technicolor contracts that she was the Technicolor consultant and she had a right to interfere, she would attempt to stipulate what colour the set would be and the costumes would be. They maintained very rigorous control over the process but it had been operating since 1935. *The Magic Box*, the festival of Britain film.

Robert Beatty: That was, I didn't like myself in that when I saw it. I spent more time in the makeup – I had a hair piece on me.

Roy Fowler: What did you play?

Robert Beatty: Beaverbrook . A younger Beaverbrook, addressing some meeting of some sort.

Roy Fowler: I haven't seen it for so long.

Robert Beatty: Last time I saw it I thought I looked bloody awful. But, being one of the few Canadians around, fortunately I don't have to do much walking round because I'm too tall for him really. They had this hairpiece thing on and I spent a hell of a long time in the make-up room, about four hours in the make-up room, About two hours doing the bloody shots and that sort of stuff and the rest of the time getting rid of the make-up. One day.

Roy Fowler: It was kind of a gesture, the people who made the film.

Robert Beatty: Did you ever know Beaverbrook?

Roy Fowler: Was it the Boultings?

Roy Fowler: John Boulting directed it. The producer is credited to Ronnie Neame and Jack Cardiff shot it.

Robert Beatty: I remember a car came to pick me up and I was living in Hampstead at that time. I was late for some unknown reason, I was just having my breakfast, the driver can wait five or ten minutes, I eventually went out and John Boulting was sitting in the bloody car, it's not too good to keep your director waiting, I was very embarrassed about the whole thing, I thought it was just the driver. I did apologise, he was a great sweetheart.

Roy Fowler: What do you remember about John?

Roy Fowler: That's all I can remember he was a very sweet sort of guy.

Roy Fowler: Did you work with them on anything else?

Robert Beatty: No.

Roy Fowler: Did you meet Beaverbrook?

Robert Beatty: No.

Roy Fowler: I knew his daughter and grandson quite well. I asked Johnny once and said what was it like to be the grandson of the Beaver and he said it was a bit strange making an appointment to see your grandfather, so he was quite a tough character within the family even. And certainly Mrs Kidd his daughter was a very tough lady.

Robert Beatty: The Kidds came from my home town.

Roy Fowler: He was a nice man, Kidd.

Robert Beatty: I never met him.

Roy Fowler: The next one is *The Gentle Gunman* which is Dearden [and] Relph.

Robert Beatty: Very pleasant, mostly done in Dublin. Both that and *Odd Man Out* wouldn't stand a chance of being made today because they present gunmen as rather sympathetic characters, it shows how times and propoganda have changed. It's certainly true of *Odd Man Out*.

Robert Beatty: Except that they all came to a rather sticky end.

Roy Fowler: But nevertheless, they're portrayed as heroic figures.

Robert Beatty: Sympathetic, heroic figures.

Roy Fowler: You have anything to add to Dearden and Relph?

Robert Beatty: Not really except as I say they were part of that..

Roy Fowler: Ealing camaraderie.

Robert Beatty: I wish I had some quickie little stories about them but I haven't.

Roy Fowler: They both had an edge as people, they were a little more than tough, abrasive almost both of them, would that be fair to say?

Robert Beatty: Possibly, Dearden used to go around saying bloody actor.

Roy Fowler: To you.

Robert Beatty: No, he and I got on alright together. But somebody who maybe wasn't too hot, but he didn't say it to the guy, Bernie Lee we'd get the shots in before lunch time and Bernie would be pissed or he couldn't he would take somebody else and try and get Bernie away from the pub so he couldn't have a drink. But he was a lovely actor, lovely guy too. But he drank too much.

Roy Fowler: That seems to have been the occupational hazard in those times. It's drugs now. I neither approve or disapprove, I find it very wasteful, self-destructive, but to some extent it is understandable with the pressures, the tension, achieving a high and then coming down from a high. I worry about kids. As they grow up they are exposed to these things and are in enormous danger.

Roy Fowler: *Albert RN*. Anything particular?

Robert Beatty: Not really. The technical guy on that, he was an ex-naval guy, he was supposed to be there advising them technically, and who was the director, Lewis Gilbert, he used to play tricks on this guy. He'd say could you do this further away, and they got him way at the back of the stage, up into the gantry, we were splitting ourselves, Lewis was a great practical joker, the poor guy never knew he was being taken for a ride, being made fun of. Any Germans which were called they'd get him to do it, no a bit further back. That's not quite right, would you go up the steps there. That's better.

Roy Fowler: Was he being anti-German?

Robert Beatty: No this guy was British, he was just taking the mickey.

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

Robert Beatty: Yes, he liked his practical jokes.

Roy Fowler: But they were benign jokes

Robert Beatty: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Because Hitchcock was notorious for his unkind jokes. *Another Shore*.

Robert Beatty: That was another Irish one. It was Ealing. I'm supposed to be a little guy sitting on the steps of the Bank of Ireland waiting for an accident to happen, some rich person in

their car and I would rush out and rescue them and they out of the kindness of their heart would give me a lot of money and I would be able to go off and dream my dreams in some south Pacific island and I get mixed up with Stanley Holloway and Margaret Lister and all that lot. I have to have this little dog with me sitting on the steps. They asked for this dog here, this dog was supposed to be able to turn backwards somersaults, sit up and bark and do all that kind of thing. They said they couldn't have it ready, when we come back from Ireland the dog will be ready,

so we got a similar dog in Ireland used to just sit on the steps, we get back home and the trained dog is duly presented and the damn puppy couldn't even sit up let alone turn backward somersaults, there was a bit of consternation with the people who trained the dog. In the end they got it to sit up, that was about all. It was all the dog would do, and speak, woof woof. That didn't go down too well with Ealing studios I can assure you.

Roy Fowler: The film has sunk without trace.

Robert Beatty: It's been on television, a good cast.

Roy Fowler: It sounds as if they were getting a bit out of touch with subject matter. it sounds a bit fey and twee.

Robert Beatty: It was a little and it didn't go down well with the critics, they wouldn't believe it. The English critics wouldn't believe an Irishman would sit on the steps like that, but believe me some Irishmen have done it and would do it. But they just couldn't believe in the story.

Roy Fowler: It's a matter of whether it's of interest to people at large as a film subject.

Robert Beatty: A sweet little story in its way but unbelievable. We had a lot of fun and very pleasant location.

Roy Fowler: A couple of more pictures in '53, *Man on a Tightrope* and *The Square Room*.

Robert Beatty: *Man on a Tightrope* was a nice picture, made in studios just south of Munich, I was there for about 10 days, Freddie March was very sweet

Roy Fowler: Was that Kazan?

Robert Beatty: There is another very good director. They were on location, because most of my stuff was in the studio, when I arrived in Munich they were on location and I had to go down, and he went over the script with me and he'd suggest things and tell me how he wanted it, rather flamboyant character.

Roy Fowler: How did he approach giving an actor directions, would he perform it for you or come to it more indirectly?

Robert Beatty: More indirect but he certainly gave me the idea how I wanted it, a flamboyant character.

Roy Fowler: And it made sense to you.

Robert Beatty: Yes, and Freddy was a wonderful character to work with, he gave me, very sweetly, one night after the first filming, I got back in the make-up room he said it's nice to be working with a professional again, I think some of the people he had on the film, there was one girl who's name I'd forgotten, but I'd gone down and watched them filming the day before and they were up to about 39 takes on one shot . We used to do ours in one or two takes and Freddy was very sweet about that.

Roy Fowler: Were you aware of the political implications of the film. It's a cold war film.

Robert Beatty: I was trying to get out, I was behind the Iron Curtain.

Roy Fowler: Yes, it was also Kazan purchasing re admission to Hollywood after being before the House for un-American [Activities]

Robert Beatty: I don't think I was aware of that.

Roy Fowler: It was him trying to show he was an anti-Russian

Robert Beatty: That was committed to the cold war, he was making his peace with the Hollywood establishment, the blacklist and House of un-American activities. But that wasn't really known at the time.

Robert Beatty: I wasn't aware of it. I found him a delightful director to work with, very imaginative, he'd give you bits of business.

Roy Fowler: Congenial man.

Robert Beatty: Exceedingly, he always seemed to get on with the cast.

Roy Fowler: His autobiography has just been published. He comes across as a very angry man.

Robert Beatty: He didn't come across as angry when we were doing this film.

Roy Fowler: It was a very very fraught period in his life. He'd named names in front of the committee, people who'd been in the communist party with him and an act of abasement was to make a cold war thriller. This was ritually which was required.

Robert Beatty: I'm trying to remember what was the name of the very right wing actor, he had a smallish part, he came over on the plane. On *Man on a Tightrope*, the wind-up party, I remember the day before they came round, they asked Freddy[Frederic March], I was having lunch with him, they said would you be master of ceremonies because a lot of the crew were going to be playing accordions and various acts they could do. He said oh no I'm no good at that, so they went to Adolph Menjou and he accepted. So the night comes along, I'm sitting beside Freddy and his wife is beside him and Freddy is getting a bit pissed, Adolf gets up and he starts talking, I want to give a big greeting to my old friend, and he says my old fanny, he's only known him for a day, and he introduced another one, a big welcome for so and so we all love, and he said shit, what the hell does he know about it, he's only been on the film for a week and he muttered on and on getting louder and louder and Florence was nudging him saying keep quiet and he got louder and louder and in the end she took him out, she said come on Freddy we've got to get out of here, and she dragged him from behind the head table and took him home.

But it was a bit embarrassing for Adolph Menjou but I don't think Freddy would have done it if he hadn't been drunk but he obviously didn't like him, probably he was much too right wing for Freddy.

Roy Fowler: I think that was a time when people carried their convictions very close to the surface. Did Menjou make political propaganda?

Robert Beatty: Not to my knowledge. I didn't see much of him, the only scenes I had was Freddy. It was slightly embarrassing in a way, he was embarrassing Menjou, he had turned the job down in the first place. He was doing it alright but Freddy didn't like him.

Roy Fowler: The McCarthy period didn't really come over to this country.

Robert Beatty: Not to my knowledge.

Roy Fowler: Incipiently, it may be beginning now, in that any opposition is rubbished and dismantled. The Arts Council no longer subsidises many things they used to. How about *The Square Ring, Out of the Clouds*.

Robert Beatty: That was before Heathrow was built, all that was done was the runways then, we used to have little Nissan huts. There was hardly an operation at all and they were just beginning to build the main building. There was a heck of a lot of glare, because of all this white concrete from the runway when you were trying to play a scene and you got all this glare off the white runway, you had a hell of a job trying to keep your eyes open.

Roy Fowler: In the 10 or 15 years you've been making films have you perceived any kind of change, had they become more professional?

Robert Beatty: I think so. And having to keep their costs down. There was a seemingly casual way, especially with the cameramen, the lighting cameramen, some of them could be very slow, somewhere quite good, Otto Heller was always fast, he was boom boom boom. Some of the other ones seemed to go on forever, you'd be sitting around the set.

Roy Fowler: Otto was Austrian. He told me once how he came into the business. I'd assumed that he was. [resumes on next tape].

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ROBERT BEATTY

SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Roy Fowler: I assume he wasn't romancing and it was a true story but he said he was in the Austrian army in 1916 when Franz Josef died and he was given a camera as one of a great many people and told to film the funeral procession and that was the story. A lovely cameraman.

Robert Beatty: Possibly they're more efficient now and get on with the job quicker, there was a certain casual approach.

Roy Fowler: Was it paced and people were stopping for tea and cake or whether this is a story we now all tell, I mean certainly of my recollections of working when I was very much younger we seemed to work very hard but probably time was wasted.

Robert Beatty: I think so. The only thing I can remember, talking about unions, it was getting late one afternoon and the set had to be changed; they were trying to get this shot in before breaking up for the day. It needed a lot of prop stuff to be shifted around, I knew one little ornament had to be put on the piano, I thought I might as well do it, I picked up this ornament and put it on the piano, what do you think you're doing, I'm just trying to help, who the bloody hell do you think you are, that's my job, trying to do me out of a job, all that kind of stuff going on, I don't think they're quite as bad as that now. I was just trying to be helpful.

Roy Fowler: I began directing in the early 50s in the States and I organised the prop people there and it was exactly the same thing, and I was the director let alone an actor. If you touched anything, if you had a good prop man you'd say would you mind if I move it, you always had to ask.

Robert Beatty: I didn't even think of that, whether he was head propman or not, I was just trying to be helpful and let's get on so we can get this scene in before the break.

Roy Fowler: Harry Miller, the dubbing editor, I was telling you about how he said if the picture bulb blew on a movieola the studio electrician had to come and replace it whereas if the bulb in the exciter lamp for the sound system in the movieola blew you had to have a sound maintenance man change the bulb. Nonsense and

there were disputes over it all the time, it was real Fred Kyte stuff, if you remember *I'm Alright Jack*.

Robert Beatty: When I did the Mau Mau film, *Something of Value*, the whole camera crew were people who seemed to work together, in England it might be the same lighting cameraman but it wouldn't necessarily be the same operator, but there they seem to have an ongoing relationship so they worked terribly well together, each knew exactly how the other worked which was good.

Roy Fowler: Here, especially people on the camera, but not only people on the camera, were ambitious and upwardly mobile, they saw themselves moving into the next job on, so if you were a focus puller you saw yourself as an operator and then lighting cameraman, in the States, especially those working at say Metro or Warners, they were very content to be a camera operator all their working lives, so you had 60 year old operators, marvellous at what they did and that was all they wanted to be.

Robert Beatty: That was the answer in some ways, it did lead to an efficient camera crew though. They knew exactly how the other worked.

Roy Fowler: Orson Welles used to say there were certain things he could only do in Los Angeles for that reason especially on the camera, the enormously elaborate moving shots, only a Hollywood crew had the expertise to do this. Is it worth mentioning *Tarzan and the Last Safari*, that was an American director, Bruce Humberstone.

Robert Beatty: He took over, something happened at the last moment, somebody else was going to do it,

Roy Fowler: John Croydon is down as producer.

Robert Beatty: I've a feeling Raoul Walsh was going to do it and then something happened, we had to wait for about a week and then Bruce Humberstone came over, but he was quite a pleasant bloke I looked him up when I went out to do something and he came over and took me out and gave me a ride around LA and showed me the sights, he was very sweet.

Roy Fowler: Was that a foreign location for *Tarzan*?

Robert Beatty: No, it was all done in the studio, Yolande Donlan, she was in it.

Roy Fowler: The next thing I have is your Los Angeles trip, *Something of Value*, Richard Brooks and Pandro Burman, they would

both be interesting people to talk about.

Robert Beatty: I wasn't even aware of Pandro Burman, Richard Brooks, I found him very nice, I wish he'd done more of a Carol Reed, I think he let me overact.

Roy Fowler: He was a writer before he was a director and so perhaps he was less confident with actors.

Robert Beatty: That's possible, but a very pleasant character, he used to invite Walter Fitzgerald and myself up to his house nearly every weekend and give us either a lunch or supper, sit around the pool and have a few jars, nice chap.

Roy Fowler: As an actor, what struck you the difference between working here and there, at Metro?

Robert Beatty: The crews seemed more efficient which I've already mentioned, I'm trying to think of anything else. What impressed me was how empty it was because that was the beginning of the days when television was making inroads and I think there was probably only two films being made and there were something like 36 stages at MGM, you really rattled around in the place.

Roy Fowler: Did you tour the lot.

Robert Beatty: No, I didn't actually tour it. Richard Brooks: I liked him very much.

Roy Fowler: How about Rock Hudson who was your leading man.

Robert Beatty: Very nice guy, he used to turn up with some girl who I thought was his wife, and it was a plant really.

Roy Fowler: Would that have been Phyllis? There was a marriage of convenience, he married Henry Wilson's secretary, who was his agent. They were divorced eventually and she sued him for an enormous amount of money.

Robert Beatty: I did another thing for television there, something about the moon, and I saw him over there again, this was before he got ill, and he was quite pleasant. He was sitting on the back of his caravan outside the stages and he was doing some tapestry work, I said Jesus what are you doing, tapestry, he said I find it very relaxing, I understood that, he was a nice fellow. I don't remember anything about the film.

Roy Fowler: When was this?

Robert Beatty: About 6 or 7 years ago, it was a series, it got repeated I think, but I don't remember any[thing] particular.

Roy Fowler: *The Shakedown, the Amorous Prawn*, and then we come to what for me is one of the great movies of all time *2001 A Space Odyssey*.

Robert Beatty: Stanley [Kubrick], I was impressed by him, he was obviously a very intelligent man. There was a scene in it where we were sitting in this little moon vehicle going from one place to another, actually flying and Stanley didn't seem to be too happy about the dialogue on it so I sat down and wrote something which I thought might be better dialogue, but it was never used, probably he was right and I was wrong, he was a nice bloke, brilliant in his way.

Roy Fowler: Was he difficult to work with?

Robert Beatty: He was not an actor's director, he was more interested in the technicalities, and I noticed he used to carry his own camera around with him, some of the shots he would have it on his shoulder, and the cameraman wasn't there, the operator wasn't there, it was him, he wanted to do it himself.

Roy Fowler: He was a stills man to start with. Were you aware of the enormously complicated nature of the film?

Robert Beatty: When I saw some of the sets they were building, the space station and all that stuff.

Roy Fowler: Did you have a lot of retaking, reshoots?

Robert Beatty: No, they had technical problems with, we were all in space suits, and they had about six of us all miked up inside the space suits and it didn't work for some reason and we had to cut, all that dialogue in the end was cut out, they hadn't got to the stage where they had six different wave lengths with the radio mike.

Roy Fowler: You're in two sequences, in the briefing and the trip to the crater. Technically looked quite complicated, travelling there and the moon crater itself which was an enormous set.

Robert Beatty: Technically it didn't pose too many problems as far as travelling up to the moon was concerned, it was a big long corridor, but he had such detail in there, it was never used at all, little tiny things where people, like what you would expect to see, please do not use the toilet when thing in motion.

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Roy Fowler: That's in the film. It's a private joke almost because there's an enormous list about how to operate the zero-gravity toilet.

Robert Beatty: There are a lot of other tiny little details, that occupied the art department, and you never saw them at all, it must have cost quite a lot of money, all these private little signs and the camera just went by them and you never saw the things. You could just have had gibberish on the wall and nobody would have noticed.

Roy Fowler: You say he left actors on their own, he didn't direct performance at all.

Robert Beatty: I'm just trying to think. Not very much.

Roy Fowler: He just gave you marks.

Robert Beatty: Pretty much that sort of thing. I don't remember him doing too much that way, he was more interested in the camera.

Roy Fowler: Was it clear that it was going to be an extraordinary different type of film.

Robert Beatty: I would think so. At that time they hadn't even done the ape sequences, they were still monkeying around with that, how they were going to achieve those apes. I think they ended up with ballet dancers and things like that, they were talking about going over to China and trying to get little people in order to dress them up at that time, it was a few months before they shot that sequence.

Roy Fowler: it was in production over a period of years, I don't know when you shot that sequence.

Robert Beatty: Early on, at the beginning, they hadn't shot the ape sequence.

Roy Fowler: The film expanded all the time.

Robert Beatty: I dare say, they had some of these big sets up and the space station thing where the guys were working around.

Roy Fowler: The big set was Shepperton, rather than MGM Elstree
Do you remember where you were?

Robert Beatty: Mostly MGM as far as I was concerned. I feel you' re right.

Roy Fowler: I thought they used the big silent stage at Shepperton.

Robert Beatty: I think you're right. it wasn't a good sound studio.

Robert Beatty: it was the old silent stage.

Robert Beatty: That was the one where we had the problems with the radio mikes. Eventually they didn't have them talk at all.

Roy Fowler: They do have lines.

Robert Beatty: It might have been post-synched.

Roy Fowler: Anything more about Kubrick?

Robert Beatty: I think at one time he said I wish I'd used you for the voice on the computer. This was after the film was made. I ran into him, we talked about the film and he said somehow I wish I'd used you for the voice instead of using me as this thing, he obviously couldn't use me for both, so it was too late, he couldn't have m.,

Roy Fowler: What would you have done with Hal's voice

Robert Beatty: I don't know. It can be done pretty well technically nowadays, they can completely change a voice. Cutting off lower registers.

Roy Fowler: The state of the art was fairly advanced then when it comes to being able to muck around with the voices. It's definitely one of my desert island films.

Robert Beatty: I could never quite see what was going on at the end there. I found it a bit mystifying, going on at the end of the film with the fetus.

Roy Fowler: He's reborn as the star child, goes to another high level of being, that's my reading of it.

Robert Beatty: He went into a black hole.

Roy Fowler: This is the late 60s when in the States it was the drug culture, the sequence when he reaches Jupiter all the kids there used to go and see that absolutely spaced out on

something or other and it was their favourite trip. All the colours and movement.

Robert Beatty: Clever chap.

Roy Fowler: From the sublime to the ridiculous, the next one is *Where Eagles Dare* which must have been fun. Directed by Brian Hutton.

Robert Beatty: I went to see him [at] an agency I had then, and this was in December some time, early December, he said here's the script, take it and see what you think of it and let us know. So, I took the script home, it wasn't all that many lines, just this thing in the castle, but the money was there and it was sixteen weeks work and I was in no position to argue, so reasonable money and 16 weeks work, I said of course I'll do it. I wait around and wait around, and the film goes off on location in Austria. Around Salzburg. Eventually I'm called to go and I go out and I find out that Richard and these people they're all up in one hotel including Brian Hutton, and some of the minor characters are in another hotel. So, I thought I'll go up and see what's going on. So I got to the other hotel and this young man comes up and say hello, how are you, and have a nice trip, that sort of stuff, he said you don't know who I am, usually I say I know your face and I've forgotten the name, I thought this time I'll be honest with him, haven't a clue, he said I'm your director. Great way to start a film off. From then on I always called him boss, thought it might mollify him a bit.

Roy Fowler: Had you seen him before?

Robert Beatty: Only at the interview in December, he was a youngish chap, he might have been one of Elizabeth's children by Michael Wilding, he looked so young, he didn't look like a director. For once in my life, usually I say I know the face but I can't quite place it. I thought I'm going to be honest, I haven't got a clue. My gawd, I felt like sinking through the floor. But not the best way to start off on a film. Richard was a very lovely guy to work with and always very pleasant.

Roy Fowler: And Mrs B.

Robert Beatty: Very good too. I got some flu when I first arrived, I wasn't wanted, you're brought out days before you're actually wanted, but when I was beginning to feel better I went out on the set and we were sitting around and Elizabeth was there and introduced herself, I hadn't met her before, I'd only just

met Richard the day before, she said oh dear what's wrong with you, I said I think I 've got the flu, she said what you need is a Jack Daniels, bring him a Jack Daniels, she gave me a couple of Jack Daniels and I must say I felt a hell of a lot better.

Roy Fowler: Her cure for everything.

Robert Beatty: Richard and Elizabeth, one time after we'd made the film I was down on their yacht having lunch and after lunch we were sitting out by London and Richard said what are you doing for your holidays, we're going out to Majorca, he said take the plane, just ring up tomorrow morning and I'll fix it, I knew by this time he'd probably forget because he was getting pissed. But he thought it and Elizabeth came in and I said Elizabeth I think you ought to know Richard is offering me your plane to take me and the family out to Majorca, what a good idea, when are you going, I said we're planning to go on September 3rd, let's say, how long for, I said 3 weeks, OK, disappeared away, came back in ten minutes, said it's all fixed just phone whatever the secretary's name was, just phone up on the actual day and it will be there. And sure enough, it was all done just like that. Very sweet. The following year, I kept in touch with him, he flew us out to the Canaries, it wasn't costing him that much. They hired these private planes, say 100 dollars for 200 hours and they'd pay what they pay in the first place and give it over to a company who hires it back from them and they're given say so many of hours of flying time for the year and they hadn't used up their flying time for the year, nevertheless it was very sweet.

Roy Fowler: It was probably written off against taxes

Robert Beatty: But not many people go around offering you planes. The only sad story about Richard, one day Ron Barclay , he was his make-up artist, we used to meet down the Fulham Rd, and this was a time Elizabeth was making a film down at Elstree, Cannon Studios, and Richard was in his house at Hampstead, and Ron said why don't you phone up Richard, he's awfully low, he's sitting round not working, and Elizabeth is working all day, I said do you think he'd welcome it, he said fine, go on, ring him up, he said come on up and have lunch. Before lunch this little man pouring up these bloody great vodkas, after a couple of these he said, OK, how much do you want, I said what do you mean Richard, how much do I want, he said don 't you want any money, I said I didn't come up here to ask for money. A terrible thing, but every

time an actor looks him up he thinks he's coming to borrow money from him. It's very sad.

Roy Fowler: Yes. But then on the other hand, they're in that position and they're easy marks.

Robert Beatty: He was very generous I know, from what I hear around, he did give people money if they were hard up. He certainly looked after his own family. They never lacked for anything.

Roy Fowler: Even before he became a big star he had this aggressive side to him. I remember an aggressive side to him was usually brought out by booze, one New Year's Eve I gave a party, it must have been either 1950 or 1951, company of *Lady's Not for Burning* came to New York and I got to know quite a few of them, and they all came trooping over for this New Year's party, and he got not aggressive but narky, there was an edge, who are you sort of thing, and his then wife said it's our host. Before he'd been gracious and pleasant and suddenly, a few drinks, suspicion.

Robert Beatty: I never found him aggressive. Willing to take the floor and talk and amuse people, a marvellous story teller, mimic, Gielgud, Olivier, those voices, fabulous, and I always found him very generous and very warm and her efficient and pleasant

Roy Fowler: Perhaps part of that was that you were a fellow actor.

Robert Beatty: Probably.

Roy Fowler: Other people might be mistrusted or regarded as appendages, there to serve them, because they were rather grand. Their private jets and yacht. Clint Eastwood was on that.

Robert Beatty: Clint was always very nice, very pleasant, retiring almost. Richard was always one for saying come up and have a fresher, I didn't have very much to say so I didn't have to bother about whether I was drinking or not. But even after filming finished in the day, there was always boozing in the dressing room and we'd have a drink or two maybe, perhaps two or three of us, but Clint would only occasionally come up. He was nice, pleasant but usually he 'd scurry back home.

Roy Fowler: There were some good tipplers on that film because Pat Wymark was on it too.

Robert Beatty: I didn't really run into Wymark really because of different scenes. I did run into him because he was on the plane on the way back, the final scene.

Roy Fowler: I remember taking my father one day to The Thatched Barn and all these German soldiers trooping around which baffled him a bit and it turned out to be that picture.

Robert Beatty: We used to eat there quite often. Elizabeth would sometimes be there, and Mia Farrow who she was working with. It was a very pleasant experience as far as I was concerned and they paid me.

Roy Fowler: *Pope Joan*.

Robert Beatty: Tiny part. I never saw the full script, it was another of those one or two parts, if they're going to offer the bread you might as well do it. At one point, they cut the whole scene out.

Roy Fowler: You're listed still as being in it. 1974: *The Spike Gang*.

Robert Beatty: Again, a very tiny part.

Roy Fowler: Where was that shot?

Robert Beatty: Spain, just outside Madrid. That was pleasant and the first time I met Lee Marvin, Rosy and I were out there and he was sitting out there in the middle of an exterior, he was sitting out on a big log of tree trunks, sunning himself, I went up to say hello to him, I'd always admired him, so I went up and introduced myself, he couldn't be pleasanter, he said sit down, we were chatting away, eventually I said I'd like you to meet my wife, he said sure, she came over and the three of us talked away, and it was getting pretty hot, and I said I wouldn't mind a drink, nothing hard, there's some stuff up in the barn, coca cola or some such stuff. I said can I get you one. He said I haven't had a bottle against my lips for ten weeks now and I don't want to start now.

Roy Fowler: He always gave the impression of being a very interesting man with a warm side to him.

Robert Beatty: We talked about Richard and the two of them trying to hit the marks in a film they'd been making earlier, a year or so back, and both of them pissed out of their minds. They had to come up and hit their marks with a car, I don't know if he was driving or Richard was driving, in the end after about five or six attempts the director said okay, we'll do that in the morning, forget it, they couldn't hit the bloody marks in the car, it's terrifying getting people to work under the influence of alcohol,

Roy Fowler: Especially with wheels. Richard Fleischer was the director of that.

Robert Beatty: Seemingly knew what he wanted, good. Very nice fellow.

Roy Fowler: And Michael Anderson was on camera.

Robert Beatty: Forgotten that.

Roy Fowler: We come now, you were in Superman III.

Robert Beatty: I was in Superman IV too, I played a president. I never saw it. Just the opening sequence.

Roy Fowler: It was terrible, it was when Cannon took it over, it had that feeling of Cannon cheapness, the sets which had been once grand and glorious were suddenly less interesting and less well built but the special effects were so badly done.

Robert Beatty: I'm surprised the technicians allowed that sort of thing. Or was it that they were told you have so much money get on with it.

Roy Fowler: there were two things, it was up against, the technicians claim these particular scenes were shot in the States, but one was the time problem, getting them done against an opening date, the other was that's alright we'll let it go. In one sequence, I remember superman' costume was green, it was a great nothing film. That brings us to tv, it would be interesting to talk about some of the early tv series which were made here but designed for American release.

Robert Beatty: If you're talking about *Dial 999* that was a sort of co-thing. A company, Ziv of American and Harry Alan Towers

Roy Fowler: Another "El Schlocko" outfit.

Robert Beatty: It was hard work, working every bloody day, they churned them out. I was a Canadian cop attached to Scotland Yard.

Roy Fowler: 30 minutes a week.

Robert Beatty: At one part, we were doing two episodes a week, half hours, mostly exteriors, the scripts were planned in such a way that I could be out doing the exteriors for two of the first half of the week and the interiors for two of the second half of the week. It took a bit of planning, they did it, how they got through it I often wonder myself.

Roy Fowler: 39 of those.

Robert Beatty: Yes. Most of the time it was one a week, six days, maybe five and a half days, at one point Harry was pushing us, they were written in such a way that I could be out doing exteriors for two in the first half of the week and interiors for the second half of the week.

Roy Fowler: Low budget stuff. Where were they based?

Robert Beatty: ABC again.

Roy Fowler: Elstree. Who were the directors?

Robert Beatty: [missing?]

Roy Fowler: I don't know how you would have been able to learn your lines, two a week.

Robert Beatty: We only used to see the script Monday morning usually. Scenes were never very long and I suppose you get a certain facility, once you've rehearsed a scene two or three times you do it.

Roy Fowler: This was in five days or six days.

Robert Beatty: I'm trying to remember. I got a feeling it must have been six days, or at least five and a half.

Roy Fowler: Even so, three days an episode was pushing it.

Robert Beatty: At least you weren't sitting around idly getting bored because you were working all the time.

Roy Fowler: Was it lucrative to be doing that sort of thing in the early 50s?

Robert Beatty: Not particularly, not badly paid, nothing overwhelming. And with repeats you didn't get any money, if they repeated them now they'd have to pay me. But the chances are they won't repeat them, but they were better than some of the crap you see on television in these days, some old stuff.

Roy Fowler: They might get repeated, there are all these channels opening up.

Robert Beatty: The quality, for what they were, for how quickly they were made and how cheaply they were made they weren't bad. Certainly, I saw bits of London I'd never seen before, down around the docks and all that kind of stuff, it was fun.

Roy Fowler: Did you do any other series?

Robert Beatty:

Robert Beatty: No. I never did any other series. Once you've done 39 episodes and they're repeated if not once, then at least twice, then nobody wants, your face is too well known, so I didn't do any television for about 10 years. And the film people didn't want to know me because I'd done television, so I was in a no-win situation from 1959 on.

Roy Fowler: Was that something which happened, was the advice lacking that this might happen?

Robert Beatty: I didn't realise at the time, I may have thought I might be able to go on working in television. I should have had the sense to know if your face gets too well known.

Roy Fowler: There is the exposure and also this thing between being a proper film actor and being in television in those days. There was a lot of money in television but it was the producers who got it, when you think of Hannah Weinstein and the Danzigers and King Brothers, and Douglas Fairbanks Jnr who got very rich out of half hour series.

Robert Beatty: I did a couple for Doug Fairbanks, we went to Austria to do them, Bavaria. Douglas was in them and he was also producing. I got on very well with him, a very nice guy.

Roy Fowler: One television thing and a recent one, your portrayal on Regan, a fascinating study, how did you get the man, the essence of the man.

Robert Beatty: They gave me a couple of clips of him making speeches, I was never quite sure where they were, they might have been United Nations and somewhere else. I didn't have any private stuff.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Robert Beatty: When he's wandering round his ranch talking to Nancy, so there was only public stuff I could base it on and what I remembered about him, I watched him, the way he walked and the rest of it.

Roy Fowler: You seemed to get it. I'm surprised the Republicans didn't ask you to run this year.

Robert Beatty: It was nice to do. I went down to see them two or three times before they made up their mind, I didn't think they

were even thinking about Regan for me, I thought I was going to be one of the boys up at Reikvik [?], all the American crowd, and suddenly I realised, the last session, they were talking about Regan.

Roy Fowler: How did the production go?

Robert Beatty: Ok, we rehearsed here Monday till Saturday lunchtime, went up to Manchester Saturday and taped from Monday till Thursday night so it was all over very quickly.

Roy Fowler: But very effective. I do want to ask you about Al Parker because he was one of these extraordinary characters.

Robert Beatty: He was a director, and I think he directed Doug Fairbanks Snr. In many ways, he tried to charge too much money for me and subsequently ruined a lot of situations, he was a bit too hard in trying to get his clients more money and probably scared a lot of people off.

Roy Fowler: I think that's probably true. He was a director at Fox British before he became an agent, he came over here to work as a director and the stories of him there are that he was a very offensive unpleasant man towards people.

Robert Beatty: I can't ever say he was offensive as far as I was concerned.

Roy Fowler: He is supposed to be to prospective clients.

Robert Beatty: Yes, and frankly he didn't do me any good at all. Probably overcharging and they'd say forget it. He had a habit, a telephone wire, you could go in and see him and he'd have this telephone up on his shoulder, yeah, yeah, I'm not going to do this, and he'd be striding up and down the room with the telephone clutched in his shoulder. He went half blind in one eye. His wife is quite sweet.

Roy Fowler: And still working.

Robert Beatty: I thought she'd given it up.

Roy Fowler: Well until quite recently.

Robert Beatty: He had a house down in Brighton for a while and if I was ever down that way I'd phone him up and we'd have drinks.

Robert Beatty:

I met Doug Fairbanks Snr once with him. He was going to start up a film repertory theatre, just before the war, say July '39, and I was in a play at the Criterion, whether Al sent him or he just went but American actors appealed to him, if he was going to set up a little repertory of film people over in Hollywood, Americans would be helpful. Eventually Al called me down to the office and I met Doug and he told me what he was thinking of doing, I said yes, I'd be interested, super, we'll let you know, I've got to go back and work things out, he goes back and war is declared and he dies and that was the end of that one.

Roy Fowler: He got the first boat out after war was declared.

Robert Beatty: I thought he was already back by then.

Roy Fowler: I did some research very recently on this. It was either late August or the first week in September, but it was the first boat they could get on, and he died in December in Santa Monica. How did he seem to you, he must have been a bit faded?

Robert Beatty: I remember thinking he was a bit smaller and a bit faded.

Roy Fowler: Well he'd lived well.

Robert Beatty: I was thrilled meeting him, a character like that. But Al knew him very well. I don't know if it was Al's doing or he went to Al and said I've seen this guy on stage. I'd like to meet him about coming over to Hollywood.

Roy Fowler: Would you have liked to have done that?

Robert Beatty: It would have been an experience, I had a fairly meagre-ish part.

Roy Fowler: At that time for a young actor Hollywood was the Mecca.

Robert Beatty: Yes, I would have gone, the money would have been better than what I was getting then, I was making about £15 a week.

Roy Fowler: As an actor, you would have fitted very well into Hollywood requirements, rugged leading man type. What regrets if

any do you have on that score, are you glad your career panned out the way it did in this country?

Robert Beatty: From what I've seen of Hollywood I don't think I would have wanted to go over there and lived.

Roy Fowler: There are people like Clint Eastwood, Lee Marvin, Robert Preston, people in that genre in which you might fit, they seem to have good careers.

Robert Beatty: I'd have made money but it's a hard life.

Roy Fowler: To make money and not always keep it.

Robert Beatty: And always watching, you have to be, always climbing to be up on top one way or another, always in the public[eye].

Roy Fowler: It's a full-time profession being an actor, not acting, being an actor.

Robert Beatty: There was a chap who became an actor, he lives out in LA, he's a Canadian actor, and we went up for a meal with him one night, he said what restaurant do you want to go up to, Rosy mentioned one of the better known restaurants, where we might see some of the Hollywood stars, but what amused me was him saying he'd set the meal for about seven o'clock in the evening, both Rosy and his wife said who the hell wants to eat at seven o'clock in the evening, why not make it later, no he said we can't do that because if you arrive later it means you're not working, if you get there at seven o'clock it means you're having an early meal so you can get to bed early so therefore people think you're working. This is a terrible way to live a life. And we get there and there's nobody there at all. He was fairly well known as an actor and myself, there was no one there we recognised at all. And he had to take his best car. It was his best Merc[edes]. He couldn't take his Ford car. It had to be the Merc and he had it washed and polished just to go down to the bloody restaurant. To live up some bloody image. I'd hate to live to those sorts of standards.

Roy Fowler: That's one of the reasons I left, I didn't relate to it in any fashion, one was not expected to be oneself but to be something quite different that they wanted, that was true as a

Robert Beatty:

director even. If you're not a success you're counted as a failure. Whereas it seemed to me work that one did as well as one could as still just part of one's life. Other things are equally if not more important.

Robert Beatty: I'm bloody pleased I don't live over there or work over there.

Roy Fowler: It used to be fun and then it ceased to be fun and then it became a business. Especially true of television. It was rather like Ealing, it was a family, one knew everyone, one mixed socially but then quite suddenly it was perceived there was an enormous amount of money in this and quite suddenly it was taken over by a different bunch of people and the criteria became quite otherwise, making money.

Robert Beatty: Too many accountants got into the business. I reckon.

Roy Fowler: Well that's about three hours...you said there was nothing to talk about...

Robert Beatty: There's nothing of any use to anybody, it's a lot of prattle...

Roy Fowler: Well we've got useful sidelights on people...

Robert Beatty: Well I'd hate to think someone's got to listen to all that stuff trying to find something useful.

Roy Fowler: No, I enjoyed it. Thank you very much Bob.

Robert Beatty: Well I'll return your microphone...

[END]

Transcript checked and edited by David Sharp. May 2017.