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FREDDIE FRANCIS, lighting cameraman, feature film director, interviewer Alan Lawson, recorded on 24 November 1993

SIDE 1, TAPE 1

Alan Lawson: When and where were you born?

Freddie Francis: I was born in the wilds of North London, Barnesbury, north London on December 22nd, 1917 and on the night of the 22nd December 1917, when I was born, there was a Zeppelin raid over London, so they tried to get me even then.

Alan Lawson: What about schooling

Freddie Francis: Very primitive you know. And my parents were not very rich and my dear old mother, bless her, had never been to school. My father had started in his life as a clerk on the railway, actually he started life and I always tell this to Americans because in American slang it means something completely different, my father started life as a knocker up on the railway which by American standards means he went around knocking up ladies, he didn't do that, he went up knocking on the windows of the train drivers' to get them there in time to get the train out. So I had very little education really. I went to one or two what in those days, and you'll probably remember, what were called elementary schools, which was the lowest common denominator.

And when I was about 13, maybe, I passed a school scholarship which was then known as a trade scholarship, and you passed this scholarship and you then went to a school where you learned a trade, and you chose what trade you wanted. I didn't know what I wanted to do in those days so I said I wanted to be an engineer. I had visions of building dams and all that sort of thing, but I soon discovered that was not what it meant at all. However by this time, I had become a bit of a film fan and also I had an uncle, Uncle Joe, who ran a pub and he was a bit of an amateur photographer. And he taught me to process my own pictures, and things like that.

Alan Lawson: Where about are we now in time?

Freddie Francis: I'm now about 13, 14. And I've now gone to this very posh school, one degree over the elementary school, it was the North Western Polytechnic in Kentish Town. And as I say I was a film fan slightly interested in photography and during the last year or two years at the Polytechnic we had to write a thesis on any subject you wanted to. So I said I'd write a thesis on films. So I used to go to the school library and get out all the information I could on films, quite useless information but information. And during this on one of my holidays I scrounged a visit to, I've forgotten the dear old publicity man's name, at Gaumont British in Lime Grove, can't remember his name, anyway I went and

found the studio and there they were, they were shooting one of the Aldwych farces and also building sets for Jew Suss and I was hooked, this was what I wanted to do.

So I left school and I was more than ever determined that this was at what I wanted to do, but as you probably knew, there was no entry, you had to break your way in, or scrounge your way in or know some body. And I knew nobody at the time. Suddenly a couple of elderly ladies who had a flat in our house, they used to take the Daily Telegraph for what's that's worth and they came across an old stills man who wanted an apprentice. He really wanted money actually. His name was Lewis Protheroe - you remember Lewis?

Alan Lawson: Yes

Freddie Francis: Very few people do. So I went with Lewis, and these were the days when you used to take stills with a 10 - 8 camera, and I would rush up to the dark room and process them.

Alan Lawson: Always printed on sepia

Alan Lawson Freddie Francis: not when I was with him, he was getting to the end of his tether. After a few months of this I realised I wasn't going to get anywhere, I learned quite a bit messing around processing stuff and going on the floor with the old camera and the bulb, hold it for a still, right, OK. And suddenly, by this time my father had now become a street book maker and he had a gentleman who used to bet with him, his name was, I'm not sure if it was Bob, but something West, were turned out to be the master painter at BIP, and he was also a distant relative of one of my distant relatives, and suddenly ringing up to put his bets on with my father he happened to mention that dear old Bill Hagggett who ran the XXX department at BIP, always armed with a hammer, never saw Bill without a hammer, was looking for a clapper boy. So I said this is for me.

So I went down and met the guy who used to run the studio at the time, a real Scottish bloke, but he told me what a big break he was going to give me and told me he was going to make an exception, Underhill, he was the bloke who used to run the studio. Anyway he was going to stretch a point and to pay me 25 shillings a week. And so that there I was, the next thing I know I'm a clapper a boy on a film called The Marriage Of Corbal.

Alan Lawson: What date is that

Freddie Francis: That's about 1933. It's very difficult to get any information on The Marriage Of Corbal. It was for those days quite a big movie, it had, in those days as you know, any big movie always had failed American stars in it, we had Nils Asther, and Noah Beery, and a lovely young lady who had rather a disastrous career, Hazel Terry, a niece of Phyllis Nielsen Terry, I know something rather nasty happened to her, but it was a very interesting picture. The cameraman, it was a Czech cameraman, Otto Kanturek, the director was Karl Grune, and the camera operator was Alfie Black who was the son of

George Black of the Palladium and who later went into that business. And there I was, I was off.

And at the end of that, just as we finished that picture Bill Haggett came up to me, he had just had a call from his opposite number over at B & D, just the other side of the fence, Bill Law, and they were working on a film, it was a film with Arthur Riscoe who was a very well known English musical comedy star and an American musical comedy star called Frances Day. So at 8: o'clock one night I went to over to British and Dominion to start work on this movie. And we went on until about 3 o'clock in the morning, which was unheard of, my poor mother thought I'd been kidnapped, or something. Anyway, as you know, in those days if you worked until 3 o'clock in the morning, you would be given 1sh/6 d for your supper and you had a taxi ride home. So anyway I was off. That film was photographed by Claude Friese-Greene and the operator was Guy Green

After that I'd got embroiled in Herbert Wilcox productions, because Herbert virtually ran the studios then. And there I was until we were doing a film which Freddie Young was photographing with Johnny Wilcox and Ivan Foxwell his crew. And I went home one Friday night and discovered on Monday morning that the bloody studio had burnt down. So everybody went off in different directions. We were still virtually allied to B & D, so first of all I found myself up at the Old Gate studio finishing off a Herbert Wilcox picture, after that I went over to the old Rock Studios where we continued making Paramount British quotas, which we made in those days, we made one every 10 days.

Alan Lawson: Did the cameramen vary on that or was it usually the same?

Freddie Francis: Usually the same, usually, it varied very, very slightly but it was nearly always Francis Carver, poor old Francis, never a very good camera man but a very nice guy. And occasionally odd people would come. I remember for instance Ernie Palmer doing a couple and Ronnie Neame did a couple. But never anybody else. As I say it was 10 days. You would go from Monday to Friday, Monday to Friday, then start another one.

Alan Lawson: Did you work late or was it fairly straight.

Freddie Francis: Fairly straight. It was amazing. I'm going to go off at a tangent now, I work all the time in America now and even in America the hours have got just as bad as they are over here. I was in America, in Boston, making a movie for Paramount and having terrible fights with them about the unnecessary hours they will working. And during this there was a sort of classic cinema in Boston called Coolidge Corner and they had various seasons, and while I was there they had two weeks of a Freddie Francis season with films I'd directed, and films I'd photographed. And we were working such long hours I couldn't get there except on one Monday, we used to work on the Sunday and get Monday off and we went in there one Monday and most of the crew came, and we saw Sons And Lovers and the crew who were much younger than I, a lot of them hadn't seen it and said how wonderful it was. I said I do not understand it, we made this film in England five days a week, 8. 30 till 6.30 and we had eight or nine weeks to do it. And

here we are, we're over here on a much, much simpler film, we've got 14 weeks and we're working about 18 hour a day. What happens, and a six day a week.

But in the quota days, mind you the quota pictures were not very good but sometimes they had directors who went on to greater things, let me think of some, not really great things, but better pictures, John Paddy Carstairs, some body called Lawrence Huntington who did quite a few middle pictures, I can't remember any more, and a voice from the past, dear old George Pearson. It was lovely working with George, because George at this time was a very, very old gentleman, always wore a black trilby hat and an overcoat, regardless of what the weather conditions were. And had never realised you were shooting sound. So he used to wander around the set mouthing all the words all the time, because obviously when he did the silent films he used to speak the words all the time. But this was great.

Stop me if I'm going off at a tangent. One thing I learnt here and I think I can speak with some authority, because at the moment I'm the sort of flavour of the month in America, I can work whenever I like, as Pam will tell you I turn films down all the time, but if some body says to me what is your greatest attribute, it really has nothing to do with photography or anything, it has got to do with helping the director in every way possible. Because at this time, bearing in mind I had been doing a bit of photography at school, and also a thing I hadn't mentioned, I ran a little 16 mm film club as well, I knew a bit about lighting, I used to do portraits and things, and it used to worry me, I would go on the stage and the director would say to the cameraman I would like to do this, this, that and the other, and the cameraman, you can't do that. And because the directors in those days didn't know any better, they'd accept it. And I knew that the cameraman was saying this because he couldn't get his nice photography in if he did it that way. And I had enough sense even as a kid to realise it didn't matter how well you photograph a picture if the director is not telling the story right you may as well forget it. So that was one of the valuable lessons I learnt there.

Alan Lawson: Every shot is not an Academy Award.

Freddie Francis: No, sometimes, I have a wonderful camera operator called Gordon **Hayman** who has just been with me ever since French Lieutenant's Woman wherever I go, he comes, and sometimes if I think it he is taking too long to light up a shot I say you can't win an Academy Award with just one good shot Gordon. Anyway this is how we went on till suddenly Pinewood opened.

Alan Lawson: You were a clapper boy? Or you'd moved on?

Freddie Francis: No, I had moved on to focus puller by now. Yes I moved on during the period of the quota quickies, and don't ask me how many quota quickies I did because you would have to divide the years by two weeks and that would be that. So I was focus puller when we went over to Pinewood.

Alan Lawson: When it you say we?

Freddie Francis: I meant the whole unit as it were. We were still roughly B & D although some of us were at Gate and some of us were at the Old Rock Studios, so we went over to Pinewood, what were we doing there, I remember the first films that happened there was a Carol Reed film called Talk Of The Devil, another of these films with old Hollywood artists, or we had Ricardo Cortez and Sally Eilers, another film I was doing, I don't know which one I was on, but another one was a Sydney Howard picture, Splinters In The Navy, and there was another one which I can't remember. And we went on and on and on and on until, then the thing started to split up and they weren't retaining their units and so we went off to various things. And I was making a film at Twickenham, a Carol Reed film, The Stars Look Down, I think, about the miners. And I went home one Saturday and found that somebody had started a war. So there was not much point in going in on the Monday. So I did very little from that day because I knew I was going to be called up pretty quickly.

I can't think I did anything after Stars Look Down because I was the wrong age, I'd just missed the first conscription, I was just a few days too old for that, so obviously when the war broke out I was just the right age for the call-up and I tried to get it into the RAF thinking with my great knowledge of photography I would be useful to them. But the RAF were very snooty in those days and I of course I spoke, I hadn't had a great, wonderful education, they didn't want to know about me. So the next thing I know, I was called up for the army so I told them how I could help them tremendously with my great knowledge of, and they thought I would be of much more used to them as a clerk in the Ordinance. So here I am, I'm now a clerk in the Ordinance.

Alan Lawson: Before we talk about the war period when you started what were the cameras being used then?

Freddie Francis: The Marriage of Corbal at BIP, we had the old Debie Super Parvo, and then I went over to B & D and that was very civilised - they had Mitchells there, the old Mitchells, they didn't have, no Freddie Young had one BNC, no I'm telling a lie, no he didn't

Alan Lawson: They were all in blimps?

Freddie Francis: Yes, it was the old NC, yes NC. Most of the films I was doing, I was assisting Gilbert Taylor and we had the standard Mitchells in these great big blimps. Freddie Young of course being Freddie Young, he had the NC. Then at Pinewood, somehow or other they got a lot of Super Parvos, at Pinewood, all brand new. They not only had Super Parvos but they had as their camera mechanic Pat Heath who had come from Debries. So we were on Super Parvos all the time we were at Pinewood.

Alan Lawson: Do you remember what lenses you used at B I P?

Freddie Francis: On the Super Parvo I think they were Cooks. When we went over to B & D there were a lot of **Astros**

Alan Lawson: Yes, because I can remember when I was at Ealing and we had Astros on the Mitchells there. It's funny that they should go to the Astros, very soft.

Freddie Francis: I think they ought to go back to them. I think lenses are now much too sharp, they drive me mad.

Alan Lawson: Where the cameramen using gauzes and things like that in those days?

Freddie Francis: Yes, oh yes, yes

Alan Lawson: Remember burning out the

Freddie Francis: Absolutely, all sorts of. There were basic one they used to use, round ones, Harrisons, OAs and OBs and NPAs and NPBs and **Shibies** as well. Shibby filters.

Alan Lawson: The NPA was rather heavy

Freddie Francis: It was indeed. People didn't used to worry about that. Bang it in.

So I'm now a clerk in the army, and which is a great excitement I must tell you. I never actually became a clerk in the army because I went to, when I was first grabbed hold of I was at Woolwich, terrible old barracks, and they had in fact been condemned before the War but they obviously opened them up again, they were very cheerful barracks I must say. After which I went to another rather ghastly place at Catterick. It was unbelievable, how we ever won the War I do not know because we were being instructed by people who just hadn't a clue.

Anyway while I was at Catterick a very distant in law of my sister had been in the regular army and he was now called back as a sergeant instructor at a place called Parsons Barracks at Aldershot. Parsons barracks was next door to a Ordinance depot called the Field Stores Ordinance, the Field Stores at Aldershot. Within the Field Stores they had a photographic section which did all sorts of photographic work for the army. And then they had what they referred to as a Film Unit, which consisted of one man who had been a corporal in the army proper. And when he left the army he went back as a civilian to run this Film Unit. But he hadn't got a clue. Anyway he was a heavy drinker and he used to drink in the mess with my sister's distant relative who obviously got him drunk one night and said look, I'm sure you could do with the some body down here who has a little knowledge of this. And the next thing I know, I'm down there as a one man Film Unit in the Field Stores at Aldershot.

And it was quite enjoyable, nothing is enjoyable during war I know that but you may as well make the most of it. I used to do all sorts of funny little jobs until eventually the

Field Stores at Aldershot suddenly became the Army Cinema Establishment at Wembley, where they do talk over the old Capital Cinema. So we were up there operating for a long time. And then just about that time Thorold had made that film

Alan Lawson: Next Of Kin?

Freddie Francis: No. This is the one that persuaded the War Office that they should get involved with the making films. So the next thing we knew, everybody was coming into this unit. So instead of being a one man Film Unit, there I was surrounded by Carol Reed, Ray Pitt, the editor, Thorold Dickinson of course, and all sorts of people Tilly Day, Angela Martelli, Tubby of course was there, and Peter Ustinov. He used to come down once a week to collect his seven shillings, or whatever it was he got. He was the scruffiest soldier I ever met in your life. We were a joke within the industry because everybody figured we did very little and they used to refer to us, because we were stationed at Wembley, although we eventually took over the old Fox Studios so we became known as the Wembley **Chindits**

Alan Lawson: Because you had a CO who took his riding breeches very seriously, didn't you?

Freddie Francis: Yes, Gordon **Rayner**, from Ealing, he was your accountant at Ealing wasn't he.

Alan Lawson : No, he was a junior accountant

Freddie Francis: But he was married to some body

Alan Lawson: He was married to one of the Courtaulds

Freddie Francis: He wasn't with us for long, I don't know what happened to him. But when anybody says oh you had a cushy time, I always refer to various things we did, and various things that I did for instance. I was lucky or unlucky enough to have had security clearance. If anything was ever going on abroad I used to have to do it automatically. One of the things I had to do in, I was just telling Sid here, they were very disappointed, the artillery people were very disappointed in the rate of AK AK fire over London. They couldn't figure out what was holding it up this way. So George Ashworth and I had to devise some infra-red filters that we could put in front of lamps so that at night during an air raid we could illuminate the gun pit with **this sort of** light and could photograph it. Which we do it. And it was quite amazing when we saw that people were falling over each other and dropping shells. And as a result of which the Ministry increased the rate of gunfire over London by quite an amount.

Another thing, dear old Dave Harcourt did this, I'm sure you know Dave, there was a situation where the German planes used to come over and drop this silver stuff, which was called **window**, streaks of silver paper. And Dave and I think Bunny Frankie between

them had to devise a new way of being able to photograph this on radar screens. And they eventually found out, with the aid of Kodak, and which stock they could use and so they sorted that out.

And the other thing which I'm probably most proud of which has obviously helped the medical profession a lot, during the war there was very little knowledge of a branch of surgery called **maxilo** facial surgery, and which actually means what happens if your face is blown away. I was attached to a gentleman from the dental corps and every time there was going to be a big river crossing or any big action, I used to have to go out and would have to look around the battle field and the casualty stations for people who came within this category, because they wanted to find out more about this. So we used to have to collect these poor souls and while they were being operated on in churches or schools, I used to have my little Newman Sinclair, a little bridge, I used to be about 6 inches from their face photographing everything. And this went on for about a year going backwards and forwards. I know they used this film for a long, long time after the war. So I don't think I wasted my time in the army.

Alan Lawson: In fact it broadened your canvas enormously.

Freddie Francis: I had another occasion which I laugh at but was not very funny, suddenly I was called up to the War Office by Eric Ambler, he said Freddie they want you to go over to do a job for them, this was six days after D day, they want you to go over there because they're being held up and blah blah blah. I said yes, what shall I take. He said I don't know, they won't tell me what it is. So I thought this is very funny because you cannot go on a film shoot without knowing something about it. So I said I've always got my maxilla facial stuff equipment, standing by in case you have got to rush over there immediately. Take that he said. So we fly over to Caens where they were held up.

And we got off and I was met by if you'll pardon the expression, some prat of an artillery officer. Now this was the guy if they were ever making a film in Hollywood and they wanted an English Artillery officer, he was the guy. So I said what would you like us to do. So he tells me, and you won't believe what I'm going to tell you because nobody else does -he explained that they had been doing very well, they burst out from the beaches and when they got to Caens they were being held up because they'd come across the these batteries and batteries of XXX[xxxwurfers?], which was, was it 7 or 9, whatever, these tremendous mortars that they had

Sid: They were 12 actually

Freddie Francis: They were being held up by these up. Well I thought I don't know what you want me to do about it. So he had got this wonderful idea that he was going to put me and the camera in a sort of caravan, one of these little things that Montgomery used to live in, take me up within view of the Germans, you see he is laughing, and the they were going to fire at me and I was going to photograph it on the screen so that they could find out how to trace these things.

I said well look, I was probably a little rude to him I said I do realise that you are an officer and whatever you tell me to do I've got to do it, but I must tell you that I have not got the equipment to do it because Dave, dear old Dave Harcourt had only just discovered how to photograph radar screens with this XXX stock I think it was called. So if I had photographed this stuff there would have been nothing on the film anyway and so the situation was I and my assistant and the dreaded Newman Sinclair were going to go out into this field, the Germans were then going to fire all these things at us, blow us to hell, they were going to rescue the cameras and there is nothing on the film. And I had terrible trouble with him. Fortunately by the next day when we were supposed to go out, suddenly they broke through. And I was left on my tod. Nobody could get me home. But it is unbelievable, he really wanted me to go out in this thing

Alan Lawson: Expendable

Freddie Francis: Obviously, I'm not brave but I understood there was a war on, whatever they told me to do I had to do it. But I would like to have thought I had some sort of fighting chance. I often wonder what happened to that guy. I hope something nasty. We're now in the war, and once again nobody had a good war but I suppose I had a very educational war because by now I was able to light and do almost anything, my education had been increased completely, very much so.

Alan Lawson: Now after the war. Did you have any reinstatement rights at all?

Freddie Francis: No but after the war within three weeks of my coming out, I was on a plane once again going to East Africa with Johnny Wilcox, we were going out to do some second unit stuff for a film that Zolly Korda was doing in Hollywood called The Macomber Affair and we were going out to-do the animal stuff. Once again, it was typical of the business, we were going out there and they weren't sure, they knew that Gregory Peck was going to be in the movie, so fine, so we get a stand in, a double for Gregory Peck. But they weren't quite sure whether it was going to be Barbara Stanwyck or Joan Bennett, whoever it was it was one of them was blonde and the other was dark, so they couldn't tell us, so we had to get some body who didn't look,, anyway we had a wonderful time out there.

Alan Lawson: Was that colour?

Freddie Francis: No, it was black and white. It was a wonderful time because they had been no hunting during the 7 years of the war, so there were more animals than you knew what to do with

Alan Lawson: Who was the actual cameraman

Freddie Francis: Dear old Osmond Borradaile

He was a terrible cameraman but a great adventurer. He would go anywhere, I wish he'd have gone and photographed these things they wanted me to shoot in the caravan. He is still around, he became a strong union man I gather in Canada.

Alan Lawson: Again what equipment was that, Mitchells presumably

Freddie Francis: No Arriflexes

Alan Lawson: These were the rather crude ones were they

Freddie Francis: I think Arriflexes we had had been stolen from the Germans, I'm not sure, because there were an awful lot over here that were pinched from the German troops.

Alan Lawson: Liberated

Freddie Francis: Liberated. I think we had about three Arriflexes, I'm honestly not sure but I think it was three Arriflexes

Alan Lawson: The motor in the handle

Freddie Francis: That's right

Alan Lawson: The lenses?

Freddie Francis: I've an idea they were **Zeiss**. Not sure

Alan Lawson: Probably. 400 ft mags?

Freddie Francis: Absolutely, yes 400

Alan Lawson: Quite an eye opener that camera after the Newman

Freddie Francis: But I used to love the old Newman.

Alan Lawson: The trouble was parallax, wasn't it always

Freddie Francis: Yes

Alan Lawson: But I had a Newman which had a look through

Freddie Francis: One of the later ones?

Alan Lawson: I don't know, I was in the Army Film Unit, I was in the opposition and this was one of the Newmans which had been commandeered. I don't know owned it before, no idea.

Freddie Francis: I think that we had one with a look through that George Ashworth had converted for us at Wembley.

Alan Lawson: That was quite good except looking through the film

Freddie Francis: I've never really liked the Arriflex actually, it's never seemed a complete camera to me and I think they're brilliant people, I think if they'd said well we designed this camera for combat, let's throw it away and design something completely new. But it still has pieces left over from the war, even now it seems to me, although the latest one I gather you need a guy with great to assist on Arriflex, you need a guy with all sorts of degrees almost, it really is so unbelievable.

Alan Lawson: Anyway carry on, you've been to East Africa

Freddie Francis: Then we came back from Africa and straightaway I went up to do some location work for the pre-production stuff on Bonnie Prince Charlie, so we it were all up in Scotland with the various units being directed by dear old Herbert Mason, and suddenly Lew **Foreman** rang me from Shepperton and would I like to go to Canada to do a film over there that they were going to do. So I said yes, sure, fine. So I came back and with my assistant who was a guy called Bob Moss, I don't know whatever happened to him we're off to Canada.

Now in those days it was very difficult to get an air passage, so Bob, myself, the equipment and the continuity girl and the producer's secretary arrived at Surrey Docks to get on the SS Bayano which was an old banana boat that had been borrowed by Cunard to do some of their transatlantic route, it took 80 passengers. So there was Bob, myself, these two girls, a very dear old businessman plus about 70 girls from the New York Theatre Ballet who were going home. So we had quite an enjoyable trip. It took 2 days to get to Montreal.

But when we got to Montreal, the film we were going to do, the film was Marie Chatelaine which was a very famous Canadian novel. And we arrived in New York and bid farewell to these 70 ladies and looked down and there was the producer, a man caught **Bill Gillette**, looking very forlorn. And we said hello Bill, what's wrong. Well, he said just after you left Alex read the script and said don't let them go, bring them back. But he said I'm not going to go back home, I'm going to spend the money we've got at here, and make as much of the film as I can. He said you've photographed films before haven't you, I said in the army yes. So we fiddle about in Canada shooting as much as we can with the money we have got at our disposal and we all come back, Bill doesn't come back so I get back to Shepperton, me I'm a sort of camera operator and I'm held responsible for the whole thing, I mean deep, deep trouble. However, Bill has not returned from that day to

this and I think eventually they were able to sell the stuff to a company at Riverside made the film, who was the guy, the BBC television director, his wife did the casting for, his wife did the casting for Doctor and the Devils, Maggie Cartier, Rudi Cartier, he made it and I think they sold some of the stuff to them. Anyway we managed to get over that.

By now I'd got involved with, by now Korda had bought Worton Hall and I was now the resident camera operator at Worton Hall. We did one pretty horrible film, but a lot of films were pretty horrible in those days, and then I was lucky enough to get tied up with Michael Powell. And Mickey and I became great friends, because Mickey is a terrible bully and he loves it if people shout back at him. And we used to have terrible rows, which Mickey used to love. Pam is glaring because she doesn't like, but I was very fond of Mickey and do you know even if Mickey was, Mickey all his life kept tabs on what I was doing. And I did several films with Mickey, the first one was The Small Back Room then I did The Elusive Pimpernel, Gone To Earth, and then Tales of Hoffmann.

Alan Lawson: Gone To Earth was 1950 according to this little list, then there is a gap and then comes Beat The Devil, but you were the operator on that, weren't you. That is 53

Freddie Francis: Everything I did with Mickey I was the operator and Chris Challis was the cameraman. I used to do all the second unit photographing if there was any

Alan Lawson: Then the next one I've got, again there is a gap because it's Hill in Korea, so you were operating between those two.

Freddie Francis: Yes, after Mickey, various things I did, I did the film which finished off the Royal Command Performance, we made a film called Beau Brummell. In those days it used to be the Royal Command Performance, it isn't any longer, I think the Queen was a bit upset when she went up to see this film and there was Robert Morley playing her uncle as mad as a March hare, she didn't like that.

Soon after that I got with John Huston. I did Moulin Rouge as a camera operator. Then I did Beat The Devil as a camera operator. Then I wanted to go off photographing on my own and John didn't want me to because he rather liked me operating for him. So by the time we got to Moby Dick I said John I really must go off on my own. So he allowed me to do all the second unit and the model stuff. And then at the end of that, then I did A Hill in Korea which was my first film as a cameraman.

Alan Lawson: Would you like to talk about working with John Huston

Freddie Francis: It was great, I used to find it very thrilling working with John because he was the great one for looking through the camera and just figuring out how much he could work into that frame. He also taught me one very valuable thing, look through the lens, say to yourself what is the intent of the shot and if the intention doesn't read, forget it and start something else. From the point of view of a real exciting filmmaker, I found John very exciting, purely because he knew exactly what he wanted to. I think John could

have been the world's greatest director ever except, John was one of the world's great characters and I used to think he spent just a bit too much time being one of the world's great characters instead of being one of the world's greatest directors. But by whatever standards I think he was a great director

Alan Lawson: Let's go on, Scamp that's the next one I've got.

Freddie Francis: This was something, in those days don't forget that cameramen in this country didn't used to earn a great deal of money, they used to earn more than dustmen I agree but if you wanted to live a decent sort of life you had to keep working all the time. Consequently you found yourself doing films that you really didn't want to do with the directors who frankly didn't excite you

Alan Lawson: And this is one of them.

Freddie Francis: This is one of them.

Alan Lawson: I can understand that.

SIDE 2, TAPE 1

Alan Lawson: There is one you've missed out

Freddie Francis: I did several films with Chris Challis other than the Mickey Powell pictures, one of them I just mentioned was Beau Brummell, and another was Angels One Five which was an ABPC film I think, having started down there when it was BIP, and they were always changing, I never quite known what the studio is, I know it's Tesco now. Yes we made this little film Angels One Five which is about the first film they were hoping would bring John, who died, played the lead. John Gregson. He was very good he never in my opinion fulfilled his potential but he was very good, that was with another first-time director called George More O'Ferrall who was a television director, very nice guy

Alan Lawson: A gentleman

Freddie Francis: A gentleman, yes. It is very difficult to be a gentleman in a film director actually. That was just one of the films one does.

Alan Lawson and: Then I've got Time Without Pity

Freddie Francis: Yes, Time Without Pity was a film, the producer of that was Leon Clore who has always been a good friend of mine. And it was I think, this was the first film that Joe Losey did in this country when he was able to use his own name. He had made films with all sorts of. So we made this film, and I don't think the film did very well, I thought it was quite a good film though. What was the company, Leon's company was Harlequin. And with Joe Losey, that was quite an interesting film.

Alan Wilson: Did you like working with Joe Losey, reservations

Freddie Francis: I enjoyed working with him then because he was very nervous, hadn't done a film for a long time and needed a lot of help. And I like it when people need help. That was the only film I did with Joe. But yes, I would say that was one of the films I enjoyed.

Alan Lawson: The next one I have here is Next To No Time

Freddie Francis: Yes, yes. This was a bit of a mess of a film, a film with dear old Henry Cornelius. He was a lovely man but a bit of a muddler. And the film didn't make a lot of sense, it needed a bit of stronger direction and by now, unfortunately, one of the problems may have been, by now Kenny More who I liked very much, Kenny More was a bit of a law un to himself and Corny hadn't done anything for a long time. So I've an idea that Kenny may have been a bit too strong for Corny. And the one thing I always remember about that film, it took place on the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth, I don't know,

one of the big liners and the lady star was Betsy Drake who was married to Cary Grant in those days and we had the big set of the deck of the Queen Mary or Elizabeth or whichever it was, and I'd lit this set and I'd just laid smoke on it, and that there was this night fog on the set. Betsy Drake came onto the set and promptly fainted. We thought my God what has happened and what had happened, Betsy some months previously had been on the Andorra Star which had had a collision in the fog in mid-Atlantic and had sunk. So that was unbelievable. It was of Spain I think, it was a cruise ship, so she was in a terrible state.

Alan Lawson: Virgin Islands

Freddie Francis: This was another film for Leon Clore and I think I had been pressured on to that by Leon. I don't think Pat Jackson particularly wanted me to do it. But Leon wanted me to do it. Not that there was any bad feeling between dear old Pat and myself but once again Pat was the wrong guy I think for the picture because the two stars were John Cassavetes and Sidney Poitier. And let's face it, those two guys with dear old Pat whose such a nice bloke and basically a documentary director, he was way off. It got to the point where, I tell this story because it doesn't really matter, I remember one night I was having dinner in the yacht club in one of the Virgin Islands and Sidney Poitier and Cassavetes came over and said would I take the picture over. I said listen I can't do that, you better go and speak to Leon. So anyway they went to Leon and obviously Leon said no you can't do that. So it was a very unhappy picture from that point of view.

Alan Lawson: On that point, to translate from documentaries to features, I don't think it's a very easy translation.

Freddie Francis: No, I don't know why, you have to be a different sort of story teller altogether, don't you

Alan Lawson: Well it's probably also you're not used to handling actors, probably. If you like, by the time you've made your name

Freddie Francis: This is why it you can't, as I say, I was quite serious when I said it's very difficult to be a director and a gentleman. In the old days, as you know I've worked a lot in Los Angeles in America recently and I gather in the old days, the old directors if they had any nonsense, they would take you out side. Obviously things are different now but you have got to be pretty tough, once you undertake to do a film you have got to have an idea of how that film is going to go and if some body starts taking off at tangents, you're in real trouble.

Alan Lawson: We now come to one of the films that rings bells, Room At The Top

Freddie Francis: Room At The Top, with dear old Jack Clayton. Well Jack and I had known each other for a long time and I knew Jack when he was an assistant director, when he was a production manager, when he was associate producer and when he did this

film he asked me to shoot it for him, which I did, and as you know it almost opened a new chapter in British films. Not without its problems, I tell this story quite often. I know Jack hates me for telling it, nevertheless, halfway through the film, Jack and I had discussed it at length and we wanted Larry Harvey to look less like his rather effeminate self and a bit more like a tough North country boy so halfway through the picture, Larry didn't say anything but he didn't really like it I don't think, and we had shot a scene with Larry saying goodbye to Simone at the railway station, and they'd had a dirty weekend together, and I wanted it to look as if she had had a dirty weekend. Anyway Simone said nothing but Larry went to John, Jimmy Woolf who was a dear friend of Larry's and the producer. The next thing I know they were going to take me off the picture which I thought was a bit much as I was doing everything Jack and I had discussed. And Jack said hang on, and so Jack went to the Woolfs and said if Freddie goes, I go. So we thought obviously that's it and it was it, we carried on. But it wasn't until sometime after the picture that Jack discovered that they had asked somebody else to take over the movie. However, the next time I saw, I had a great deal of satisfaction because the next time I saw John and Jimmy Woolf, they came on the set just I got an Academy Award for Sons And Lovers and they had to come up and congratulate me. So I got a lot of satisfaction out of that.

Alan Lawson: The next one I've got is Battle Of The Sexes, or have we missed one out

Freddie Francis: I don't know. That is one that dear old Danischewsky produced, Charlie Crichton directed which we made over at Beaconsfield. That was a lot of fun, Peter Sellers, Bob Morley. Bob is a great deal of fun. Peter of course is no fun at all, but no, an enjoyable picture, not a great picture, not a bad picture

Alan Lawson: What about working with Charlie

Freddie Francis: Charlie is a miserable all swine but he's nice. The famous thing about Charlie, with the pipe, I remember saying to Charlie once, Charlie would it be a good idea if so and so did such a thing and this that and the other. Puff, puff, puff. I think that's a better idea than mine but it wouldn't be mine. He was good fun Charlie, I think he's a very nice guy basically.

Alan Lawson: Now Never Take Sweets From A Stranger

Freddie Francis: Really, that seems very low down. That was the first thing I ever did at Hammer.

Alan Lawson: 1960, this is a Hammer, we're coming into the Hammer era.

Freddie Francis: This was the only film I ever photographed for Hammer, Cyril Frankel directed it, it was quite a good film actually but no that was a nice film, I don't think it got a big showing, Hammer films never did really. No, this was a good film.

Alan Lawson: Then comes the golden gong. Sons And Lovers

Freddie Francis: Sons And Lovers, Yes Jack Cardiff wanted me to do the picture because he'd loved Sons and Lovers and anything connected with, and he'd loved Room At The Top and he wanted anything to do with Room At The Top to be involved with his movie. It was nice working with Jack and I had a very good operator, Denys Coop

Alan Lawson: This is an interesting thing, because you've done both director of photography and director, and Jacks done both. Did you ever have any differences of opinion about photography with Jack.

Freddie Francis: No, we didn't. But I'll tell you why, very few people realise this, Jack had never done a black and white picture. We never had any problems. I think Jack had liked what I'd done for Room At The Top and thought if I could apply that same quality to his film he'd be happy. No, we never had any discussions about it at all, well not any discussions, not any problems about it

Alan Lawson:: Then another good one to, Saturday Night And Sunday Morning

Freddie Francis: Oh yes Harry Saltzman wanted me to do this because it was Karel's first feature picture, it was very strange. I always tell this story, I can't mention names, I know that Karel didn't want me on the movie because he thought with my record I would make it look like a glossy Hollywood musical. So it was arranged that I would meet Karel in some dingy pub in Wardour Street, and if Karel didn't want me, that was down to Karel. So I said to Karel well before we start any conversation Karel I want you to know, now I have to be very careful, the guy he wanted was a very well known documentary cameraman, let say it's John Smith, I said Karel I want you to know that I am the rich man's John Smith. And Karel burst out laughing and we've been the best of friends ever since.

Alan Lawson: Again another delight for person to work with

Freddie Francis: Very nice, a bit of a old fuss-pot but very nice

Alan Orson: And he's an artist director not a technicians director

Freddie Francis: He loves the artists. Yes, I remember once and I've told Karel this, Leon Clore coming up on the set, maybe on French Lieutenant's Woman, he said to me where's Karel? I said he's over there over-rehearsing the artists. No, he loves rehearsing, it's his food and drink. Before the movie the artists were all at Karel's house and they're rehearsing and rehearsing which is fine

Alan Lawson: He got wonderful things out of his artists and let you get on with it which is nice in a way.

Freddie Francis: Indeed

Alan Lawson: And then we've got an *The Innocents*

Freddie Francis: Yes, another one with Jack. This was very interesting. I still say, I still think says he modestly, I still think it's one of the best uses of CinemaScope ever for the simple reason, I've been involved in lots of CinemaScope, or anamorphic, whatever it you like to call it. People say we're going to do anamorphic and that's it, and go ahead and shoot it 2.35 or whatever. But this film was really planned and it was really planned because neither Jack and nor I wanted to do it anamorphic. But suddenly, not very long before we were due to start, 20th Century who financed the movie said its got to be in CinemaScope. Because those were the days when if you did a film for 20th Century, you did it in CinemaScope. So we worked on it.

In those days there were always restrictions, you can't go closer than nine feet. So we decided that we'd stop down to ridiculous stops so we could get in closer. And then we had those big, an enormous amount of that stuff was shot on the silent stage, all the garden stuff, and I had the art department paint one side of the trees silver so they always had a highlight, and various things.

And I had the special filters that used to come in from the side, as we thought it was an intimate film and shouldn't have been CinemaScope we were able to bring our filters in from the side and keep all the interest there, and we could move them during a shot. And sometimes I'd paint to my own filters. So we really did plan it as CinemaScope, and this is why I hate it when people see it on ordinary screens, and not CinemaScope. I have only just managed to get a copy of it in CinemaScope, and that is because Scorsese managed to buy an old copy of the film and he had a video copy done for me. And I still say, and I'm sure people think I'm being big headed, but I still think it was the best use of CinemaScope

Alan Lawson: What do you think about CinemaScope really, has it had any value at all other than a gimmick

Freddie Francis: Oh no, or I like it provided it's, one of the things about CinemaScope, forget showing CinemaScope on television, if you shoot a film in CinemaScope you know how it's going to be shown. Whereas if you shoot it normally, sometimes they let you put a mask in the camera to 1.66 but then they're going to show it at 1.85, so you never know how the wretched films going to be shown. I've always said in this day and age if you want to see your film properly projected that's all you can hope for. Whereas if you shoot it in CinemaScope, forgetting showing it on television, you know it's going to be shown as you shot it, provided it's the right sort of subject. But we were at some BFI thing, something at Bristol, and they had found a CinemaScope print, I think it was made up of two different prints, of *The Innocents* and it was super.

Alan Lawson: The next thing I've got here is *The Horse Masters*

Freddie Francis: We had more fun on making The Horse Masters which is probably the worst film I've ever done, it really was

Alan Lawson: Not from your point of view

Freddie Francis: I don't find it very good from my point of view really, I don't know how to describe it, it was absolutely mad. I don't think anybody really believed in the film

Alan Lawson : Who directed it

Freddie Francis: Bill Fairchild. Ronnie Taylor who operated on the film for me, any time anybody mentions Horse Masters we just fall about. But we did have a wonderful time. Unbelievable.

Alan Lawson: Then next was Paranoiac

Freddie Francis: No, there was one before that

Alan Lawson: Not Two And Two Make Six

Freddie Francis: Two And Two Make Six which was the first film I directed. And that again, it seems that I never made any good films, I'm panning them all now. No Two And Two Make Six was the first film I directed.

Alan Lawson: Where was that made

Freddie Francis: Shepperton. This is one of those things I should never have done. Dear old Danischewsky whom I love asked me to do this film and I read it and I said I don't think the script is right for kids. He said you can change it. And he was serious about saying I could change it, but he didn't think I wanted to change it to the degree I wanted to. So Pam and I work on it an awful lot and we made a script which we thought was suitable for kids, when I say kids I mean a younger audience. When Danny saw it of course he was appalled, he hadn't meant I could alter it, he meant I could alter it. He meant I could change a few commas. Now I was in a spot. If I know what I know now I would have said I'm sorry Danny, I can't do it. But having gone all through the dramas, and in those days if they wanted some body to direct a film, they had to get the permission from the National Film Finance Corporation. - we are going to have so and so to direct it, and if they said no, you were out. They'd agreed that I could do it. And I thought if I back out now I'm going to be in trouble. And so I thought I could still change it to what I wanted and I couldn't, and it wasn't very good.

Now we come to the dreaded Hammer. I'm always knocking horror films but do you know I know I owe a lot to Hammer. Within a few years I'd become a cult figure in the horror world, which is something I really never wanted to be. But however the point is if

some body is writing my obituary and they say he made too many films, it is really much better than saying he never made sufficient films and starved to death. And I love making films. I enjoyed my stay at Hammer, I still get fan letters, one came this morning funnily enough, I still get fan letters and the letters from all over, mostly the Continent. I'm their favourite figure.

Alan Lawson: There is now this German one, **Totter Suchte Seinen Murder**

Freddie Francis: My God. In Vienna, this was a young German producer who was heir to the Siemens millions and he used to walk around with a revolver in his pocket all the time. That was, oh. I went on and on doing these Hammer films, horror films

Alan Lawson: This was made for Hammer

Freddie Francis: No, that wasn't. This was made purely for him. He made films the way you and I make home movies. I'm always telling this story but I suddenly realised I was embroiled in this horror situation and I hated it because I wanted to do something else and nobody would let me to do anything else. They said no, all these films make a fortune, we don't want you to do anything else. So that's why I backed off. I used to go all over the world and to their famous horror festivals and I used to talk to them and I found myself talking to these horror people, I'd talk about directors I admire, Billy Wilder and all these people, and they didn't know who I was talking about. So I thought well I'll try a new tack and I thought and start talking about famous horror films, the Tod Browning films, and they still didn't know. And I realised that these people were not interested in films, they were interested in horror. So this is not my scene, so I backed off. I forget when I backed off but I backed off.

Alan Lawson: Around 1964

Freddie Francis: I backed off and I was preparing stuff I wanted to try and direct on own until David Lynch and Jonathan Sanger asked me to do *The Elephant Man* for them

Alan Lawson: What about *Night Must Fall*

Freddie Francis: That was in the middle of, I'd directed a few films but then Karel and Albie were for doing this film with their own company for MGM and they asked me to do it. So I did that for them, which was interesting. And I think it was a good film, it wasn't a very good version of *Night Must Fall* but as a film, and I always told Karel if they'd called it anything other than *Night Must Fall* it would have been successful. But if you say this is be *Night Must Fall* everybody remembers *Night Must Fall*, the head in the hat box and blah blah blah. and this had none of that element in it. It was too much a study of this strange boy, which was fine but not when people are waiting for the hat box bit.

Alan Wilson: They keep on coming, do you want to talk about any of them particularly

Freddie Francis: Not really, they're all sort of. For instance there is one there called Torture Garden which my friend Martin Scorsese love this, he loves it. I had a script, while I was working with Marty on Cape Fear I had a script sent to me about the life of Edgar Allan Poe, which I didn't want to do, because I didn't want to get involved in setting up something and rewriting, and Marty persuaded me to do it because he thought Torture Garden which had a little bit about Edgar Allan Poe in it was so good. He loves them

I loved making them all, let's face it, because I love making films but in retrospect I wish I hadn't done them.

Alan Lawson: What about The Intrepid Mr Twigg

Freddie Francis: A friend of mine, he used to be a neighbour, Tony Marriott who wrote a couple of plays Uproar In The House and No Sex Please, We're British he had this idea to do a series on a man called Mr Twigg. And he prevailed on another friend of mine, Roy Castle, to play Mr Twigg, only little one reeler jobs. Because the writer was a friend of mine and also Roy Castle was a good friend of mine I did that. It was a nothing thing, a one reeler

Alan Lawson: What for, television

Freddie Francis: A programme filler.

Alan Lawson: And then Night Flight to Andorra.

Freddie Francis: No idea

Alan Lawson: Who's Mad Now

Freddie Francis: Who's Mad Now, I did an episode for Sid Cole, he was doing a thing called Man In A Suitcase, and I think I did one called Whose Mad Now, McCoy. That was just a television series

Alan Lawson: The Man Who Gambled With Life

Freddie Francis: I think that was a Saint, again for a television

Alan Lawson: Then we have Trog,

Freddie Francis: The less said about that the better, and unfortunately it was dear old Joan Crawford's last picture, and it was terrible

Alan Lawson: You took over from Desmond Dickinson

Freddie Francis: No, I directed it.

Alan Lawson: Did Dick light it

Freddie Francis: He did

Alan Lawson: It was about his last film

Freddie Francis: I think so.

Alan Lawson: I remember him telling me about working with Joan Crawford. Shadow Of The Panther

Freddie Francis: That was also a television thing, a series called The Champions

Alan Lawson: Then a film called Creeping Flesh.

Freddie Francis: That was a film I did for John **Heyman**. If you like horror films, that was good, it was a good film, and Peter Cushing was excellent in it as he always is. It was such an unlikely story and Peter Cushing seemed to convince everybody it was real. Even I, I listened to Peter talking all this rubbish on the screen and I think that must be true. Peter was very good, and Peter is the greatest guy at speaking unbelievable dialogue and making you believe it.

Alan Lawson: It's an interesting art that

Freddie Francis: Yes, and he's the past master.

Alan Lawson: Tales From The Crypt, again that is another horror

Freddie Francis: That is another horror film, that had about five different stories in it

Alan Lawson: Craze

Freddie Francis: That is another film for Herman Cohen with Jack Palance, not that good

Alan Lawson: Tales That Witness Madness

Freddie Francis: I thought Tales That Witness Madness was good. There was an earlier one you mentioned which I said I'd did for John Heyman, Creeping Flesh, and that was one of the first films John did for his new company, and it did very well. And I had just done a film for Amicus which had done very well in America. And I had this script, Witness Madness and I said to John why don't you do this. And I went to see John one Easter, I was working on a film, we had Easter off, I went up to see John. I told him about the film and he said oh yes, I'll set it up for you. I thought we've heard all this before. So

he went in to his teleprinter and I heard him tap, tap, tap, and he came in, we were still talking about it. Five minutes later, and the telly printer was working, he came back, he said it's fine, I've set it up with Frank Yablans. And we were off, and we made this film which I took it as far away from horror as I could, because it really wasn't a horror film.

Alan Lawson: Where was it made

Freddie Francis: Shepperton. When it was made I thought it was a very good film. Yablans came over, and he was the head of Paramount then, and he started his morning with a meeting with John Schlesinger when he cancelled a musical which John was going to do about Queen Victoria, so he cancelled that, and lost a lot of money on that. He then went to see another film which his company had made over here called something like The Last Days Of Hitler which he hated. Then he came on to see my film. He saw it, he said nothing, I said well what do you think of it Frank. He said well it's not a horror film. I said well it wasn't a horror script. He said oh Jesus I don't read scripts. So I don't know where you go from there. So we then had to shoot for another few days to try and make a non-horror film into a horror film. It still wasn't a bad film though

Alan Lawson: Then Son Of Dracula

Freddie Francis: Oh yes, this I did for Ringo Starr. And at the end of the film I opted out. I said Ringo look, I'm ill at the moment, you better cut the film yourself. He had made it with a lot of his friends and that, the least said the better.

Alan Lawson: Legend Of The Werewolf

Freddie Francis: That was one I did for Tyburn which I thought was quite a nice little film

Alan Lawson: Tyburn, that was Kevin, your son, what's it like working with your son

Freddie Francis: Obviously I keep him well out of the way.

Alan Lawson: The Ghoul

Freddie Francis: Another one for him. I did these as a great favour, because this was after I decided to give up horror films, and Kevin I think was in a slight dilemma, so I agreed to do those for him.

Alan Lawson: Then I've got, this can't be right, Short Circuit, camera operator. No. Moulina Maxima

Freddie Francis: Sounds like a food processor

Alan Lawson: That's right. I wonder if it is. Not a commercial

Freddie Francis: No, I did very few commercials.

Alan Lawson: Then The Doctor And The Devils

Freddie Francis: That was the last one I directed at Shepperton.

Alan Lawson: Anything about that

Freddie Francis: This was one we had for a long time. A doctor friend of mine owned it, and he got the rights, he got the rights off Nick Ray. I suspect that Nick Ray owed him money, and he spent a lot of time trying to set it up. We eventually set it up with Mel Brooks. Mel Brooks thought he owed me a favour after Elephant Man and so he set it up and off we went. It wasn't a bad little film.

Alan Lawson: Then you reverted back to the oldest profession.

Freddie Francis: Then I went back, the oldest profession, that's right

Alan Lawson: With Brenda Star

Pamela Mann: Elephant Man came before that.

Freddie Francis: I'm not sure.

Alan Lawson: Brenda Star, it says here 1989.

Pamela Mann: Because of the Tim connection, Brenda Star was after xxx, Elephant Man was before that.

Freddie Francis: Tim Dalton starred in The Doctor And The Devils which I directed and just as I was finishing it I got a phone call from Tim who was out in Florida and asked me if I would take over this picture, and they had had to fire two cameramen. So because Tim was a friend I did that. I was the third cameraman on it but I did it for as a favour to Tim

Alan Lawson: Then Glory

Freddie Francis: Glory, I did a film before that, before Glory I did the Bruce Beresford film, which was the reason why I did Glory. Before Glory I did, what was it, with Tom Selleck,

Pamela Mann: Her Alibi. Careless Heart was before that.

Alan Lawson: Incidentally Elephant Man isn't down here

Pamela Mann: Elephant Man and French Lieutenant's Woman were

Freddie Francis: Before, yes, because I did Elephant Man and almost immediately after I did The French Lieutenant's Woman and almost immediately afterwards went to America and did a thing called The Executioner's Song

Alan Lawson: Going back, Elephant Man anything you particularly would like to talk about, because it was quite an outstanding film

Freddie Francis: It was the most enjoyable. It was David's first sort of feature picture, David Lynch. And he knew what he wanted and I was able to show him how to get it, so it was very interesting from that point of view. And we've been friends ever since

After Elephant Man, I did The French Lieutenant's Woman with Karel Reisz

Alan Lawson: What about working with Karel

Freddie Francis: I liked working with Karel very much, he is an old fuss-pot but he is very good.

Alan Lawson: Is he an artist's director or a technician's director?

Freddie Francis: He is definitely an artist director. He's fine. Anyway after French Lieutenant's Woman, I went over to you to Utah and did The Executioner's Song

Alan Lawson: Can we come back to French Lieutenant's Woman, because it's got some outstanding location stuff in it. Like to talk about that at all.

Freddie Francis: This was the first, let us try not to be too technical now, because I'm not very technical, this was the first time, since then and now I've used a little bit of equipment called the Varicom, which was then called the Lightflex which for all sense and purposes was a contrast control. This was designed by Gerry Turpin when he was doing a film for Dickie Attenborough called Young Winston. Because Dicky wanted everything to look like as if it was in those XXX pages of the London Illustrated News. Gerry came up with this thing where by there was a sort of curved plastic sheet in front of the lens and above it was a light box which shone light onto this curved sheet, so it gave everything you photographed this sort of hew, but mostly in the shadows, not in the highlights. And they also discovered while they were playing with it that it increased the speed of the film quite a bit.

So when we did The French Lieutenant's Woman I wanted to get a differentiation between the modern stuff and the old stuff. So I decided to try this, by which time the guy who had financed the backing of the Lightflex, had taken the stuff away, and so we had to get it out of pawn as it were and I did tests of it and I used it a lot to differentiate between the modern, not so much by colour but by contrast, because the most important thing in filming is contrast. Anybody can change the exposure, if it's under exposed you can

brighten it up a bit, if it over exposed you can print it down a bit. But you can't change the contrast. So I used it as a contrast control and I've been using it ever since. And eventually Arriflex decided to take it up. They took me out to lunch and they said we're going to take this over, what do you suggest, is it a good idea. I said I'd don't think it's a good idea because I love it, I will always use it but I don't think everybody else well, plus the fact that a lot of companies won't pay for it anyway.

So anyway Volker **Bonneman** from Arris in New York, he liked the idea. So they bought it. They then made a smaller version which was not so bulky. I kept using it, nobody else did, well other people did and without being big head nobody seemed to know how to use it. In fact there is one very famous cameraman whose work I admire, he once did a film with the Lightflex and he made a terrible mess of it. It has almost gone out of use except for me. But then they changed it and called it the Varicom which made it very much smaller and you were just shooting through a round glass which was illuminated from the side, so you didn't have this huge window front; and I don't think anyone was using it except me. And every now and again I would ring, especially when I was in America, I would ring Volker in New York, I would say Volker look we've got three cameras working on this and I don't think we can afford to have three Varicoms, can you let me have them. Volker used to let me have them and eventually I was going to do this film I've just done and I rang Arris here and I said I'm going to do this film and the only Varicom you've got in this country is no good, it was one they sent me when I was doing a film in Yugoslavia, and it's no good. So they've redesigned it completely and given me one. I've used it ever since *The French Lieutenant's Woman* on every film except *Cape Fear*.

Alan Lawson: Does it take you long to set up

Freddie Francis: Not at all. The only trouble is, what Arriflex do wrong, if you order one from Arriflex, they send you lot of meters and things with it which are no good. When Arriflex very kindly gave me this one, they send it over and Volker Bonneman said I haven't included the meters because I know you'd just throw them away. Because you know, if a cameraman doesn't do everything by eye then what is he doing. I think this scares people off. But I think it is a wonderful bit of equipment, it saves so much time. Anybody can light a set but the thing is to fill it so you've got the contrast right. But if you can control your contrast on the camera you're laughing. So if this is why I use it

Alan Lawson: I was going to ask you, because you talked about meters just in passing, what about the meters

Freddie Francis: I find it very difficult anyway to get the right exposure, I'm not very good at that, but I think I can get it approximately right and then it's down to the labs. My basic principle is, I'm joking really, you've got to be a pretty right, but providing you're somewhere near, the labs can sort it out. What the labs can't sort out, I think you'll agree, is if the contrast is wrong, then you're dead. So if you keep your contrast right with Varicom, especially in this day and age. I've just done a sequence, in this country, we

were doing a sort of party in a huge area with thick bushes, green bushes. Well when you've got sun on dark green bushes you can see them, but as soon as the sun goes off you're dead. So if you have to shoot a sequence in one day you can keep that pretty even with the Lightflex

Alan Lawson: Did you use a foot candle meter at all for key lights

Freddie Francis: No, I just use reflected light, well sometimes, well it's a foot candle meter but I never use foot candles now. Don't forget I was 15 years not photographing a film when I was directing, and then I always used to use foot candles, but somehow or other I don't now.

FREDDIE FRANCIS

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SIDE 3, TAPE 2

Alan Lawson: It is interesting what you were saying about meters, I was playing a little bit of an Alan Hume tape and he remembers working with Otto Heller, he used to come on the set, and kind of wet his finger and put it up and say FA.

Freddie Francis: Don't forget these were the days when the film was pretty slow and even, I've always used meters, but when I finished photographing the first time, before my 15 year break, I could light a set and would guarantee it was going to be somewhere around F4 but I couldn't do it now. When you have 500 and 600 ASA, it's impossible to judge it. I gather Dougie still doesn't use a meter, but he has been at it all the time, he never gave up as I did.

Alan Lawson: You've missed the middle bit, because the stock has got faster.

Freddie Francis: Indeed, tremendously faster.

Alan Lawson: Cape Fear

Freddie Francis: Cape Fear. Marty heard me give my speech at the awards when I got the award for Glory and asked me if I could stop off in New York and talk to him, which I did. And this is one of those funny things, I do lots of interviews and lecturing for kids, and they all say how did you and Marty decide on the style for Cape Fear. And I can't help knocking them, I know what you want me to say, I went along to see Marty with a Van Gogh book under one arm and a Rembrandt book under the other. I say we didn't do that at all, Marty knew my work, I knew Marty's work and all Marty said to me is did you ever see Cape Fear, I said I did Marty but I can't remember much about it except the atmosphere. That's all we spoken about. And then Marty being a film buff we spoke about every other film under the sun. We spoke about an hour about films and five minutes about Cape Fear. And it was just that Marty knew what I could do and I thought I knew what Marty wanted, and it went on from there. And we became very close, Marty would leave various sequences for me to do. One weekend he would go away to Los Angeles for some reason or another and leave me to shoot a sequence of a car chase or something. And then I persuaded him that he couldn't shoot the final sequence exterior because there is no running water in Florida, it's all very placid. And I said if you bring in wave machines and wind machines you'll be lucky if you get this through in the next six months. So he said how shall I do it. I said, if the way we did in Moby Dick, we build a tank. So Marty said fine, we'll build a tank, no, Marty said we'll shoot it in a tank. So I thought this meant we'd pack up and go to Los Angeles to shoot it in the Universal tank. But Marty doesn't like working in Los Angeles, so we built a studio and a tank in Fort Lauderdale.

Near the end of the shooting I said to Marty, now Marty I think you ought to get Thelma to cut this so you can see the model shots you need. Oh, he said nobody ever told me about that, so I said well you'll need it. So we got a storyboard artist down. So I said why don't you let me shoot them back in London. So he let me shoot all the model stuff with The Magic Camera Company at Shepperton which they made a great job of. It was great working with Marty. Marty will take mad chances because he can afford to and this is exciting.

Alan Lawson: Man In The Moon

Freddie Francis: Man In The Moon was a lovely, lovely film, but nobody ever saw it. It was a charming film and some of my best work, I think. It was a charming film and it was the wrong time because there was no violence in it, no sex

Alan Lawson: It was actually before Cape Fear

Freddie Francis: Yes it was. That's right. But if it was a lovely film, directed by a lovely man Robert Mulligan, great director, whom I'd done a film before called Clara's Heart, similar situation, lovely film, charming, but nobody wanted to see it.

Alan Lawson: School Ties

Freddie Francis: School Ties, this is a film I did for Paramount, Sherry Lansing. It wasn't a bad film, it wasn't good, it wasn't a bad film

Pamela Francis: It was quite good

Freddie Francis: It was much better than I thought. It was beautifully edited. I've never known a film to be improved by editing as much as this one was. I've now forgotten who the editor was.

Alan Lawson: Then there is Princess Caribou

Freddie Francis: That's the one we've just finished. Which I'm recovering from at the moment. It's the first film I've done in this country for 12 years. It was directed by Michael Austin, he's a writer.

Before that I did a very interesting film, it was a video for television but I did it because it was a Mamet play with Jack Lemon and Matthew Broderick. It was called Life In The Theatre, it's a play which has been done several times over here. But that was very good.

Alan Lawson: that was shot on video was it

Freddie Francis: No, film. And they're hoping to show it in film, but it has already been shown on video, on television.

Alan Lawson: Do you find if you're doing something for television you have a different approach.

Freddie Francis: One is always aware of the contrast but this again one can take care of that with the Varicom

Alan Lawson: I wasn't thinking of that at all, I was thinking of angles and things like this, that is up to the director really

Freddie Francis: It is up to the director really and nowadays apart from the real fast soaps, where they do it all in talking heads, they all hope to do films one day, so they're all trying to make a film out of whatever they're doing for television.

Alan Lawson: Have you ever suffered from one of these whiz kids whose come from television straight into film-making, you needn't name names

Freddie Francis: I haven't really. No. Not only have I not suffered, I don't think I've had one. Can you think of one.

Pamela Francis: From theatre to films, and nowhere to films I've suffered with as well.

Alan Lawson: We've all had those. You've seen enormous changes since you started, what is the greatest change.

Freddie Francis: I find it very difficult to say, because one of the things I'm proud of is that I've changed with it, so it is very difficult to say. Today one of the greatest changes is the way they work these ridiculous hours. This I can't quite gather. This is, I suppose something to do with accountants but one always blames accountants. It doesn't have to be. As I say I've done a couple of films with Bob Mulligan. One never works long hours and you still get the film through on time, because he knows from the first bell what he's doing.

Alan Lawson : What about the use of zooms

Freddie Francis: I think most bits of equipment are useful in their place. I know when zooms first came out it was terribly difficult to stop the directors using them. I hate to use them except in association with a track for instance. If you can do the two moves at once they're most valuable.

Alan Lawson: Do you find them limiting

Freddie Francis: Not really, because it's just a bit of your equipment and you sum up the shots you've got to do and you use the equipment for that.

Alan Lawson: It's a means to an end

Freddie Francis: Yes all sorts of things. People go mad about Steadicams and things like that which are fine but when you need them. I got an Academy Award for *Glory* as you know, and there was one time when Ed Zwick the director wanted to do a Steadicam shot. I said I think it's unnecessary. So we did this shot on a crane a few times and then he did it on a Steadicam. And having spent all this money on getting the Steadicam crew, he fought like mad to keep a piece of it in, and to my mind it ruined the shot. Because the shot had worked out fine without the Steadicam.

Alan Lawson: There was that great period of cinema Verite when the slogan was if it wobbles, it must be good. Fortunately that's now gone

Freddie Francis: Thank God

Alan Lawson: You've seen changes in lighting too

Freddie Francis: When you say lighting, do you mean styles or equipment

Alan Lawson: The equipment

Freddie Francis: Yes, and a lot of them not necessarily for the better. I know when I did *Elephant Man*, I hated all the new stuff that had come, lamps where you couldn't put diffusers in, you would have to put paper on the front of the lamps, and so you set barn doors, and then you put a paper in front of the lamp, they spread the light again. Things like blondes and red heads I believe they're called. Nowadays I invariably go for the older stuff because you've got much more control over it, but it seems to me nobody seems to worry about that these days, it's rush, rush, rush, and whatever you can put in front of the lamps, put it in front wherever it goes.

Alan Lawson: Do use a lot of barn doors, do a lot of XXX

Freddie Francis: Yes.

Alan Lawson: You learned some of that from Guy Green

Freddie Francis: I never worked with Guy, no, that's not true, I was a clapper boy, I'm talking about 1934,

Alan Lawson: He hadn't started lighting then

Freddie Francis: No, he was operating for Claude Friese-Greene. But I think one has to, you put a light on something for a certain reason and you don't want it to do things other than what you planned for it.

Alan Lawson: It's there for a reason

Freddie Francis: Yes

Alan Lawson: Which cameraman gave you encouragement, did you get encouragement, tuition from cameramen, or tuition, not tuition, that's the wrong word

Freddie Francis: No, because I found, because I started in the business with a slight knowledge of lighting, so all I wanted to do was watch other people and learn. I suppose the people I watched most, because the people I worked mostly with them and who would willingly give me things to do of my own are Ossie Morris and Chris Challis.

Alan Lawson: Freddie, I suppose, at that time you were more or less the lowest form of animal alive.

Freddie Francis: I've always known Freddie

Alan Lawson: Mr Young then

Freddie Francis: Freddie Francis: Mr Young, sir. A lovely story, you don't remember Ivan Foxwell, he used to be his assistant.

Alan Lawson: Yes I do.

Freddie Francis: For some reason or other Freddie was doing some test for a picture and he had to use a Debrie. Ivan, dear Ivan Foxwell was the assistant and for some reason or other he undid the camera and then undid the magazine that they had just shot. Sir, sir, chief, I've fogged been the film. God knows what happened to Ivan, because he was a great society man, married Lady somebody

Alan Lawson: But I can remember him over at, in those days it was Sound City

Pamela Francis: He became a producer, didn't he

Freddie Francis: He was the producer on a film that Chris and I did in Monte Carlo for Victor Saville called 24 Hours In A Woman's Life

Alan Lawson: When it you were at B & D was Cyril Bristow still there

Freddie Francis: Cyril Bristow came in for some of those 10 days things.

Alan Lawson: Because he disappeared completely.

Freddie Francis: And I thought he wasn't a bad cameraman, Cyril

Alan Lawson: He started on the Swanson film, I think he lasted one day. The last I heard of him and this again was before the war, he was selling motor cars

Freddie Francis: Car salesmen, that was the last I heard of Cyril. I thought Cyril was quite good. It was the other guy who was, Hone Glendinning, you remember him

Alan Lawson: He again started at Sound City,

Freddie Francis: And well he was a friend of the bloke who owned it,

Alan Lawson: Boot, no Boot built it, it wasn't Boot

Freddie Francis: Norman something, I know because Hone used to live there

Alan Lawson: So did George Dudgeon Stretton, they all did, I think they'd all put money in, Norman Loudon, they'd all put money in, because I met them over there working on Three Men In The Boat

Freddie Francis: Because dear old Hone was in the camera department when I first started there

Alan Lawson: If you could start again would you want to change

Freddie Francis: No, I don't think so. I think the only thing I would do would be to have kept out of the horror genre, but I enjoyed it, I like making films, it doesn't really matter what they are

Alan Lawson: Is there anything you're particularly proud of.

Freddie Francis: It's difficult to say. Normally if people say that to me I usually think about, and I suppose it was The Innocents because as a cameraman however much my films are appreciated, I never appreciate them 100 per cent, I always think there is some thing else I could have done, even the films I got Academy Awards for. But The Innocents, it was something we planned meticulously. And I was younger then so I appreciated the praise

Alan Lawson: Thank you Freddie very much

INTERVIEW continued

Alan Lawson: Your first serious thoughts about the cinema was presumably when you wrote your thesis for the North London Poly,

Freddie Francis: North-Western, I think it is the north-London now

Alan Lawson: Doesn't matter, can you remember anything about that thesis

Freddie Francis: It was very, very varied. And I used to look, obviously I couldn't make it a film fans thing and as it was an Engineering Polytechnic I used to go through the school library for any reference to any thing cinematograph, ie cameras, projectors, most of which I didn't know about at the time but I picked up from there, camera movements, projector movements, those sort of things

Alan Lawson: What was you'll line, what were you trying to prove

Freddie Francis: It was, I suppose, funnily enough I've never thought about this before, my line basically was something I'd enjoy and not have to get too involved with, because I didn't like school very much, but also I love the cinema as it was today, and it really was a how the whole thing started and it was just I suppose without realising it, I wanted to know how what I enjoyed today had come about. And it didn't angle towards I wanted to be a cameraman or anything like that, I just wanted to know how the whole thing had started, because I love the medium.

Alan Lawson: When you started at the Bush working with Lewis Protheroe

Freddie Francis: He was from the Bush, but by the time I came with Lewie, Lewie I suspect was on hard times.

Alan Lawson: So he wasn't actually working at the Bush

Freddie Francis: No he had left the Bush and I think he was on pretty hard times, and I think the whole reason for wanting an apprentice was he needed the money. I'm not condemning him for this, because the little time I spent with him was very valuable. So he was a freelance. And the films I did with him, the first one we did at Walton, a film with Gene Gerrard

Alan Lawson: Which studio

Freddie Francis: Walton on Thames, where dear old Geoff Faithful was the resident cameraman and dear old Arthur Grant was his camera operator. That was one film and I did two more with him at Ealing. Stanley Lupino started a company, Stanley Lupino Productions and they made a couple of films at Ealing. And funnily enough, I don't know whether I mentioned it in the last one, suddenly arrived on the floor on the second one, the name of which I've forgotten, as the leading lady was an ex neighbour of mine, Sally Gray, now the Dowager Duchess of somewhere. Funnily enough I've just looked up her

history for a guy who came over from Australia to interview me, but she's now a dowager duchess. It was a surprise, because apart from Jean Simmons living 100 yards that way, Sally Gray used to live about 100 yards the other way. And I used to drool at Sally Gray on her way, she was a chorus girl at the Saville and going past the top of the road to the tube station, she was a gorgeous little girl, however enough of my sex life.

Alan Lawson: I looked up the credits for Talk Of The Devil and I noticed Jack Raymond was the producer, do you remember anything about Jack

Freddie Francis: Very little,

Alan Lawson: He had a stutter, do you remember

Freddie Francis: No I don't. He was the type of producer and director, because I think I did a picture with him that he directed, for the live of me I can't remember, but he was typical of directors in those days always wore a lounge suit, always extremely well dressed. Quite a tough character,

Alan Lawson: Yes, I worked on two films

Freddie Francis: But I can't remember a great deal about him other than that. I suspect for those days of the industry he really knew what he was talking about and doing, because very few people, in my opinion, very few people did know what they were talking about or doing in those days. Because people used to crop up, especially directors, would crop up and completely disappear

Alan Lawson: Like Mainwaring

Freddie Francis: Bernard Mainwaring, I did a quota quickie with him

Alan Lawson: He would conduct his scene

Freddie Francis: That's right

Alan Lawson: Rather short

Freddie Francis: I'm pretty sure, I had a friend who was also a clapper boy whose father was a song plugger for Feldman's the music publisher, and he told us that one of our directors, it may have been Bernard Mainwaring, one of our directors' had been a drummer in a band just before he started directing. It may have been him, I don't know. Another one was dear old George Pearson, bless him, he was a good director, George, I've said this before, he never realised we were shooting sound. He used to wander about, he didn't speak but he always mouthed the words

Alan Lawson: Another thing I looked up was The Stars Look Down, there are three camera credits on that. There is Mutz, Ernie Palmer and Henry Harris, why.

Freddie Francis: The only one I came across was Mutz. I was doing, I left when everybody left, when the war broken out, we went home one Friday evening and the war broke out that weekend. And I was second camera on the first unit and Mutz was the cameraman, who was operating on the first unit I can't remember.

Alan Lawson: It wasn't Irwin Hillier was it

Freddie Francis: It could have been but I don't remember. I know one of the focus pullers was Karl **Keyser** who during the war was sent to Australia and stayed there. But I can't remember the rest of the crew

Alan Lawson: During the war years when you became a one man unit at Aldershot you didn't say what camera you were using

Freddie Francis Generally it was a Newman Sinclair, and occasionally for things like manoeuvres, I remember being out on manoeuvres once and I had dear old Dilly Weddon with me and then it was all hand-held Eyemos. And when we were for in the studio, in the early days we had an old Vinton, but then we were in the lap of luxury, once America joined in, they sent us two NCs, this was real luxury

Alan Lawson: After the war, when it you'd returned from Africa working on a Korda film you landed up at Worton Hall, were you working in the old studio, the one attached to the house, or were you in the big one which became the model stage

Freddie Francis: No, we were in the original, the small studio, because the big one you're talking about was the silent stage which is now at Shepperton and is going over to Pinewood, is it going over to Pinewood or Elstree, anyway they're moving it once again

Alan Lawson: But that was used as aircraft storage or something during the war, wasn't it

Freddie Francis: That I can't answer, because by the time I got to Worton Hall, it was now the special effects stage and they'd imported an American effects cameraman, Ned Mann, and they had a lot of people down there.

Alan Lawson: Because when I worked at Worton Hall, the power supply was from batteries, there was a traction engine that used to charge the batteries

Freddie Francis: Really, no,

Alan Lawson: It was on the power

Freddie Francis: No it was very modern by the time I was down there, they had a meter there

Alan Lawson: They had pennies to put in the slot. Do you remember what was the sound system was there, because when I was there it was one of these none royalty ones called Fidelitone, which we used to call Fiddlely-ton

Freddie Francis: I don't remember, I don't think it was anything strange though. I know the sound man was Alan Allen, and in charge of the department was Bill some body, a very dapper little man whose name I can't remember. But I think it was ordinary. Because I remember when I started at BIP they also had a strange sound system there

Alan Lawson: Ambiphone

Freddie Francis: No, it had a German name

Alan Lawson: Klangfilm

Freddie Francis: Klangfilm, that's right

Alan Lawson: They started with Klangfilm, and then somebody pirated it and called it Ambiphone and it became RCA afterwards.

When you were talking about working with Michael Powell, apart from saying he liked people who stood up to his bullying, you didn't say very much else about him

Freddie Francis: I absolutely loved Mickey, I consider I had two mentors in this business, Mickey Powell and John Huston and they were both great characters, completely different but great characters. And Mickey was a great adventurer, a film for Mickey was a great adventure, you were going off into the great unknown. He would do mad, wild things, some of them terrible, some of them wonderful, but he was not afraid to take ridiculous chances. No, I was very fond of Mickey, not many people are. He had this terrible reputation of being a bully, and so many people are but they, I'm sure they do it in the hope of getting somebody to stand up to them. Mickey and I used to have terrible quarrels and he used to love it. And being a Cockney I used to, I always used to have the last word, except on one occasion when we were on *The Elusive Pimpernel* at British National we were having this terrible row, terrible row, it would seem a terrible row to anybody listening but to Mickey and I we knew that as soon as we got out of the door we would be talking about something else. He couldn't think, I came in with some quip which he couldn't answer so he just stood there and he said, I'll tell you what will happen to you, you will end up directing cheap comedies. And then he walked off. Even in Mickey's declining years he always kept in touch with what I was doing, always knew what I was doing. And one of my proudest possessions, because I always operated for Mickey, I have a little card somewhere, Mickey came over to England to celebrate his 80th birthday which was held in one of the clubs in London, and I was put at the top table,

and this little card, Freddie, and underneath in brackets, the eye. I'm very fond of Mickey. If anybody says he was a nasty man, I never argue because he must have been nasty to lots of people. When I was, as I say I was the resident operator at Worton Hall and when we were going to do The Small Back Room, people were coming from all over the country saying you can't go with him he's a terrible man. But we hit it off right away.

Alan Lawson: The other person I was wondering if you ever worked with and that was David Lean.

Freddie Francis: Never worked with David Lean, Pam did, I didn't. He admired my work on Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, and funnily enough, I've never told the story before in case the people who took over were envious, I was, I think Pam was with me in the cutting room at the time, she came down to visit, I was cutting a film which I'd directed at Shepperton and we were in the cutting room, and I was called to the phone and it was somebody ringing me from Spain and they were replacing the cameraman on Zhivago and would I take over. I said I'd love to but I was in the middle of cutting a film.

Alan Lawson: That was Nick Roeg.

Freddie Francis. Then I would have worked with him but I didn't. My memories of David Lean are always when I was a clapper boy at B & D and we'd be going home at 6 o'clock at night having done much more work than we do in 16 hours today and David used to like working at night, couldn't be bothered by the hoi polloi, and the cutting rooms were near the gate at B & D; and David's cutting room was on the first floor and there was a veranda round and David would be, always as we went past, he would be on the veranda, smoking his cigarette, always holding it like this, with his jacket which I copied later, without the pearls. But I never worked with him.

Alan Lawson: Another director you worked with but again rather passed over and that was Cyril Frankel. He'd come from documentaries originally hadn't he.

Freddie Francis: I knew Cyril for some time, I only did one film for him, Never Take Sweets from a Stranger and I suspect for some reason or other he must have asked for me, because although I became very popular and very friendly with Hammer as a director, I'm sure I wasn't the sort of cameraman they would have employed. But anyway, Cyril and I had a wonderful time together, I enjoyed working with Cyril very much. And we never worked again but we kept in touch for a long time.

Alan Lawson: Because he is now a ceramics specialist.

Now for the sake of clarity, the first Carol you talked about was Carol Reed wasn't it and that was The Stars Look Down. And then a little later on you talked about another Karel, Karel Reisz and that was Saturday Night and Sunday Morning and The French Lieutenant's Woman.

And also you talked about Marty but you didn't say who Marty was.

Freddie Francis: Marty Smith, no Martin Scorsese.

Alan Lawson: Having gone right the way through the camera department before the war, did you ever work on any films using any process work, such as Schufftan

Freddie Francis. I can vaguely remember doing a Schufftan shot but I can't remember the film. I did very little of it until we did, which I enjoyed it very much, unfortunately I didn't do it much because not many people can do it, we did a lot of foreground miniature stuff on Dune and they had this wonderful guy from Spain whose name I've forgotten. He is a wonderful foreground guy. I can't remember, he is a wonderful guy, he must work cheaply I think because he does all De Laurentiis' pictures. Knowing De Laurentiis he probably works for nothing.

Alan Lawson: Did you do the double exposure work done in the camera and mixes and this kind of thing.

Freddie Francis: Funnily we did a few of these, but not in my early days, we did a few of those, Mickey suddenly decided to do some of them on Small Back Room.

Alan Lawson: Done in the camera

Freddie Francis: Yes. We did them in the camera. And I did a few while I was in the army because I got involved, before all the big wigs came in, when we were the Photographic Section, Field Stores, Aldershot, I used to do a bit of animating for plastics, and we used to do opticals in the camera then.

Alan Lawson: All that's gone.

Freddie Francis: Ah, yes.

Alan Lawson: Did you ever working on the Dunning which eventually became travelling matte.

Freddie Francis: Vaguely I can vaguely remember a few sort of shots way back, what they were on I can't remember.

Alan Lawson: When did you first start working with BP, can you remember.

Freddie Francis: No, funnily enough I did a reasonable bit of BP during the war at Wembley, we had BP there.

Alan Lawson, Can you remember what kind of screen you had, was it a paper screen or one of the acetates.

Freddie Francis: I'm sure it was a paper screen. It was obviously the screen left over from the old Fox British studios days.

Alan Lawson: Can you remember the rather strict rules about taking plates. They don't seem to bother quite so much.

Freddie Francis: No, they don't. No, I could tell you a funny story but not the people involved. I was doing a film in a British studio and before we started I had to shoot some plates. So I went out and as you know with plates you want a five minute plate going along country roads. So, you mess about with the shutter at the back. We did that. We came back and they were processed and some of it was over and some of it was under. I said the shutter hasn't been working. Got the camera out and the head of the camera department who again will be nameless said well you didn't tell me you needed a shutter. So the complaints were made to the studio manager, and he said well if you do that sort of thing you should tell us you need a shutter. So that was the strict rules. But obviously one was strapping the camera down, but nowadays of course one doesn't. Not that one does much back projection anyway, because nowadays you get on low loaders and you don't do, you don't even do blue backing, just do it straight.

Alan Lawson: Do you think it was easier to do it as BP, was it as convincing.

Freddie Francis: This is difficult to say. They're nowadays such a complicated thing, it is horses for courses now. You have to analyse, don't you. You have to analyse if you've got money to analyse. So often you're told how you've got to do it because the money is not there to do it any other way. But I don't think you can say. The point is if it's a straight forward shot, then in many cases it is easier, two people sitting in a car driving, it is easier to do it in the studio where you're not bothered with weather, but when you look at the sort of things you see these days, it is difficult to say. I don't think you could break it down to whether it's easier or not. The answer to that is, tell me a shot and I'll tell you which is an easier way.

SIDE 4, TAPE 2

Alan Lawson: You talked about working on a film in Boston, and on your one day off on the Monday, you went to see Sons and Lovers, what was the film you were making in Boston

Freddie Francis: A film called School Ties. It was a Paramount film.

Alan Lawson: You took the crew and we did this Sons and Lovers, we shot it in 8 weeks

Freddie Francis: I'm not sure if it was 8 or 10, I suspect 8,

Alan Lawson, On a 5 day week, 8.30 to 6.30 and then you went on to say, here we are working a 6 day week, some 16 hours a day, a 16 week schedule and you pondered the question, what is going on. Do you reckon you know what was going on.

Freddie Francis: I can never analyse it, I'm always asking people this, what are we doing.

Alan Lawson: Is it the productions are more complicated technically or more demanding.

Freddie Francis: I don't think so. This specific case certainly wasn't. It was a very straight forward movie. Wouldn't you say School Ties was a straightforward movie. Nothing complicated at all. I think if one had thought in advance, one would have had a time and motion expert around when we did one film, and waited about 20 years, I cannot figure. The thing we spoke about earlier, crews especially in this country now are not very well trained

Alan Lawson: We didn't record that bit, I was coming along to that. Going back to Sons and Lovers, as an anchor point, there was Jerry Wald produced it,

Freddie Francis: So they tell me, he never appeared.

Alan Lawson: So who was acting on his behalf.

Freddie Francis: I would say Tom Morahan, was it Tom, there are so many Morahans, I think it was Tom who was a top class designer.

Alan Lawson: Then you had Jack who had established himself as a director and yourself as cameraman, no mean record. That was based on a studio, so you had studio back up

Freddie Francis: Pinewood.

Alan Lawson: Do you know how long they did pre-planning on it, any idea.

Freddie Francis: No idea. I should certainly think, the way modern films go and I was amazed how much preplanning there was on this film I've just done over here, so I shouldn't think there was any more in those days.

Alan Lawson: Can you remember how long it took from the final shot being taken to getting the answer print.

Freddie Francis: I can't

Alan Lawson: That now brings me back to the other anchor point, School Ties in Boston, who was the producer.

Freddie Francis: Sherry Lansing.

Alan Lawson: Is she an established producer

Freddie Francis: Indeed, she now virtually owns Paramount, she runs Paramount now. She has done some extremely successful films, Fatal Attraction and all those.

Alan Lawson: The director

Freddie Francis: Bob Mandel, not a really established director.

Alan Lawson: You reckon there was just as much preplanning as probably anything else.

Freddie Francis: On this particular one there was more for the simple reason, you've hit upon one with a strange history. School Ties was a pet subject of Stanley Jaffe and Stanley had had enormous sets built, the set construction must have been so expensive and so unnecessary for which I suggest there was a very good but very inexperienced art director, no designer they're called now, because we were shooting in a college, Middlesex College, which was a huge old college, but also they then took over what had been a leisure centre which was now not used so they built huge sets in there. The first thing I saw, for god's sake these sets are more solid than the actual college itself. Almost impossible to float. I did, I remember one shot where we needed an over the shoulder of a guy who was sitting at a table like that and I had to, we couldn't move the wall although it was a flat, we had to cut a hole and poke the camera through the hole to get this over the shoulder. So there was a lack of experience in the case of the art department. But I'm digressing, I'm telling you the history of this film, I can't tell you about the preparation, and this was a pet subject of Stanley Jaffe, and Stanley Jaffe had spent this fortune on building these sets and preparing the picture. And he was suddenly promoted to head of Paramount so he was unable to, so they then had to start from scratch and get a new director. Meanwhile the set was still in this leisure centre, so that preparation period was an enormously long period. So it would be impossible. Mind you thinking of this set that they built, I've seen some pretty ridiculous sets built in my time but this was completely

off the wall, so they must have had a long preparation. I'm sure they had a much longer preparation period, or building period than any film that we did in the 30s or 40s.

Alan Lawson: Was the script properly prepared.

Freddie Francis: Yes, I guess so.

Alan Lawson: They weren't coming on the set with new lines.

Freddie Francis: No.

Freddie Francis: Do you know how long it took between final shot and answer print.

Freddie Francis: Let me see, after, no I can't tell you. No, the other way round, while we were doing School Ties I had to fly off one evening and Pam and I flew up to New York to see the answer print of Cape Fear, no can't remember.

Alan Lawson: Do you think studio based productions are better organised than ones shot on location.

Freddie Francis: Not necessarily. I did a couple of films in America with a very good, very well organised director, Robert Mulligan, who did things like To Kill A Mockingbird and those sort of pictures, and as the director he makes sure everything is well organised.

Alan Lawson: The other thing I was wondering again, when you were working from a studio you had an established unit, so they did work as a unit.

Freddie Francis: You're getting near to one of the things which I think. If you take a unit list, not a unit list, a list of producers, co-producers, associate producers, the point is now it takes so long and it's so difficult to set up a movie that everybody that comes in along the way wants to be the producer or the associate producer, so eventually you haven't got any real pros in that pre-production period.

Alan Lawson: Really in a way, and I don't mean in a derogatory way, but you're always working with a scratch crew. You obviously would pick your own operator and you've got your own gaffer but you pick up whatever sparks there are, and you pick up whatever props there are

Freddie Francis: This goes down the line you see because I pick up the best operator and the best gaffer. Now I expect that they in turn are going to pick up the best camera crew and the best sparks.

Alan Lawson: The difficulty is without having a studio base, everybody is peppered around, you're relying on them to be ready when you want them.

Freddie Francis: Well let's take the last film I did in the States, my east coast gaffer and my west coast gaffer were both tied up so I had to take a chance on another guy who turned out to be great. Now this was a small film with not a great deal of money but every inch of the way he picked up fantastic electricians, even if we only had them for a few days. So if you pick up the right people they pick up the right people. But over there, most of those people have been trained properly anyway and a lot of them, all sorts of menial people, you talk to them, when I say menial people, people who do menial jobs, you talk to them and they're from film schools, they're interested in the job, they know all about movies, and they're dead keen. On this last one, there was a little stage hand who kept coming up to me and saying this was in Santa Monica, if you have a second camera can I operate it. And he was obviously so keen, he had come from film school, and suddenly I said who is that and he was Gene Kelly's son. But you have these sort of people. But do you know since we've been talking, I'm sure one of the main problems is this fact that if you look at any film that's made nowadays as opposed to, OK let's take Sons and Lovers, the director was Jack Cardiff, who had been in the business 200 years, the guys who were running it, the producer was Tom Morahan who having been an art director, not a designer as they're called now, knew all about economies and that, and Ernie Holding, who had been a production manager for 100 years, they knew everything about how to get the show on the road. You look at a film, you go to any studio today where they're making a film and say could I see who your top people are, you'll find that the main associate producer is a guy who knew the guy who had the script and it goes from there and I'm sure this is one of the problems. Great, heavy top loading but no talent.

Alan Lawson: Again, is it also perhaps because of the financial climate films are under budgeted and under schedule purely to make sure they get the money, never mind about whether it its going to be followed through, would you agree that does happen.

Freddie Francis: I agree it happens but it always used to happen. I did 4 or 5 films for a company called Amicus, which was run by two lovely guys, Milton Subotsky and Max Rosenberg. Now they had to make films to live. And they would come to me with a script and they'd say would I do it and I'd say yes and they would get out a budget, in those days they would get out a budget of say £150,000; they would hawk it all around and suddenly they would find that Columbia say they would make it for £80,000. Now because Max and Milton had to live they'd say fine, we'll do it. So this film which they're budgeted, right close to the bone for £150,000 we were now making for £80,000. So to get some money out of it somehow, Milton would have to write the script. Now Milton couldn't write a script to save his life but he thought he was a great writer and a great editor. Now I will quote one film, a film we did for Columbia, the film came to me and I read it and I got Pam to read it I think, and I figured we were doing a 90 minute film, that script at the most was 40 minutes. So I knew Max and Milton so I knew I would have to add to it as we went along. So I worked out a way we could make it 90 minutes. So then, the first morning we were shooting Max arrived from New York. He said I've just been in touch with Columbia and they want it for a slot on television, I forget how long the slot was but it meant that they now needed 120 minutes. So I'd taken this 40

minute script and made it 90 minutes, and I am now asking 120 minutes. We had extras playing funny parts, you know, but we always got through on time, always got through on time. And I would say, although most of the films I directed were small budget films, I would say 90% of them made money

Alan Lawson: Came in on budget.

Freddie Francis: Yes, funnily enough I have never been over budget, over schedule as a director and I suspect neither have any of them been over budget. But this was because everybody around knew exactly what they were doing. And suddenly say oh my god, I was doing a sequence with John Standing, and there was a little stand-in girl, very pretty, very attractive and I suddenly thought of an idea, on the day we were shooting, when we've finished what we have to shoot on this set I put John and this girl at a table and did a little two minute scene with them, and nobody turned a hair. Nowadays you do that and everything goes mad. I'm sure it all emanates from the top, I've never thought of it before, and the number of people you've got at the top.

Alan Lawson: Are some of these people, people who have been on the fringes in television, come across.

Freddie Francis: I don't know where they come from. Some of them have probably helped the production at some point. Or helped to get the production going. But that is a different thing. Helping the production to get going and then pushing it through can be two completely different things. I'm sure this has got a lot to do.

Alan Lawson: A lot of it is we have no training places now, because studios are gone.

Freddie Francis: Absolutely

Alan Lawson: I think that's it Freddie.

Freddie Francis: Having now committed myself to your tape I will probably be black balled from the industry