

# Peter Stroud (Projectionist)

by [admin](#) — last modified Jul 27, 2008 02:44 PM

**BIOGRAPHY:** Peter Stroud was born in Kilburn. His first job was as a projection box boy at the Prince of Wales Cinema (ABC), Harrow Road when he was fourteen. He went on to the Odeon, Kensal Rise where he returned in 1949 after National Service. Having become frustrated with the lack of promotion opportunities at Rank Theatres, in 1951 he went to Pinewood where he became Chief projectionist at Theatre Three, and later for many years was the Chief of Theatre Seven. **SUMMARY:** In this interview, conducted by Jim Shields shortly before Stroud's retirement in 1993, he talks in detail about his early days in the projection box. He remembers the Wartime newsreel-crossover system which meant that newsreels had to be shared between Gaumont and Odeon cinemas, he discusses the fraught relationship between operators and managers, the average personnel in the projection box during the 1940s and 50s and the atmosphere in the box. He discusses different boxes in cinemas in London, and also in the theatres at Pinewood. He talks about the difficulty of projecting rough-cuts with separate soundtracks for directors at Pinewood, and about his rare encounters with directors (particularly Kubrick). The interview is a fascinating insight into an aspect of the industry which is rarely discussed. (Lawrence Napper, BCHRP)

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Interviewers: Jim Shields

Interviewee: Peter Stroud

Tape 1, Side 1

**Jim Shields:** This is an interview with Peter Stroud, Charge-hand projectionist, Theatre Seven, Pinewood Studios. The date is... the something of June?

**Peter Stroud:** 29th!

**Jim Shields:** 29th June 1993. Well Peter, where were you born?

**Peter Stroud:** At Kilburn, West Kilburn.

**Jim Shields:** West Kilburn, and where did you go to school?

**Peter Stroud:** The 'Gordon Memorial School', which is also at Kilburn, until I was evacuated.

**Jim Shields:** Where were you evacuated to?

**Peter Stroud:** Northampton.

**Jim Shields:** Northampton. And er, after that, when you eventually left school where did you first start in the industry?

**Peter Stroud:** Er, I had about six months in odd jobs first, then I - then I was about what? Fourteen and a half I suppose - no - yeah, fourteen and a half, I got a job at the ABC, 'Prince of Wales', Harrow Road. Basically I wanted to be in the cinema because we've all had toy projectors haven't we? [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** Yes! [Laughs]

**Peter Stroud:** And the buggers bit, as you might say. The cinema I wanted to work at was in Willesdon which comes under Middlesex County Council and you weren't allowed to work in cinemas until you were fifteen in those days, whereas the Prince of Wales was LCC, and you could bloody start at five if you wanted to, you know!

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes!

**Peter Stroud:** So I had six months at the Prince of Wales first and then as soon as I was fifteen, very shortly afterwards, I went to Kensal Rise Odeon. Because you could walk in and out of jobs as you liked in those days! [Chuckles]

**Jim Shields:** Yes that's right, yes!

**Peter Stroud:** They were desperate to get anybody!

**Jim Shields:** There were plenty about.

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah. Not that they were worth having all that much you know, but even so it was fun, that's the main thing, it was fun.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes.

**Peter Stroud:** And of course, being Ranks, you weren't allowed to work on Sundays until you were sixteen. [Chuckles]

**Jim Shields:** This was the religious side of the Rank Organisation of course.

**Peter Stroud:** Yes, yeah, yeah.

**Jim Shields:** Lord Rank, yes.

**Peter Stroud:** But that was quite happy. I got called up in [19]46, de-mobbed in '49. Oh, 1951 I came out of here, which was the sheer and utter frustration of trying to get anywhere on Odeon's. [Chuckles] Well no, we had an area supervisor, I won't mention any names but he was not a cinema man, he was an ex-naval man who'd married some shareholder's daughter or something, and he was bunged in as area supervisor. And our previous supervisor had been an ex-'proj'. He knew the job, he came up to see us to find out what your troubles were - he didn't do anything but at least he came up to talk to you, you know. Whereas this new chap didn't want to know at all, we never saw him in the box at all. Anyway I got a bit fed-up there, it was a fleapit cinema, you know, it was a goldmine but it was a fleapit cinema. And we had a starter of about eight, believe it or not, and mostly so we could serve other places with relief's, which was quite fun, going round and working on different equipment at different times, you know. But um I wanted a place of my own, I was the sort of boy, I mean even when I got de-mobbed I was still the boy. There was a Chief and six 'seconds' and I expected to be promoted to fourth - from fourth to fifth or something you know but when my turn came, once again this gentleman who shall be nameless... Because everybody when they got de-mobbed moved up a step automatically, where they would have been if they hadn't been called up, you know?

**Jim Shields:** Yes.

**Peter Stroud:** And he said, "No this has been going on too long, it's got to stop somewhere and you're it," you see. Which meant that one of the chaps who was my junior when I was called up was now my senior! Because he's only got the eighteen months service [laughs] you see!

**Jim Shields:** [Laughing] Yes, yes.

**Peter Stroud:** So I was beginning to get a bit fed up with it, so I started walking around looking for jobs and I finally landed myself with an interview at the Gaumont, Camden Town. Where they had 'Clover Leaves' it was a really super show you know, it was a really pucker place, I thought, "Well this is it," you know. Anyway I went about there and had a word with the Chief and generally questioned this that and the other. He said, "Yes," it was a Co-Chief job, you know. He said, "Yes Mr Stroud, I think you'll be all right," he says. He said, "You'll have to come down and see the area supervisor, he's got his office backstage," you see. And it turned out to be our old supervisor from the old area, who knew me, you know. He said, "Oh yeah - where are you working now?" I said, "Still at the Kensal Rise Odeon." "Oh," he says, "that's so-and-so's area. We can't poach staff. Write in for a transfer." [JS chuckles] Well I'd written in for transfers

loads of times and I always got the same answer, "You cannot be spared from your present position, have a five-bob rise."

**Jim Shields:** [Chuckling] Right, yeah...

**Peter Stroud:** This went on all the time you see, so that really got me, I'd got it again you see. So I thought, "Well sod it!" So I got on the 'phone to the union office - more-or-less to have a moan than anything else you know. And they said, "Well how about trying the studios?" I thought, "Gawd, big stuff you know...studios." Anyway they gave me a card to go to Denham and believe it or not I couldn't find my way to Denham! I went round all the tube stations, nobody knew where it was, you know! [Laughs] I thought, "Oh blow this, because I only had an hour and-a-half in the morning before we started work in the cinema anyway, so I went back to them the next morning and said, "I couldn't bloody well find it." They said, "Oh well that job's taken now anyway. You could try Pinewood but things are very, very dodgy there, you'll probably be out of the frying pan into the fire." Well I was that bloody desperate - anything, you know! So I came out here and I got the job, then I went back and gave my notice in, and after I'd been here about three months, Denham closed down! [laughs] The only time I went over there was on music sessions!

**Jim Shields:** It always works out for the best doesn't it?

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah, yeah, dead lucky you know.

**Jim Shields:** But Peter tell me, if I can just go back a moment...

**Peter Stroud:** Hmm...

**Jim Shields:** The Rank Organisation, I remember the old stories about the newsreel being shared with the Odeon and Gaumont and all that...

**Peter Stroud:** We were very lucky in as much as we had our own copy.

**Jim Shields:** Ah, right.

**Peter Stroud:** The Prince of Wales, Harrow Road had to share with Kensal Rise Palace.

**Jim Shields:** Yes that's right, people panicking across to get newsreel from one theatre to another.

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah it's quite funny, when you're rushing - I mean I was only the boy there, I did the newsrun quite often. And it's quite funny coming back, often in dense fog you know, and they'd hold the show up, waiting for you. You'd come struggling up the bloody circle stairs with this can under your arm and you'd get a bloody great round of applause from the bloody audience! [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** [Laughing] Yes!

**Peter Stroud:** Oh dear! Couldn't happen nowadays!

**Jim Shields:** But that's um...I always remember people mentioning that you know, when they were on about round the circuit.

**Peter Stroud:** And of course that's where I did one of my really... um...[exclaims] first cock-ups! I'd watched the other people spooling up the news... because you carried the can, you know, you couldn't carry on spools on busses and things. And you know, one finger on the hub, flat on the bench, grinding away like so - and I tried it that night [chuckles] and it got away, right off the edge, right into a bloody fire-bucket of water! [Chuckles] The old chief he was very good - Percy Mole, you might have known Percy Mole, he worked in the studios a lot...

**Jim Shields:** Yes I did know him...

**Peter Stroud:** Yes, lovely man he was - lovely man.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes, yes...

**Peter Stroud:** Actually, years later when I went to CTS when they were in Bayswater was it?

**Jim Shields:** Yes, Kensington.

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah, when I went there on relief from here his son was working there, so isn't that something?

**Jim Shields:** Oh yes, yes, that's right, he was; you're quite right.

**Peter Stroud:** [Chuckles] Amazing the old circles, you know after all those years. Actually I was very upset because Percy, as soon as he - he had great trouble with his wife, I don't know if you know it, she was a bit mentally unstable. And he left the studios to work in the cinema because it was a reserved occupation, Chief, you see.. So he could keep with his wife you see. And as soon as it was all over, of course, he was back to the studios like a shot you see. Well it must have been oh - probably three years later when I came out here. And the first night, waiting outside for the old green bus used to go home - you know, London Transport.

**Jim Shields:** Yes that's right, yeah...

**Peter Stroud:** Who should I see but Percy Mole you know, I hadn't seen him around the studio anywhere you know. He'd been in Charlie Stafford's maintenance shop!

**Jim Shields:** [Chuckling] Yes!

**Peter Stroud:** See? And I said, "Hello Percy, how's things?" "Oh" he says, "I'm finished." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Redundant." And I thought, "Oh Christ, I'm here, just started and this bloke's redundant, you know, there's something wrong somewhere," you know. And I

didn't know what to say! you know. And I sort of... he said, "Oh don't worry about it, I wouldn't want the bloody job you've got, no way!" [Laughs] So I felt a bit better after that you know!

**Jim Shields:** When did you actually come here Peter?

**Peter Stroud:** [19]51.

**Jim Shields:** '51?

**Peter Stroud:** Hmm.

**Jim Shields:** Yeah, it's a long time isn't it?

**Peter Stroud:** The first day was post-synching in theatre one, the second day was post-synch rushes. Do you remember those sessions, post-synch rushes?

**Jim Shields:** I do yes...

**Peter Stroud:** With Harry Miller. Ohhh, God Almighty!

**Jim Shields:** All optical, you'd run your loop with a piece of film...

**Peter Stroud:** Oh God, some of them we only had one take on...ohhh! [Chuckles]

**Jim Shields:** Well yes that's true, I mean you used to run the bit, the takes you had, you'd made with the loop, and then that came off and the next one was on and it was a real rat race!

**Peter Stroud:** Oh God that was a baptism of fire that was.

**Jim Shields:** Absolutely! And then you went - you were permanently in Theatre Three or Four weren't you?

**Peter Stroud:** I went from Theatre One to Theatre Four.

**Jim Shields:** Ah hmm...

**Peter Stroud:** Where I couldn't very well get on with a man, my charge-hand, because he was showing me how to lace up machines, which is quite obvious to anybody anyway, and everybody does it their own way...

**Jim Shields:** Right...

**Peter Stroud:** But he insisted on putting the film on that sprocket there, pulling up a loop and putting it on that one, you know, doing it his way you see, which slows you down no end.

**Jim Shields:** That's right, that's right.

**Peter Stroud:** So anyway I couldn't get on with him, he was a bombastic bugger anyway. And after a while I went up to see Bert, I said, "Look, can I come out of there and go somewhere else?" He said, "Why?" I said, "Oh so-and-so is a bit too overbearing," you know. He said, "Oh, it's taken you a long time to find that out!" [Both laugh] Anyway I moved around a bit after that, a little bit of dubbing that drove everybody mad...

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes...

**Peter Stroud:** ...and finally finished up in Theatre Three with Eddie Carpenter.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes...

**Peter Stroud:** And he went off somewhere - he went off to work for some firm who made the first electronic brain, which he...

**Jim Shields:** Oh you - down at 'Anglo's Cottage' was it?

**Peter Stroud:** I don't know where it was but...

**Jim Shields:** Yes, down at Halliford.

**Peter Stroud:** He took me down for a visit - no it was in London somewhere.

**Jim Shields:** Oh was it? Oh yes.

**Peter Stroud:** He took me for a visit somewhere, and it was a massive great room, racks and racks of panels all full up with bloody valves, you've never seen so many bloody - HOT!! With the heat of these bloody valves you know...

**Jim Shields:** Yeah, yeah, yeah...

**Peter Stroud:** And that was the first electronic brain, the for-runner of the computer, as it is now.

**Jim Shields:** Yes...

**Peter Stroud:** But um, and of course when he left I got his job.

**Jim Shields:** And then you were in there with Arthur?

**Peter Stroud:** That's it, Arthur came over from Elstree, yeah.

**Jim Shields:** There are one or two - oh he came from Elstree did he?

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah...

**Jim Shields:** Oh I didn't realise that. Then of course there are your stories, one or two stories about one Max Benedict I seem to recall...

**Peter Stroud:** Oh Max! [chuckles] Max Benedict was all right...

**Jim Shields:** A lovely man...

**Peter Stroud:** Apart from being a bit difficult to understand at times you know, I mean he's never upset me.

**Jim Shields:** No, very excitable.

**Peter Stroud:** Oh yeah, I've seen him waving his arms about a bit! [Chuckles] But the only one - a film he was involved with, I forget what it was called now. It was a dead copy of a Will Hay film and we were running a real Will Hay film in Theatre Four in the morning for them, and then they go and shoot the bloody thing in the afternoon, with Ronald Shiner...

**Jim Shields:** Oh yes!

**Peter Stroud:** And you know it's word for word - but not the same! It could never be the same, you know! So anyway Soskin, that's the producer bloke, Paul Soskin, and he asked me if I'd finally run his cutting copy through and when it was finished he came round and said, "What do you think?" I said, "Oh well I'm a Will Hay enthusiast," you know, so...

**Jim Shields:** It can't compare to that!

**Peter Stroud:** Which is the wrong thing to say, you know! And I said, "Yeah it'll be all right I suppose - it doesn't strike me as very funny 'cause I already know it off by heart anyway," you know! And he was sort of "ohh, ohh...". I said, "It'll probably make money." [Enthusiastically] "Oh, yeh, yeh!"

**Jim Shields:** Make the face happy!

**Peter Stroud:** So, or course thereafter I could do no wrong, you know. Whether it did or not, I don't know!

**Jim Shields:** Yes, I was thinking about the story of Max and his little bits of film - when he came in and he asked you to run something and he said, "Will it run all right?" And you said, "Oh yes it'll run all right." It was spliced joins in those days and at the end you gave him all the little bits of film.

**Peter Stroud:** That wasn't Max!

**Jim Shields:** Oh wasn't it?

**Peter Stroud:** That was Clive Donner!

**Jim Shields:** Oh, Clive Donner - oh I beg your pardon, yes!

**Peter Stroud:** Clive Donner - we used to stay up all night making alterations then he used to make you put 'em back the next day! [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** Yeah that's right!

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah he brought in - oh about fifty feet of cut frame, and he said, "It might make a bit of a noise going through," you know. Anyway we ran it and the old Simplex projectors - in the base of the casting above the sound-head, you used to keep packed with wadding, to absorb the oil that leaks from the bearings, you know, so it's always a gooey mess there. And when we opened the door there was this bloody great pile of loose frames in this wadding, soaked in oil! [Laughs] We gave them back to him - I've never seen a bloke come so near crying in my life! He must have spent hours and hours doing it, because you know on those old Bell and Howell splicers, to do a frame on every bloody frame line, it was virtually impossible without careful lining up by hand wasn't it?

**Jim Shields:** That's right, yeah. And then there was the story about the horse wasn't there.

**Peter Stroud:** Oh, all that malarky yeah. We went down the - we used to wander around in Paddington, and there's this old horse all on his own down there, obviously an old horse, and Arthur had - 'Spangles' were all the craze then, and he gave this horse a Spangle you see, because we didn't have any sugar. The bloody thing followed us all the way back! [Laughs] Right round to Theatre Three, and he had his front hooves on the top bloody step of Theatre Three! [Laughs] We didn't half have a job of getting rid of him!

**Jim Shields:** Then after Theatre Three - oh it was '68 wasn't it, I think, that Theatre Seven opened?

**Peter Stroud:** Was it? I don't remember now.

**Jim Shields:** About 1968 because I remember I was here the time that we came into the big new lovely theatre and you ran it ever since. Yeah you were in...I remember Theatre Seven opening and you were in there from day one were you?

**Peter Stroud:** I was in there as the bloody sweeping up boy for about a week beforehand! Supposed to be getting to know the equipment but all I was doing was sweeping up. There was dust, you know, thick dust with a new building. And I was running errands and things like that. That was a bloody horrific opening as well because we had the new high [game?] screens, they were then - large portholes and loads of naked fluorescents on the ceiling.

**Jim Shields:** Yes.

**Peter Stroud:** And of course they lit the bloody screen up!

**Jim Shields:** Ahh.

**Peter Stroud:** And as you moved in front of a porthole, damn great shadows moved about on the screen in the dark, you know, and we had quite a few run-ins before the official opening. And I said, "Well look, we've got to get something done about these lights." Cyril Crowhurst this was.

**Jim Shields:** Yes.

**Peter Stroud:** We were always wrong as far as he was concerned. "We've got to get something done about these lights," I said, "because you know, they're all over the bloomin' screen, you know." I said, "We can't put on a show with them on." He said, "You'll have to work in the dark then!"

**Jim Shields:** [laughs]

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah, this is bloody equipment we've never seen before! I mean when you've been on a thing a few years you touch everything automatically, but when you're new you've got to look for things you know. So, "Yes, you can work in the dark!"

**Jim Shields:** Great!

**Peter Stroud:** You know, lovely atmosphere.

**Jim Shields:** You've had - run quite a few big films in there over the years haven't you?

**Peter Stroud:** Oh yeah, we've had our fun, we've had our fun.

**Jim Shields:** I thought it was a lovely gag on the running last Monday, when everything started off and then the screen went blank! [Laughs]

**Peter Stroud:** Oh! It...

**Jim Shields:** I thought it was done on purpose!

**Peter Stroud:** No it was a genuine accident! I should have bloody well shouted out, "Now look what you've made me do!" [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** [Laughs] Oh no, Pete, there's been a lot - we've spent a lot of hours in there and we've worked together a long time and we'll be sad to see you go.

**Peter Stroud:** Well in many ways I'm sad to go because, as I've said to other people, every bloody friend I've got in the world is here, you know.

**Jim Shields:** Exactly, that's the trouble in the business.

**Peter Stroud:** The last half of my career, I mean the first half was a bit fraught because I crossed swords with the wrong people, but the last half I've been very happy, mainly because you come into contact with so many nice people.

**Jim Shields:** Well I think that's probably the main thing about the business.

**Peter Stroud:** I mean you meet the odd sod you know, the odd one, the real nasty one.

**Jim Shields:** Oh sure, sure, yeah...

**Peter Stroud:** No I mustn't mention names must I? [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** No, no.

**Peter Stroud:** But on the whole everybody is bloody lovely. I mean everybody gets upset when they're under pressure of some sort, you know.

**Jim Shields:** Absolutely!

**Peter Stroud:** But you overlook that because, you know, you have to.

**Jim Shields:** Of course yes, and this comes and goes.

**Peter Stroud:** But - sometimes we're asked to do the impossible, you know. People read the brochure of all the things this theatre was supposed to do when it opened and believed every bloody word in it! The trouble is, there's bloody admin. people believed it too you know...

**Jim Shields:** That's right...

**Peter Stroud:** ...they believed their own publicity, which was very bad. But um, we made out all right. I had Joe with me of course, he was with me down in Theatre Three for a couple of years before we came over here.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, is that the first time you met Joe?

**Peter Stroud:** When he was in Theatre Three yes.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, so you hadn't met him before then?

**Peter Stroud:** But of course he's a first-class proj., he's a bloody sight better proj. than I am.

**Jim Shields:** Oh I wouldn't say that.

**Peter Stroud:** Oh yes he is, mate, he's much more meticulous...

**Jim Shields:** Equal...

**Peter Stroud:** ...different ways, different ways.

**Jim Shields:** I suppose, yes, but I think that when everybody thinks of you, they don't say, "We're going to run in Seven" but "we're going to run in with Peter" and that is, you know, you've sort of kept the thing together really over there. But you've met, I suppose, some famous directors and people there - producers?

**Peter Stroud:** Well yeah, the only run-in, well not a run-in but a pleasant surprise really, was when we were running for Kubrick.

**Jim Shields:** Yes.

**Peter Stroud:** And it was at a time when I was going through a very bad time, I was on bloody Valium...

**Jim Shields:** Yes I remember.

**Peter Stroud:** And I was walking around like a bloody zombie, you know. And I was running a cutting copy for Kubrick and we'd heard all these stories about you know, "Ohh, ohh Christ, you know."

**Jim Shields:** "This man...this man," yes.

**Peter Stroud:** So, and I put the wrong bloody track on, on one of his reels you know. I shut down, and he came storming out of the bloody room, "What happened? What happened? Was it in the wrong can?" I said, "No, it's a pure lapse on my part, I dropped a clanger actually." "Oh fair enough, when you're ready." You know, and that was it.

**Jim Shields:** Yes if it had been his own staff he would have given...

**Peter Stroud:** Well this is it you know but then of course I didn't try and flannel him either, you know.

**Jim Shields:** No that's right, no he was OK.

**Peter Stroud:** Well - he was "Half a foot left and half a foot left," and you can't do it, I mean the bloody things are going up and down about five all the bloody time you know, but er...

**Jim Shields:** Any other people that you remember - famous people?

[Slight pause]

**Peter Stroud:** I don't think so. There were a lot of top directors and all those sort of people but then of course I've always maintained you know, "That bloody wall with a window in it is to keep me away from them and that's the way I want it!"

**Jim Shields:** Yes, you see I've thought differently about that Peter because invariably we go into say Dubbing One or Two and we dub a picture - or any dubbing theatre in the world - you go in, you dub a picture, the director knows the mixers on the desk...

**Peter Stroud:** Hmm...

**Jim Shields:** ...the sound recordist might pop in now and again but they never come up to the box and this is why I've always thought that the re-recording room should be on the same level as the theatre, like it was in Theatre Six.

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah, yeah...

**Jim Shields:** And then everybody's friendly and closer.

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah that's true.

**Jim Shields:** I mean the way...

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah but can you imagine working a system like that with our early Mr McCullough?

**Jim Shields:** Oh, well yes that's true! He'd have been in here all the time!

**Peter Stroud:** [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** But I do think that that system - you know I feel very strongly about - when they talk about, "We all make a picture, we all work together to get to the end," and the boys upstairs normally never meet the director! Never see the director, never see the producer...um and they never come into contact, which I think is a great shame.

**Peter Stroud:** Well there again, I mean, projection is a backroom job, I mean...

**Jim Shields:** Yeah but you're still part of the organisation!

**Peter Stroud:** My First Chief, well Second Chief, when I was on Odeon there was a bloke who taught me most of my job, lovely man. A sod though!

**Jim Shields:** Who was that?

**Peter Stroud:** Joe Leonard, his name was.

**Jim Shields:** Yes...

**Peter Stroud:** I think he's possibly dead now, I'm not sure. He moved, he retired - well they - that's another story. But anyway I remember moaning once about - oh some bloody thing that was going wrong in the box. I said, "Cor, nobody ever thinks of poor old projeys." And he came

in, he says, "Listen mate, anybody down there who ever thinks of a projej, there's something bloody wrong!" Which is true!

**Jim Shields:** This is very true actually, this is very true.

**Peter Stroud:** It's true!

**Jim Shields:** People don't take any notice unless something's wrong...

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah, true.

**Jim Shields:** If they don't see you, or nothing goes wrong then they don't want to see you do they?

**Peter Stroud:** No, this old Chief of mine, he'd been at this place - oh, donkey's years. It was well before the war. And it was an independent show, Circuit Three I believe, so he told me and it was just a pit. And then the owners decided to put a circle on, build up as much as they could without shutting the place down, they put a circle in you know. Then the projection room shut down while they moved all the projection equipment upstairs for the new box you see. And of course most of the projeys were ex-electricians in those days with ETU and this crew had the job of getting their equipment upstairs, running all the conduits, wiring it all up, getting it open again. And they were on half-pay until it was open!

**Jim Shields:** [laughs]

**Peter Stroud:** There you see - you know, I mean that's the sort of thing that went on in those days, you know, yeah.

**Jim Shields:** They were very much 'hire and fire' weren't they?

**Peter Stroud:** Oh Christ, yeah. But anyway, I mean that whole place was a... [sighs]...Well let's put it this way, when they decided to re-equip us, because the old equipment was too bad, we got BT-H equipment that came from a bombed out cinema!

**Jim Shields:** [chuckles]

**Peter Stroud:** Need I say more?

**Jim Shields:** New but second-hand!

**Peter Stroud:** Yeah that's it, yeah! But anyway - it was when he was getting on a bit, not far from retiring he said, he kept on that he wanted to go somewhere else. He said, "I've been keeping this bloody place going, it's a bloody fleapit and after all these years I want a bit of relaxation and a decent show" you know, this sort of thing you see. And they transferred him to the Odeon in Kensington...

**Jim Shields:** Yes, it was a big house, yes...

**Peter Stroud:** Now that is the most evil bloody projectionist's area I've ever seen! Obviously stuck on as an after-thought, out on a flat roof. The projection room's in one building, you come out in the rain to the re-wiring room over there, you come out in the rain to the bloody rest room over there! It's a disgusting bloody place! And the box - you've got two projectors, one spot and the slide lantern wasn't on a pedestal it was on the bloody shelf on the wall!

**Jim Shields:** [chuckles] Yes!

**Peter Stroud:** It was that sort of, you know - that's how big it was you see? Terrible place!

**Jim Shields:** And you look at that and it looks marvellous from the outside!

**Peter Stroud:** And the lighting, house light panels were on the back wall, they weren't levers that would normally be there, they were brass knobs, and they were very, very stiff. And you couldn't see what you were doing because the portholes are behind you, you know.

**Jim Shields:** Right.

**Peter Stroud:** And they had a manager there name of Chisholm, and he led this poor old Chief a sod's life - well and his predecessors obviously. He was also an organist and sometimes on the little fill-ins on trailers he'd go down and pick up on the organ, but he frequently forgot to tell anybody! In the meantime - oh of course the non-synch is in another room right down alongside the theatre somewhere! The old Western non-synch, you know, bloody barn door's oaks... And some poor sod had been sent down to get the records ready about ten minutes beforehand, he [chuckles] puts up on the record and the bloody organ starts at the same time and the [Chief] gets a bollocking!

**Jim Shields:** [laughs]

**Peter Stroud:** And oh we had a hell of a time there. He wanted this colour for that trailer and another colour for another trailer - rehearse everything, you know on Monday mornings before you'd finished spooling up. Anyway he got so he was fed up there as well and then they slung him. Oh that's right, he'd been on these old BT-H and RCA stuff, then when he went there it was Simplex and Western Electric Universal base, which he'd never been on before - even Kensington had still got a universal base in those days you know. And um, anyway he'd just got to learn that and BT-H Supers came out so they went in and they were massive - did you ever see 'em? - massive great grey things, years before their time, years before their time. Because they weren't easily adaptable for different aperture plates and different lenses you know, but - beautiful machines, everything was in the two bases for the whole running you know - except in Middlesex, where the rectifiers had to be in another room! [Chuckles]

**Jim Shields:** There were local bylaws, eh?

**Peter Stroud:** [Laughs] Which rather spoils, you know, the single unit projection assembly as it were. Anyway that's besides the point. Then they sent him to the Gaumont, Chelsea - yeah Gaumont, Chelsea, that was a nicely run show and nothing spectacular, you know, he was quite happy there until he retired you know. And after he retired I went to see him - no he came to see me that's right, he came to see me a couple of times to talk over old times. And then he moved down to a mobile home in Yeovil. We exchanged Christmas cards for a few years and then suddenly they stopped coming, so I can only assume he's you know - gone, poor devil. He was such a nice bloke. It was very funny because when I saw him years later he said, "You made my bloody life a misery when you started!" I said, "Why?" He said, "All the bloody questions you asked, I had to get books out of the library so as I could answer you!" [Laughs]

**Jim Shields:** [Laughs] Oh well, it's been an eventful life anyway, Peter.

**Peter Stroud:** Oh I've had my good times.

**Jim Shields:** And it's so different now with cake stands on the circuit and all that sort of business, there's no - the adrenaline doesn't run any more does it?

**Peter Stroud:** Oh no, no, no.

**Jim Shields:** It's not the same.

**Peter Stroud:** No, no. I'm glad I'm going when I am, because of that - load, up there.

**Jim Shields:** Yes, well...

**Peter Stroud:** I mean I'm foreseeing forthcoming difficulties...

**Jim Shields:** Yes...

**Peter Stroud:** ...but if you dare mention them...[draws breath]!

**Jim Shields:** No, forget it...

**Peter Stroud:** I mean the thing is at the moment we've got - our changeovers are up the creek at the moment, but they operate sound as well, you see...

**Jim Shields:** Yes...

**Peter Stroud:** ...I put that in and un - I worked with Geoff - as soon as Geoff Laidman[?] came into power, I mean he knew the floor and anything I wanted to do, providing I got his approval, said, "Well you get on with it," which - we could make life easier. So that the picture-changer automatically operates the sound but we've got a manual knob as well to override it in case anything goes wrong you see. That is quite good. All that bloody lot's coming down off the wall, you see?

**Jim Shields:** Oh...

**Peter Stroud:** And they're going to have a little Dolby box on the front you see. And I said, "Where's the manual override for the sound?" "Oh that's over there on the rack."

**Jim Shields:** Oh great!

**Peter Stroud:** [Chuckles] You know? You see they're all little tiny buttons with little tiny bloody lights. I mean you've got to go up to 'em like this to see what they do.

**Jim Shields:** I think that's another thing that's happened, too. I mean in the old days, as far as I can find out from what people have said, the Chief was in charge of his box and he handled it his way but now people come in and tell you how you're going to do it.

**Peter Stroud:** Well there's no consultation at all. I mean [indecipherable?]

**Jim Shields:** Yes.

**Peter Stroud:** Well the top pre-amps are up on the wall between the two machines, on the pivots so they can tip forward to be wired up. The trunking has got to right - touch the top, so the archways - well they were going to come down you see. All right, so you can't take the bloody lead out and disconnect 'em now...

**Jim Shields:** No...

**Peter Stroud:** And we told the bloke who's doing it that. "This is what I was told to do." Well actually I was very - I had a lovely little moment of glory the other day, because the pre-amps were going over on the main sound rack you see at the back. And I said to the guy, "You can't have main headed leads that long, you've got to have those as near the pre-amps as possible." "Oh well, that's how it's wired at the Empire!" So I thought, "I'll shut up," you know. Anyway when Max Bell who was doing the insulation came...

**Jim Shields:** Yes, yes...

**Peter Stroud:** ...and um we were talking about it, he said, Max Bell said, "Oh no, they've got to stay, they've got to stay there!" "Well they said they did that at the Empire." He said, "Yes and we had to put the bloody lot back too!" [JS laughs] I enjoyed that, my little moment of glory that was!

**Jim Shields:** Well you've seen the best of it Pete - thank you very much indeed.

**Peter Stroud:** I think we've all seen the best of it mate!

**Jim Shields:** Yes we have, we have. Thank you very much indeed.

[End of Interview]