

Richard Best

Richard Best is one of the finest film editors of his time. He was born in Hull on the 29th of June 1916, his love of film started when his father brought him a toy 35mm projector. He got into the film industry by asking his mother to contact an old neighbour of hers who was now a director called Arthur Rank and he replied and sent him to meet a man called John Cornfield who told Best that they needed someone in the cutting room and sent him to Elstree where Best started his editing career. From this point onward Best would go to work on many famous films including *The Dam Busters* and *Ice Cold In Alex* .

Best appears to be a very adaptable editor in his career he edited different genres of film. He always believed that an editor should be left on their own whilst they edit the film and that the director should only get a say when he is shown it in the projection theatre. Best edited films as he thought it should be and on more than one occasion his first cut of the film was the final cut, with a few small tweaks. He does however seem to have a certain underlining way of editing. The most notable feature of the films he has edited is the length of time the shots last for and that he uses few close ups and focuses more on wide shots and mid shots. Best is not afraid to let the shots linger and allows time for the audience to soak up the scene.

When cutting conversation Best mostly concentrates on the main character in that conversation he rarely cuts to close ups during conversations and does not cut to other shots of the main character during the conversation unless he has cut to another person in the conversation. However, when the conversation gets more exciting he will cut between the main character and other characters and will make these cuts quicker to emphasise the growing excitement. He uses this technique in *The Dam Busters*, in the scene where Barnes Wallis is demonstrating the effects of a bomb dropped at the base of a dam at a miniature model dam, as Wallis gets more excited over how effective his idea is the cuts get quicker between the shots of Wallis and the men he is showing the damage to. When there is a scene where there is both a conversation and some kind of action taking place, Best will cut between the main character talking, the action taking place and the reaction of other characters. An example of this would be in *The Magic Box* where William Friese-Greene is showing a policeman his cinematic camera. Best cuts between Friese-Greene talking and operating his cinematic camera, the policeman's reaction to what is happening and the film which is being projected onto a white blanket. The sequence is not cut particularly fast or slow but the shots do remain for several seconds giving enough time for the audience to take in the details of the shot they are viewing. Best worked out a practical concept for editing dialogue which was to add frames from before and after the dialogue was spoken by a character. He said "lengthening their pauses gave a previously flat exchange of dialogue unspoken depths of feeling and meaning".

Best believed that the audience should see the actors shown in full occasionally and should be repeatedly reminded of the geography of the scene. This explains why he used mostly wide and mid shots which show more of the actors and their location and allows the audience to absorb the information easier and saves them from thinking about the location of the scene, as often as they would if closer shots were used, which would cut out much of the background area.

Best's favourite film was *Ice Cold In Alex*, One of the scenes he enjoyed editing most was the scene where the main characters of the film have to manually move the ambulance called Katy up a large sand covered hill. Best had no notes or guidance for this sequence so;

"Best decided "the whole point of that sequence was effort... not only effort, but will they get there? Tension, really." To underline the amount of time involved, the uncertainty of the outcome, and the strain experienced by the characters, he used many "dissolves to increase the effort". As he puts it, "dissolves are very important; they do a lot emotionally". (RANK, A.J., 2004. *BFI Screenonline: Best, Richard (1916-2004) biography* [viewed 11 December 2016]. Available from: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/1299516/>)

For *The Dam Busters*, his second favourite film, Best used a different technique to *Ice Cold In Alex* to get emotional involvement in the story. He achieved this by using a high number of cuts instead of dissolves between earlier and later sequences. These cuts help to show the urgency of the mission and the very short deadline they have. Within the sequences Best keeps interest by cutting out unneeded action. For example, when three of the Lancaster bombers taxi along and then take off Best keeps cutting to the next shot in the sequence before the third Lancaster has exited the shot. He said that to cut later;

"would be boring; the third one you know what's going to happen...that's timing" (RANK, A.J., 2004. *BFI Screenonline: Best, Richard (1916-2004) biography* [viewed 11 December 2016]. Available from: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/1299516/>).

While editing *The Dam Busters* Best experimented with using direct cuts between sequences instead of fades and dissolves. He did this a decade earlier than the film, *The Haunting*, which is supposed to be the first film to use this technique. Also in *The Dam Busters* is a scene where Guy Gibson's dog Nigger is run over by a car. Best cut this in a way so that we know what is happening but not actually seeing the dog get hit. He does this by Cutting from a shot of Nigger running off into the road, then to a shot of a car speeding along the road and beeping it's horn, he then cuts to a shot of the car speeding off without stopping. These cuts are quicker than his usual cuts as it is a scene of action and speed so he has quickened it to make it feel so. Best would cut quicker in more fast paced action based scenes and thus giving the audience a better feel for what was happening but he would still leave enough time between cuts for the audience to take in the shot.

Best said this about contemporary films; "contemporary films which cut, cut, cut all the pauses, make it go like a bomb. That isn't editing...If you don't respond to the emotional content... all you're getting is a fast film".