BECTU History Project
Interviewee Christine Whittaker
Interviewers Sue Malden, Jerry Kuehl
Track No 1

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Interview no: 592
Interviewee: Christine Whittaker
Interviewers: Jerry Kuehl [JK], Sue Malden [SM]
Cameraman: Graham Whittaker[ph] [G]
Date: 17 August 2009
Duration: 1:41:21

[Track 1]

JK: [inaudible] Anglo [inaudible].

No, it's true, I'm just remembering[??]...

SM: It is interesting you know...

...Bonjour Madame.

SM: ...you know, where you came from, as a job.

Much more interesting, you know.

SM: Yes, yes.

G: I'm rolling now.

OK, so do you want to ask me the first...?

SM: Yes. So if we start off, I'll, I'll say what's on this card as well.

OK.

SM: So, this is Christine Whittaker, archive producer, being interviewed for the BECTU History Project, on the 17th of August 2009 in Puglia, Italy, by Jerry Kuehl and Sue Malden, with cameraman Graham Whittaker[ph]. And Christine's going to start by telling us something of her early life and how she first, and why she first joined the BBC, and went on to become one of the foremost archive researcher producers.....

[break in recording]

G: Just say a few words Christine.

Well, what happened was, I left university where I read languages, and my ambition, like all my friends, was to be an interpreter. And, obviously I didn't get a job as an interpreter, no one did.

[break in recording]

G: And you're up to speed.

[0:01:19]
OK. Well I left, I joined the world of television after university because, I did languages at university, it happened quite by chance, and I wanted, like all my group, to get a job as an interpreter. Couldn't get a job, because no one did straight from university, and, so I did a bilingual secretarial course, and it was a toss-up between the Foreign Office and the BBC. And I ended up at the BBC. And, I went to work in Bush House on French, on a programme, which is, you know, BBC Overseas Service, to, including other things, programmes to French Canada. So I used my French a bit. It was great fun, the most interesting place I'd ever been to, Bush House. And after about a year I moved to television. Got a job as a trainee PA. Worked for.....

[break in recording]

G: Just again, running up, and... Off you go.

[0:02:20]
Well I joined the BBC quite by chance in a way, because I did languages at university, and I wanted to be an interpreter. I couldn't get a job, no one did straight out of university. So, I did a bilingual secretarial course for six months and then I, it was a toss-up between the BBC and the Foreign Office. And my shorthand and typing weren't good enough for the Foreign Office, so I went to the BBC. And I went to work in Bush House, which was, you know, World Service et cetera, and amongst other programmes I worked on programmes to French Canada, so I used my French a bit. I had a brilliant time in Bush House, the most interesting place you can imagine in those days. This was, by the way, around about 1966 I think, yes, '66, '65/66. And after a year I moved to television, as a trainee PA, which was all very exciting. Didn't use my French any more really, ever, in the BBC. But I, first of all I started off on *24 Hours*, which was great fun, met all sorts of interesting people, obviously different programme every night. My, guests I had to meet at reception in Lime Grove included Charles Aznavour, very thrilling, Richard Burton. I can't think of... You know, really interesting, both political et cetera et cetera. I do remember that, there was a lot of... The culture was very different in those days, because the hospitality cabinet used to come out at about seven o'clock, and I remember one time during the seamen's strike, unfortunately the seamen went into the hospitality room before the programme went out, and, it wasn't a very good interview. But anyway, we had a lot of fun.
[0:04:08]
After about six months I moved on to a department called, General Features I think it was.

SM: And 24 Hours had been a current affairs...

Current affairs programme in Lime Grove, yes. And I moved to... And, we were still in Lime Grove at first, but then I moved to Kensington House. And I went to work, eventually, with Eddie Mirzoeff, who as you know is a really, is a really distinguished

documentary maker. And I started off doing, I worked for him as a PA for about a year, and then I was very lucky and I became a researcher. And I worked on a series called *Bird's Eye View* with him, which was a wonderful series all shot from a helicopter, including all sorts of other programmes that I did. And then eventually...

[0:04:57]
SM: Could I just ask, what did the research work entail?

In, in *Bird's Eye View* it was, ideas, it was locations. On *Bird's Eye View* it was, a lot of them were written by John Betjeman, so I was lucky enough to work with John Betjeman, suggesting poems that he might include, which was, quite funny, because, you know, obviously, my choice was a little banal compared to his knowledge, but, I had a terrific time. And, went all over the place on *Bird's Eye View*. It took, I think, about, three years to make, and we, we worked with some very interesting people.

SM: And how many were in the series?

I think there were eight or nine in the series, and it was all shot from a helicopter. I actually met my husband on one of the programmes, because he was the assistant cameraman, so we went all over the country in a heli, you know, following the helicopter or in the helicopter. I do remember one time, it was very very difficult though, we were filming a May Day parade somewhere in the Cotswolds, and I was on the ground telling the, giving, with the, communication with the helicopter as it came down. We had permission... You... The rule of helicopter filming is, I think, you're not allowed to go below 100 feet without special permission, but of course you have to go through, below 100 feet, you've got to get special permission to film closer. And at one time we were filming this May Day parade in a village in the Cotswolds, and I was desperately trying to get in touch with the helicopter, because, as we were filming over this village, the slates were coming off the roof of a shed, and, nearly decapitating a baby, and I was trying to stop them from, you know, 'Fly away, fly away!' Anyway, nothing terrible happened, but it was great fun.
[0:06:55]

And eventually, with Eddie, I worked on various things with Eddie, and eventually, in the early Seventies, we started to work on history programmes. I think at that time, it was obviously known that Thames Television was making *World At War* and we knew it was going to be, you know, a fantastic series, which of course it was. And, so I was doing... I'm not a historian, as I said, I was a linguist, but I was working on these history programmes, finding people, going... A lot of them were to do... I worked on one, on the *Scharnhorst* one, on the U-boat war, Second World War related subjects.

[0:07:34]

And at that time I was finding people, going to see people in Germany and in Britain, finding participants. And I also started to do the film research. So I did people and film. And this is when I first got into film research, and, I remember my first visit to the Imperial War Museum, being absolutely fascinated by this film that was going to... I hadn't a clue how to load a machine or, obviously it was all Steenbeck. And, I was taught by the people at the War Museum and elsewhere how to load the film, 35mm SEPMAG film, onto the Steenbeck. And I remember being absolutely fascinated by the material. So, that, then I was doing film and people. And the people... I remember a lot of the characters involved, but I particularly remember at the War Museum, there was Mrs English who ran the film cutting rooms at that time, the viewing rooms, and also Queenie who was her assistant. Do you remember Queenie?

SM: [inaudible].

She was great, fantastic. So, they were very very helpful to me. I also was lucky enough, obviously did a lot of research in Britain, I remember going to Movietone and Pathé et cetera et cetera, but I was also...

SM: How well catalogued were all those [inaudible]?

They weren't really. They weren't.

SM; No. I can imagine.

I mean, there were... Everything was on cards, and it wasn't shot lists, a lot of it wasn't shot-listed, so, if it was on cards, or it was in a file and you'd just go through... In, in the Imperial War Museum you'd go through by date and you'd look at the material by date. I remember looking at a lot of German material in the Imperial War Museum, because they had some of the *Deutsche Wochenschau*. It took me some time to realise that on the *Deutsche Wochenschau* there was, you know, you had to go through quite a lot before you came to the relevant piece. So, obviously newsreels. And the same with Movietone, Pathé et cetera et cetera.

[0:09:45]
SM: So you're using your intuition quite a lot?

Oh enormously, enormously. And as, as I said... You see the film research, there was not really a roll of the film researcher, so, I took the film research as seriously as I took the people, so, there was, it wasn't a minor thing for me to go and find film. So... And I was looking for exciting material all the time, not just, no one said to me, 'Find a shot of a destroyer,' whatever. So... That's how it happened. And I loved it, I absolutely loved it, I was fascinated by it.
[0:10:17]
And I was also lucky enough to go to Germany, to look at the Bundesarchiv, which was then held in, you know, Germany was obviously still divided then. And I remember going to the Ehrenbreitstein, which was the place in the, where Koblenz film was, where you went viewing, and it was on a, in Koblenz, on a, overlooking the river. You went up to a fortress. And they'd get the film out for you et cetera et cetera. And, I don't know if you know the story of the *Scharnhorst*, it was called *Life and Death of the Scharnhorst*, and one of the things that happened was, I can't even remember the year, but the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* did a dash down the Channel to escape from, Brest I think it was, they dashed down the English Channel and they managed to escape. And so the Channel Dash of the *Scharnhorst* was one of the big things to look for. And I remember being in the Bundesarchiv in

Ehrenbreitstein, and I think the guy who helped me get the film out and was talking, helping me, advising me, was called Herr Hofmann[ph]. And he was great, and he said, 'I think we've got the rushes here.' Well I was so inexperienced. Of course I had to order everything on film. I'll talk a little bit more about the technology in those days. But, he actually found the rushes of the German coverage of the Channel Dash. Well now, if that had happened now, obviously you'd order the whole, whole thing, but, because I was so scared of spending the BBC's money, I had to, I selected sections. Because of course in those days everything was on film, and you had to order dupe negs and prints, and, it was all pretty expensive stuff. So you papered up the film as you went, you know, you put a bit of paper at the shot at the beginning, a bit of paper at the end, or, a piece of string I think, a piece of thread it was in Germany. So you'd definitely have to choose your sections. You had to have initiative. You couldn't just order VHS's, because VHS, there weren't VHSs of anything.

SM: You had to put a little arrow on your pieces of paper [inaudible].

You put a piece of paper... Yes.

SM: The sequence [inaudible].

The sequence. And, so it was pretty hard to do it really. The only place that I know you still have to do that actually is in the, well, not the only place, but, you still do that in Moscow, at the, Russian archives.

SM: Gostelradiofond?

No no, not... That's... No no.

SM: The State Archives?

Yes. Russian State Archives. Yes, you still do that.

SM: And again, was the German material any better catalogued [inaudible]? Or were you [inaudible]?

Oh no no no. You...

SM: [inaudible].

No no. You, detective work and you, you were relying very much on the skill and help of the librarians who you were with. And that, you know, you'd have a great relationship, and you'd be talking to them about the material. It wasn't catalogued at all, the German material, not then. I mean, there was, there were a few files, but nothing was shot-listed. So you, you know, you might find something that said, you know, *Scharnhorst* or whatever, but there was no shot list as such. And the same actually in the Imperial War Museum. You'd go through, you'd just go through files.

SM: Yes. How did you get the.....

[break in recording]

G: OK. And, we're running up.

SM: Shall I repeat the question?

G: Yes please. Yes.

[0:13:46]
SM: How did you get the opportunity... Well first of all, how did you find out about the German archive, and know to go there?

I think I talked to people at the Bundes... at the Imperial War Museum, and, I just rang people, and, I just, you just did know. I don't, I can't, to be honest, remember, but there were, you know, historians and... I just knew about it. I...

SM: You'd heard about these places?

Yeah. And I rang people, and I probably rang people at the BFI, I can't, I can't actually remember. I think particularly the Imperial War Museum who would advise me. But there was never a question that I wouldn't go, because, as I say, this was... You know, the film research was as serious as finding the people, so, you know, that was it. And...

SM: So although it was something very new, [inaudible].

Well I mean, people had done film research before, because of course there had been the *Great War* series, and people, and they had travelled all over the place for, looking at material. So, it was just that, there wasn't a job as a film researcher as we know it now. It was, I mean, it was researcher.

SM: Mhm.

So a researcher did the film and the, and the people.

SM: Right.

And, you, the kind of, working out of the technology of the film and, how things were shot-listed, or if they were shot-listed, well just didn't apply at all. And of course, shot, as we know now, shot lists list the kind of, what you see on the screen and the kind of shots and the, who's in the picture. There was nothing like that at all. So you had to actually get to recognise, you know, who Göring is or whatever, or Dönitz or, whatever. And I just did. And, no, it was... And what was actually very interesting, when we were doing the filming for the *Scharnhorst* programme, Ludovic Kennedy

was the presenter and interviewer, and when we were doing the filming in Hamburg, one of the people we filmed was one of the, was one of, the captain of the *Scharnhorst*. And the *Scharnhorst*, Ludovic Kennedy's father was killed in, was on a ship called the *Ramillies*, which was one of the first ships to go down in the Second World War, and it was sunk by the *Scharnhorst*. And, this wonderful Captain Topp, who was, Karl Topp who was the captain of the *Scharnhorst*, who was a wonderful man, highly respected, really came and apologised to Ludo, and it was so moving, and Ludo hadn't, you know, did not blame him obviously at all. It was, it was a very interesting topic to do, and a very interesting programme to work on. So... And that was the first of several series, several programmes I made, I worked on, with Eddie Mirzoeff, about the Second World War. And, so I suppose I became a bit of a kind of, obsessive. I mean I am an obsessive person, and you have to be obsessive to be a successful film researcher, or any researcher, because, I would not let, I would never settle for no, I would always be looking, looking, looking for the better material. But as I say, it was a bit daunting to know that you were responsible for the money, so if, if it was on film, which, it always was on film, you would have to, the material would go to the labs and you would have to pay per foot.

[0:17:20]
SM: To have it developed, processed.

To have a dupe neg... Yyes, to have it processed. Because you, you had ordered dupe neg and print. And, what happened then was that, I got to know a little bit more about film. But I do remember working at the BFI, where, the lady at the National Film Archive who dealt with film researchers, was called Dorly Minnick[ph]. And she was, she had been there with Ernest Lindgren when the whole thing started, she'd, I mean she'd been there a long time. And she was, I think she was Hungarian, or Austrian, I can't remember where she was from originally. But she was absolutely terrifying when you first met her. She was very very stern. And I remember being terrified, because she said to me, 'Single stripe...' No. 'Single perf or double perf for your film?' Because we get... Sorry. I should have also said, although most the film I was looking at was 35mm, we were working on 16, so you had to get 16mm

reduction negs and prints made. Well I didn't know if I wanted, you know, single perf or double perf or whatever. And so it was terrifying. But actually, she was a very kind woman, and, she was, terrified lots of people. And, she, she was disliked by lots of people, but actually she was a very gentle, nice woman really with this manner which put people off, and she was very kind and interested about, talking to me about my family and so on.

JK: She wouldn't, she wouldn't accept an indemnity, that was the problem that many people had with her.

No. No she wouldn't. She was absolutely strict about rights. And she also wouldn't... At the BFI, the National Film Archive, they were very strict about donors' rights. So, if a donor had given a film, the donor would have the right to say, yes, we allow this this to be duped or not. And, obviously not all donors had said anything. So if there was nothing in writing, she wouldn't allow you to have the film. So all the rights issues have always been there, and, you know, been difficult. And, it was very difficult to understand that at the beginning actually for me, still is in a way, but, particularly the BFI was, they were very very strict about it.

SM: Yes, the whole rights is very difficult for a lot of people.

Yes. It is.

SM: So presumably when a donor donated stuff, they didn't automatically give[?] the right to use it.

No, it was, it was... I mean, no, because it was not, it wasn't meant... It was meant to preserve and to look after the film.

SM: Yes.

And also, that was the aim originally, to preserve and look, and still is in a way. So you weren't automatically given the right to, to use the material. And so this, it's a bit of a kind of dilemma.

SM: And presumably quite[??] difficult for them to trace donors [inaudible].

Yeah, a lot of them were dead. A lot of them were dead.

SM: Yes.

And of course, the, you know, the cataloguing was never up to date, and, the system was, you know, had these odd files that you could look through, and, et cetera et cetera. I mean obviously, I don't need to say this, we're talking years, decades before the computer came, so, it's not the same at all. You had to have a sort of, killer instinct to go for it, you had to be a squirrel, you know, searching, searching, searching. You had to want to find things. If you, if you weren't that interested, you, you would never be a good film researcher, you have to be an obsessive, as I say. But poor old Dorly[ph], I do remember going to her funeral, she died, I can't even remember the year, but her, I think she, I, I think it was in Mortlake Cemetery. And, she... Crematorium. And I do remember the awful thing, as the coffin went behind the curtains, there's a rattle at the door and it was the bus bringing the people from the BFI who had arrived too late for her funeral. I thought, that was the final send-off of poor dear Dorly[ph]. I remember a few of us really, she really liked, me and Vicky Wedd-Cross/Redcross[??], who was another one she really liked, so, you know. She, her, her bark was worse than her bite.

SM: Yes.

[0:21:45]
But... So that's how I got in to film research. And then, I worked on a few programmes about the war at the BBC, and I, you know, I became more and more interested in film. And then, when I, in 1974 my daughter was born, and I had to

leave the BBC, because in those days you didn't, they didn't keep your job open, you know, it was only, you had six weeks' maternity leave and that was it, you had to come back. So I left the BBC, and, I think I was off for eighteen months before I started work as a freelance again. And when I came back, I was all, by then I suppose I'd become a specialist, I was always asked back, or nearly always asked back, as a film researcher, as opposed to a general researcher. So, film research became my speciality, and I became more and more obsessed by it. And, worked... Well I worked at the BBC quite a bit, but I also spent a year at London Weekend actually.

SM: So were you freelance, or back at the BBC on a freelance contract?

Freelance. No no, not...

SM: Or as staff?

I was not on the BBC... I was freelance. Between 1974 and 1981 I was totally freelance. But I mean a lot of my contacts were in the BBC, so, I was asked... But I, because I had another child in '77, so, all those, you know, I had another eighteen months off. But I was never out of work really. And then, I worked for London Weekend for a year, which was a different experience altogether, because, that, you were part of the film department and you were not treated in the same sort of equal way as you had been in, as... I mean it was a different way of working, the film researchers were kind of, just told to go and.....

[break in recording]

G: Running up again.

OK.

G: I'll give you the timecode. It's 22:26. And so, give the question.

[0:23:48]

SM: OK. So, were you on contract, on a freelance contract [inaudible]?

I was on, what happened was, I was asked back for various programmes, because, you know, most of my contacts were in the BBC, so I'd be asked back to do work on a series, particularly documentary. I should say that, I tended always to work on factual programmes. When I was at London Weekend... Oh, that was a bit later, but... So I was, yes, I was working on factual programmes in the BBC. Because I was in this department called General Features still. One of the things that I worked on was a programme about Lady Astor, Nancy Astor, who was, she wasn't actually the first British MP but she's always named as the first British MP. Absolutely fascinating story.

SM: Woman MP.

Woman MP. Yes, woman MP. Married to Lord Astor. She's an American woman. But... And they lived at Cliveden. And one time... So this was a wonderful find, because, I got a, I put an advert in the *Daily Telegraph*, had anyone ever got, done any filming at Cliveden, did anyone have any general, you know, home movies or whatever? Anyway, I got a call from a guy who had... Cliveden by then by the way was, had been sold off to, I think as a, was going to be made into a hotel. And I got a phone call from a guy who said he had been the electrician at Cliveden, and when the items went up for sale, he'd bid for a camera, and he got some rolls of film. Because they had a, they had a little camera and they had a screening room. And when we got, looked at these films, they were all the Astor home movies going back to the 1920s. All people like Macmillan at Cliveden, the children, I mean David Astor, who was, you know, became the editor of the *Observer*, Bill Astor who was, there was a bit of a scandal about at Cliveden. J... I think Jacob, Jake Astor. Anyway, they were all there as children. And Lady Astor there, with all these people, you know, important people, George Bernard Shaw visiting Cliveden. There was even film actually of Kennedy's sister who was married to, I can't remember who she was married to, but anyway, there is film of Kennedy's sister and Kennedy visiting. Yes. So it was

absolutely extraordinary. So we... And we had David Astor I think it was round to look at the films, to show. Because they hadn't... And he had not seen these films since they were children. It was a fantastic find. So, which really helped the programme as you can imagine. Unfortunately what happened then was, we gave it to the BFI, or was given to the, well we didn't, they gave it to the BFI, and no one saw it for about another thirty years, no one was allowed to see it, because the BFI just sort of, said, oh no no, no. It was not catalogued, it was... Anyway. I think it is released now, but it was, it was colour footage. I mean it was extraordinary footage. So that was one of the best finds ever I think. And that was just, just by luck, because I had put this advert in the paper.

SM: And presumably anybody wanting to look at that, or, or know what was in it, would have to come to you, because you [inaudible].

Well yes, but, I mean, the reason that I... I mean, we had the Astor family looking at it, to tell us who people were. But I mean some of them, obviously George Bernard Shaw was someone we recognised, and so was Harold Macmillan visiting Cliveden. And also, as far as I remember, there was film of, what was the name of the German ambassador to, just before the war, the German ambassador to London who was... Yes, he would know, he was, he was...

JK: Ribbentrop.

Ribbentrop, yes, he was there, visiting.

SM: Oh. Yes.

Because of course... Yes. He was, you know, he was part, at the Nuremburg Trials. But anyway he, he visited Cliveden. So that was a very exciting find.

SM: Real find, yes.

[0:28:08]

And I worked on various things. And then, after my second child was born I went to London Weekend for a year, because there wasn't anything coming up at the BBC. So I went... And I had eighteen months off when the kids were, you know, when he was born, and then I went back, and I worked at London Weekend for a year, which was very interesting. I met some terrific, interesting people there, including Julie Lewis who was in... The film researchers were kept separately, they were, there was a film research department, and they were just told to go and find a shot of blah blah blah, which is not something they'd ever had in the BBC. And they were kind of, it wasn't regarded with the same... I don't know. It was slightly, you... I had to fight to make my presence felt, which I did I think. But... And I think, you know, things have changed there now, but, it was, it was a different way of working. And also, I never worked on *Weekend World*, which was their most famous programme, and I do remember seeing John... but I did go to a drinks do, and I remember seeing John Birt, serving a very wicked dry Martini there, at the Christmas party.

SM: Weekend World was again a big current affairs programme.

Big current affairs programme. But they were... Yeah.

SM: And even they didn't have their own researcher?

They did, they had their, they had a film researcher, but they were all, film researchers were kind of, a department. Which they are in bits of the BBC now, but I mean I had never been part of that, you know, I was always... Anyway. So I was there for a year. And then I had a phone call from Peter Pagnamenta, who I had met, first of all when I was on *24 Hours*, he was assistant producer I think they were called then. And he rang me and said he had an idea for a, a series, and was I interested in coming to talk about it? And this series was called *All Our Working Lives*. And I got the job of being the film researcher on it. And it was the most wonderful series. It was a history of British industry, twelve programmes I think. In fact there was one went out last week called *Cutting Coal*, I saw it last week on BBC2, and it's still a brilliant,

brilliant series. And, we looked at... Maybe there were nine programmes, but there was one on the shipbuilding industry, one on the coal industry, and it was, Peter had had this vision that, how the world had changed, and so we looked at the development of the ship... you know, from the beginning of the industry until the Eighties when, obviously the, you know, everything was changing. And so, that was a terrific thing to work on. And I, on that, not only was I going to the libraries and looking at material, but I was also going and getting material from, say, the Steel Board, or, whatever, the National Coal Board in those days, you know, they still had their own films, and private factories and things. So, travelling around Britain. And I became a kind of specialist in social history films I suppose.

[0:31:19]
JK: So, you were responsible for the rehabilitation of the industry, of the sponsored film, which sometimes is used intelligently now...

In a way. Yes.

JK: ...but certainly wasn't in those days.

No it wasn't. And I mean, I, I don't know if there's something weird about me, but I also, always find that sort of thing very very interesting. But what did happen, I do remember this, in those days, this, everything was on film obviously, and we used to borrow film, and a lot of it was on nitrate stock. And, when we were on... Actually, *All Our Working Lives* was the first programme I had worked on where we actually transferred the material on to one-inch tape. Before everything had been done onto film, as I said. This was onto one-inch tape, which was a new format that had really just started. So we used to borrow the films and get the films to Lime Grove, and we used to copy the films onto, you know, from a telecine machine. A lot of the films were on nitrate, and there was just one machine in the BBC that was allowed to run nitrate and that was TK2 in Lime Grove.

[break in recording]

SM: .....worry.

It's not like your television programme where the.....

[break in recording]

G: Right. We're rolling, and it's 31:21. And, yup, so...

[0:32:40]
So, yeah, so, 35mm nitrate film, a lot of it was, was filmed on nitrate stock, which I think was, was it 1950...

JK: Two.

'51 or 2. Most 35mm was on nitrate stock, this really inflammable material, which still, if it's kept well, looks brilliant, but it is the most, you know, it can blow up, it can self-combust. So we had to have a fireman sitting with us in TK2 all the time as we were running it. And I used to run up and down stairs. You were only allowed to bring six cans of nitrate down from the vault at a time, and the fireman would sit beside you as, as you were transferring this material onto tape. And of course we didn't choose bits, we copied the whole reel. And I can remember the fireman giving me a real old time. 'Not another film about a,' you know, 'an industrial process. How boring can you get?' Haven't you got anything better than this?' You know, he acted as a film censor. Anyway. So... But what I always wondered about... So we had all this nitrate film, and a lot of the newsreel material was still on nitrate then, Pathé et cetera, and, it was very carefully kept in this one vault at the top of Lime Grove, and you had a fireman with you. However, what was very odd was that it used to just get sent back by taxi to wherever we'd picked it up, so it went through London in a normal car. It doesn't any more of course, but... So that was it. And of course I should also say that most of the material I was looking at was black and white, most of the material was... In those days it wasn't... If you saw something in colour, it was

quite exciting, but it wasn't a, an absolute necessity. People were quite happy to look at black and white apparently. Or so... Anyway, we were. Everyone was happy to look at black and white.

JK: Was that when you had the bridge built at Kensington House?

That was... Yes. So when I worked with Peter, and we worked on *All Our Working Lives*, was the first series I did with him, I did various series with him. But, I used to have to carry 35mm cans.....

[break in recording]

G: And we're rolling. It's 33:38, and, OK.

[0:35:00]
Yeah. So, there's this, there's a lot of nitrate, and, black and white. And, when... But a lot of the material also came on 35mm, and if it wasn't 35, if it wasn't nitrate, I would always be looking at it on a Steenbeck, we looked at the material in cutting rooms near the office. And I worked then in Kensington House. And the vaults where, the material, the film dispatch was in Woodstock Grove, which was across a yard. And I would be carrying these 35mm cans, which are very very heavy, from the vault back to... And a lot, also a lot of the BBC material was on 35mm of course. So I'd be carrying backwards and forwards to my office. And Peter Pagnamenta, the dear man that he is, had this bridge built for me, [laughs] so, bridge built. Well no one realises, but it was built for me, so that I didn't have to go up and down the steps, and we went, the bridge, across from Lime Grove to Woodstock Grove – from Kensington House to Woodstock Grove, to carry the cans. So... And, as I say, one-inch had taken over from two-inch really in the early Eighties; before that, the two-inch material, which, a lot of the old BBC programmes were on two-inch, which of course made things more difficult. But we worked on one-inch. And, and that was it.
[0:36:27]

And then, I went to work with, I worked on another series which Will Wyatt was the head of department had suggested, called *Now the War Is Over*, which was about the period of the, of '45 to '51, first Labour Government after the war. That I think was the next one after *All Our Working Lives*, which was, which Angela Holdsworth produced, but with Peter, who had worked with Peter as well on, on *Working Lives*.

[0:36:57]
SM: When you were transferring all the film to one-inch tape, presumably you were also needing to make a log of what you transferred, to help [inaudible].

Yes, I've still got them, but, I've still got them but they're very very badly done, I've got to say. Logging has never been my forte, I've got to say. I would... The shot lists were fine, but it wasn't like, not like now where you had, you know, you had sort of, what do you call it, code, you know, numbers...

SM: Timecodes.

Timecodes. I mean it wasn't like that. So I've got shot lists but it wasn't exactly the same at all. So...

SM: But the picture editor must have been dependant on you identifying the images, so that he could [inaudible].

Oh yah, we'd go and, go through everything, and...

SM: Or would you sit with a picture editor [inaudible]?

Oh yeah, quite a lot. Yes, quite a lot, yes.

SM: Uh-huh.

And of course, it wasn't like... Well, we cut... I'm just trying to think how we cut it actually. Because he wouldn't... I don't think we cut... I think the one-inch material was, was played in, it wasn't...

SM: Yes.

It was...

SM: He'd have had your archive on one roll.

Yes.

SM: His interview or whatever on another.

Yes.

SM: And [inaudible] have been...

Yes, but it would have been shot, it would have... The interviews would have been shot on film.

SM: Were they... Were they played in on the film?

Yes, played in on film and then... I think so. I think that's how it worked anyway.

SM: So their film, the film interview was transferred to one-inch tape [inaudible].

I guess so. To be honest I can't remember exactly.

SM: And then your archive played in at the same time.

Yes, I think so. I think that's how we did it. I can't quite remember actually to be...

SM: It seems to be quite difficult for film editors to – picture editors...

Well of course, but it wasn't...

SM: [inaudible] by then wasn't it.

Oh yeah, it was very much, we were still cutting on film.

SM: Yes.

I mean I worked with some great editors, Alan Lygo being one of them, and of course Steve Sampson who did *People's Century* which was one of my later films. But yeah, no, it was, it was a very interesting time actually. And, so, I did...
[0:39:01]
Then I did *Now The War Is Over*, which was also, you know, is about the, was also, social history really about Britain. And that's when I got to know things about, well, a bit about America. Because of course, there was all this aid from America coming across and stuff, so... But I didn't go to America for some time. And then I worked on, I worked on a series called *Out of the Doll's House*, which was about the history of women's, women and work, and, also, which was also another very memorable series.
[0:39:42]
And, and then, I worked on a series called *An Ocean Apart*, which was about the relationship between Britain and America, and that was when I started going to America for archive, to look at archives, which was an amazing experience to have, and which of course I kept on doing all my career. And, I worked with a researcher in, somebody had suggested David Thaxton in Washington as a colleague, and he showed me... He would... I would go over, he didn't do the research without me, but I went to Washington where a lot of the material obviously was, at the National Archives, and worked with David. And it was an extraordinary experience.

SM: Did he work in the National Archive, or was he freelance?

No no, he's a freelance researcher. He had been actually a, he worked at the American Film Institute, you know, he was, he'd... He had worked at West Point and taught film at West Point actually, that's what he did. So, yes, it was... So that was when I got to know the American archives. So, that was really when I started travelling. I was so lucky, I mean I've been all over the world really. So I did that. I spent a lot... I used to go to America a lot, to Washington and to New York of course.

SM: Which were the main archives you used there?

In, in America, obviously it was the National Archives in Washington, which were then in the centre, in, near, just down the road from the White House, Pennsylvania Avenue I think it was. They're now out at, in Maryland, in...

SM: Culpeper.

JK: No, in Silver Springs area[??].

Yes. Anyway, you know where they are, I can't, it'll come back to me.

SM: So did you use the Library of Congress as well then?

I did, but the Library of Congress... Yes I did, but, the Library of Congress of course was mostly for early film, and feature films. I did use both. But the actual, most of the material that I was talking about for the, you know, post-war period, was in the National Archives. And of course that's when I got to know about public domain material, because, as you know, there is no such thing as public domain material in this country, in, at least in Britain, although people think there is, there is not. It's not an official... It's only America that has this rule, this law, that material shot for and by the Government, by the Government or for the Government, is counted as in the public domain. It's the same way as written archives are. So, I suppose it's a

Hollywood thing really, you know, that the film industry had played part in them taking film more seriously or something, I don't know, but...

JK: There were, taxpayers' dollars have paid for this material.

Yes.

JK: Therefore, the taxpayer should have access to it.

Absolutely. It's the most wonderful, wonderful thing, which of course is fading away now I think. It's not, there's not as much... Well of course, what is happening now is that, there aren't films shot any more. So, you know, there is just not the same kind of material. But... So, I was really, yeah, I did a lot of travelling to America.

SM: But you still have to pay a certain amount for access to that public domain?

No you don't. You pay, you only pay...

SM: Just have to pay...

You don't... You pay for the technical side.

SM: Yes.

And you, obviously if you have a researcher working with you, which you, in a way you need an adviser, I mean, but I was lucky that I, I went there, because a lot of people now, they just, you know, use someone else over there. But I made a lot of trips to America. I went to New York a lot as well, and went to the Grinberg, the Sherman Grinberg Library, who had the Pathé and Paramount material, and to CBS and NBC et cetera et cetera. So it was, it was all terrific.

JK: Was the Grinberg Library as big a mess then as it, was now?

Yes. It was... Well what happened was, they, they, it was run... They didn't really have a cataloguing system, and the Paramount material and the Pathé material was held there, but you couldn't, I mean it took a lot of working out. And unfortunately, it think the guy who ran it was, it was Bernie Chertok wasn't it? And he died, and of course, it then moved to LA. So... It was a wonderful collection though, absolutely fantastic collection. But in the same way that the material in this country... I mean it was all on film so you had to have knowledge of it, you had to have...

SM: What was the basis of the collection?

Well, it... [pause] I... Sherman Grinberg was a collector I think, wasn't he?

JK: Yes.

He was a collector. They also... It was a bit like, it was actually... To be honest, what it reminded me of was Visnews, because it had newsreels and it had modern material. You know, Visnews was a very very complicated library, and I can remember, you know, finding stuff in Visnews which was extraordinary, because they had all the early newsreels, they had the Paramount, they had the Gaumont British, they had the Gaumont Graphic. But it wasn't catalogued, so you'd have to really pick your way around the cards and... And it was... What happened unfortunately with the Grinberg – with the Visnews material, and, I can't, this happened early on in my career, we used to go to School Road, Acton, to look at it. But then, when they moved, they did not have the right to have any nitrate material, so the nitrate material was given to the BFI, and it was not catalogued. And they had, they had a very bad thing of transferring material onto very inferior tape, and a lot of... And then there was the nitrate gap, I think it was the material from 1946 or something to '51 never got, never got... The Paramount gap, a lot of the Paramount newsreels were never copied to... The only way you could get them was to try and locate them in BFI. So, yeah, so that that was another interesting place to visit.

SM: Mm.

And, fun, but, you know, you had... It was all very quirky everywhere you went, it was all... It wasn't like now where everything's about sales, that's the difference now, everything is about sales. Then you felt you were researching and everyone just was interested in the material. Now it's about, making money obviously, because people have to do that. Because Visnews of course in the early days was partly owned, or, by the BBC.

SM: They owned fifty-one per cent of it.

Yeah.

SM: Which is why you didn't. Other people obviously did have to pay to use it.

Yeah. Yeah we didn't use, we didn't pay. But, anyway, sadly it's... Well, it then went to, to ITN, some of it did, went to ITN.

SM: Yes, they were over by Reuters then and...

Reuters, yes. Yes.

SM: ITN managed [inaudible].

[0:47:33]
Yes, they did. So... And then, what happened then... So I started going to America on a regular basis, and then, I had, I worked on an amazing programme, again with Peter Pagnamenta, called *Nippon*, which was the history of post-war Japan. And then I had the amazing experience of going to Japan and doing research in Japan. Which was extraordinary. I actually tried to learn Japanese, the BBC paid for me for two weeks to learn Japanese, but unfortunately, when... In Japan, you know, they have three alphabets in Japan, and, they have the, I can't even remember the name of the

characters, but there are three different kinds of language that they write in. And when you're at university in Japan you're still learning the alphabet, so there's no way that I could learn to read the cards in Japanese. However...

SM: In two weeks.

In two weeks. But anyway, it was good fun. So I spent quite a lot of time in Japan, I had various trips to Japan, looking... We had an office in NHK. And I can remember the first day I arrived, because the rest of the team were there, I arrived and I had got the subway, the underground station to the, to Sinjuku, which was near where our office was. And I walked out of the station, I could not... There are no, no street names in Japan at all. So unless... And of course I couldn't read where I was, I'd got no sense of direction. Unless there was a sign of a Kentucky Fried Chicken or something I recognised, there's no way I'd find my way to the office. But anyway. So, I spent a lot, I spent I think, three... I went to Japan three times for a month each time.

SM: Which archives were you using there?

Well, I was using NHK, who had the rights to the Nippon News, they had a lot of the Nippon News. I went to... I can't remember actually to be honest. I went to the national...

SM: Did they have any kind of concept of a national [inaudible]?

They did, but it was very very difficult. It was very very difficult to, sort of negotiate with them. I do remember going there, and all the guy was interested in was the fact that I had to take my shoes off and, et cetera. But we had wonderful, I had wonderful Japanese fixers. Yukiko[ph] was one of them. And we used to spend quite a lot of time with Yukiko[ph] at, in her house, her father was a banker I think and I remember us all going round there to, for dinner and... It was terrific, it was absolutely brilliant.

And I travelled a bit in Japan, but it was mostly based in Tokyo. I went to various archives in Tokyo. And then...

SM: So, can I just ask. The staff of.....

[break in recording]

G: .....again. And, the timecode is 49:21, and, it's yours.

[0:50:43]
So I was very very lucky. And then I was very lucky also to get to work with Adam Curtis, who, you know, had a totally different way of working, and when I was working on, with Peter, I think it was on *An Ocean*... no, on, just before I did *An Ocean Apart*, Adam came and joined us in the office, and he joined us and worked on *An Ocean Apart*.

SM: In what capacity?

He was the producer of some of them I think.

SM: Ah, yes.

And, he had a totally different way of working. So that's how I got to know. And then I worked with him on *Pandora's Box*, which was his first sort of, way... He uses the archive differently from any other person, and he kind of plays tricks with archive. People, it's very difficult to describe what he does, but, he's an absolute force to be reckoned with. And he has a more creative use of archive. He doesn't use things to illustrate, he uses... Like, it's very difficult to describe what he does, but... So I, I spent a lot of time in America working with him as well on, on this thing called *Pandora's Box*, which was about how science was used to create a better world. That was the aim. And, the things that are left out of people. And, and so I, I then worked on, I worked on about three or four series with Adam, which was terrific. So I, I'm

very very lucky, because I worked with Peter Pagnamenta who is one of, and Eddie Mirzoeff, and, you know, various people under Peter who were really great film-makers. And then Adam who's very creative and extraordinary.

[0:52:37]
SM: I would imagine working with Eddie and Peter that they, they kind of gave you an idea of what they were doing and, and what sort of archive they might want, but you were very much [inaudible].

Well, well of course in the... But what happened, the difference between what I did I think, I'm not sure if it's different, but I would be in on the discussions at the beginning of the programme as much as everybody else, so we'd have discussions on the, on the way the programmes would be made. And, you know, the programmes, I mean, *All Our Working Lives*, there was probably more archive, it was archive and it was talking heads. And it was more, there was more archive in than specially shot really. So, the archive was sort of, was, there was no reconstruction at all. And, I also, this period was the period when presenters were out of fashion in a way, so, suddenly, you know, things have changed now but that was just a fashion. So that it was archive and, and interviews with people. And the archive was used to find people as well, which was another thing that we did on *All Our Working Lives*. So, for instance, we did one called *Plane Makers*, which Jonathan Lewis made, and we had this film of the women making planes in the First World War. And we found the women who had been making the planes. So the film came before the interviews, if you see what I mean. So, it was an equal footing all the time. And, also, with Adam, I'd sort of have funny ideas. I was able to sort of, say, 'Why don't we find,' I don't know, a shot of someone having a fit, or, a butterfly or something. I mean, you know, something totally unrelated to what you thought we were looking for. It wasn't just illustrating factual stuff. So, it was, I was really, really lucky in that. And, lucky in, you know...

SM: Mm. So with Adam, like, you would contribute ideas...

G: Sorry.

[break in recording]

G: [inaudible].

[pause]

G: OK we're rolling, and this is Roll 2, Christine Whittaker and Jerry Kuehl. And, Jerry Kuehl.

[0:55:15]
JK: Tell us about working on The People's Century.

Well it was a very exciting and enormous project, which I'm very grateful that I was lucky enough to take part in. It all happened, started at sort of, the beginning of the Nineties when the BBC was planning to do something to celebrate the, obviously end of the century, and we ended up making a twenty-six-part series called *People's Century*, which was the history of the twentieth century through the eyes of ordinary people kind of thing. And it was a lot of archive, there were probably, I would say, forty per cent archive in many of the programmes, and the rest of it were, talking heads or people talking, interviews. And, it was a great thing to do. It was a co-production with WGBH, we made eighteen programmes, they made eight, and, we then adapted each other's programmes so they were slightly more suitable for our market. But, I was the first, I think it was the first time that I had been called an archive producer, in fact I think I was probably the first person to be called an archive producer, because, I was in charge of a team, it was an enormous project, and the planning, I was there from the planning through to the end. And I enjoyed it enormously, I had a great team of people, including, Maggi Cook worked with me, and James Barker worked with me on some of the programmes. So that was terrific. I also was lucky enough to travel a lot to many places, again, that I had been to before, like America obviously, France, Germany, but I also went to Korea for the first time

in my life, which was an extraordinary experience which I enjoyed enormously. And all in all, it was a terrific programme to work on. It was shot on, it was shot on, on, Beta I think. Yes, it was shot on Beta, and edited on Beta, edited.....

[End of Track 1]

[Track 2]

.....film. In other words, it wasn't shot on film, it was shot on Beta. And the film was transferred, the archive was transferred to Beta. And I ended up with this huge database of over 10,000 films that we had viewed during the course of our, of our research, which was quite something.

JK: How did what you did differ from what the Americans did?

In terms of content? [pause] Well, I suspect... I can only think of a few things that were different really. They made a programme, we made a programme about women, and, the history of what had happened to women in the twentieth century, and I do remember that their bits on abortion were, you know, it was, we, we altered... We, we didn't put out the same thing as they did for the abortion section. And, they also did one on, I think they, they did one on sport which was different from ours. So, it was, it was, you know, there were... But it was WGBH, so it was PBS, so it was not like working with Discovery or something where they were aiming for something very different. WGBH of course is a serious station and still is, still, they're still making, they pride themselves on being journalistic and, et cetera et cetera. And... So no, it was a, it was a very good series to work on, I enjoyed it enormously.

JK: Did you find that the people who worked with you had different approaches to the kind of archive films they were looking for?

Well, in some cases they did. But, what you've got to remember is that what we... We were given, we worked on the script and the ideas, and so we were aiming to find all this material, and, it wasn't a question of just looking for the odd shot. I mean, some people came and went on our series, but James Barker in particular, who of course is an absolute war, Second World War buff, he knows everything about every tank that was ever, et cetera et cetera. So he was a great advantage to have on board, because he, he knew so much more than I did. On the other hand I think I was probably more interested in the personal side of, the social history side than James

was, so we worked together very well. And I always came in at the end and looked at things, you know, and... And we had a wonderful editor, we had a team of editors, including, the senior editor on the programme was Steve Sampson who did a terrific job. And we cut it within the BBC. And all in all it was a great thing. It was a bit disappointing when it went out, the first programme, which was, obviously, called *Age of Hope*, which was the first programme in the series, was not, didn't go down as well as we had hoped it would, and so that was a little bit disappointing. But then it grew in popularity, and obviously some programmes were better than others. But, you know, I, I, it was really the sort of, pride of my, one of the high points of my entire career.

JK: There is a scene in which.....

[break in recording]

G: [inaudible] timecode.

[0:03:42]
JK: Tell me about, in the first programme of The People's Century, there is a woman who describes viewing a film in which the barber[??] goes to work, and, how did you come cross that?

I remember the... I remember the scene of course, and I think it was a question of viewing and viewing and viewing until I found it. And, we also... I think it was from the Library of Congress actually, I think we, it was something that I saw at the Library, found at the Library of Congress, where as you know, the Paper Print Collection, the early films, they're quite well catalogued, and I've got a feeling that I found it in the Paper Print Collection. I, I couldn't swear to it, but, I think that's where it was. And, you know, you looked, I looked through the catalogues and found this reference, and I viewed it and thought, wow! that's it. And that was, I think that's how it worked.

JK: But you... But she first told you about the scene, and then you found the scene itself.

I think that's how it happened.

G: Start again. Go.

[0:05:05]
Say it again, Jerry. Say it again.

JK: In that case, first you had the reminiscence, and then you found the shot.

That is correct, I think in that case, but in *People's Century*, and way back on, it started, I remember first of all on *All Our Working Lives*, we started this of finding some film and then finding the people who were in the film, which was an amazing thing that we did first on *All Our Working Lives*. We found a film of women making aircraft in the First World War, and we actually found, we advertised and we found a woman who was working on the aircraft. And we showed her a copy of this film, and she said, 'Oh there's so-and-so. Oh good heavens, there's so-and-so.' And that was our overseer. And that was a technique that we used quite a lot. And in *People's Century* we did it most memorably on a film called *Master Race*, about the Holocaust, where we showed some, a group in Germany of a May Day parade, a film of their May Day parade, and we showed the whole village, their May Day parade, and they all remarked on how the blonde girl was given the... And they, they, I think they danced round a maypole with a swastika on top or something like that. But they all remembered how the blonde girl was always given the May Day, the May Queen job, and, you know, the darker girls were behind. So that, that was an extraordinary thing, because people remembered. And in another one, we had some children who were from a Jewish school in Berlin, and, they, we showed them to some children, some people who had been there. And there was one particular girl who we were desperately trying to find in this film, and we advertised everywhere we could think of, in America, in Germany, in Israel, and no one came at all. And then after the

programme went out, we got a letter from someone who said they had recognised their cousin who was living in Leicestershire, and she had been the girl who had been writing in Hebrew on the, on the board in this Jewish school. It was quite an extraordinary thing. So that was, you know, a fascinating and, and rather thrilling technique to find people in the film. And in fact, we had one experience where, we were filming, we used for the, there was a film called *Nuclear Age*, and in it we used a clip from Lindsay Anderson's film of the march on Aldermaston, which I think is 1958, the film. And there was a particular girl in this film that we were desperate to find, and we advertised everywhere, in the newspapers, *Radio Times* et cetera et cetera. No one could find it. And this... So, in the end we had to give up and settle for second best. And the interviews were, we were doing the interviews for the programme in the house of Sally Doganis, who was one of the producers on the, on the series, she wasn't a producer of this programme. And we were looking... Her husband was there, and talking to Marcus, who was the researcher on the programme – the AP on the programme, and he said, 'What are you filming today?' We were filming at [inaudible] Sally Doganis's house, doing the interviews. And he said, 'Oh we're filming these people who were on the Aldermaston march, in this film, but we couldn't find the one we really wanted to find.' And he said, 'Oh Sally was in a film on the Aldermaston march, we saw it on,' I can't remember what, but he had seen it on something, on the *Tonight* programme or something. Anyway, sure enough, there she was, Sally Doganis, in this film, in 1958. And she was in the next-door office to Marcus all the time and no one had recognised her. So we did film her later. But it was quite extraordinary.

[break in recording]

OK, I think[??].

[0:09:27]

SM: Wasn't the example you were talking about, Jerry, the opposite of having interviewed someone who referred to something, and then, Christine managing to go and find the footage of it[??]?

No, because that's what actually happened in this programme[??], you know, so we did both really. We did both. I mean what was lucky in *People's Century* obviously is that we had time to do it, and we had the money to do it. In fact that particular film of course was public domain, so it didn't cost us anything, but we had a big budget for *People's Century*, and we cleared for all rights in perpetuity for, within the programme. So, the rights clearing was obviously an issue, but it wasn't as much of an issue as it is today because the budget was so much bigger. There's no way you'd get that kind of budget now I don't think.

[0:10:16]
JK: When you talk about public domain, could you explain a bit what that means?

Yes. Public domain means that you, the use of the film is allowed free, used freely by anyone who wants, without any charge. And this really only applies to footage in America, which is shot for or by the Government and is therefore, comes into the public domain. There is no such thing as public domain material in, in Britain, or, as far as I know, anywhere else. It's because the, the American Government has given, the taxpayer has paid for the rights to this film, and therefore, it comes, you know, it's like having a document or something, it's regarded in the same way, you can use it without paying. Which of course is an enormous reason for using American material. But, it's also a huge, huge, huge collection in Washington, it's an amazing place to, to do research.

[0:11:26]
SM: Is this a good point now to bring us up to date with your career and [inaudible]?

Well yes. What happened after...

G: [inaudible], from now[??].

OK. After *People's Century*, I was, I think we, the series went out in 1997 I think, you know, a couple of years before the end of the century, and so, I had a couple of more years of being at the BBC, working on various things as a freelancer. No, not as a freelancer, on the staff, but in, in 1999 I took early retirement from the BBC, and there, worked thereafter as an archive consultant. I set up a company and, you know, I've worked ever since really as an archive consultant, working on BBC programmes, but, as well as programmes from elsewhere. I've worked in, all over the place, but, of course most of, a lot of my contacts are in the BBC, so that's been the bulk of my work but not all. But the kind of work I've done, I've kind of given up now really but the kind of work that comes along now is so, so different of course.

[0:12:43]
SM: Had you worked on any feature films including[??] the BBC?

Yes I worked on two feature films. I worked on a film called *Hotel Rwanda*, and I worked on *Mrs Henderson Presents* with Stephen Frears. Adam Curtis suggested me to Stephen Frears I think. It's a very different way of working really, because, the pressure, the financial pressure of course is so enormous, and the clearances are a nightmare on, on those things, because they will not just, you can't... Everything has to be absolutely, certainly, cleared. I had to have a conference call with the, with Transit for the material from the Bundesarchiv for *Mrs Henderson Presents*, because they wanted in perpetuity and they wouldn't agree to it, but I, so we came to a compromise with this conference call with the producers of, I think it was Pathé who were the producers of *Mrs Henderson Presents*. Anyway. So... I mean it was a great thing to work on, but I mean nothing has compared with the social history films, programmes I made at the BBC, because, you know, they were just so much more...

JK: Fun.

Well not just fun. I mean, they just, were doing so much more, because you were looking across such a wide range of topics and, you know, you're there from the

beginning, you're not asked to find anything, you're part of the team that's creating this, this series, which is terrific.

SM: Which is so much more satisfying.

Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

[0:14:24]
JK: How did you become involved with the International Association for Media and History, IAMIST?

Well, I went to, when I started on *People's Century* there was an IAMHIST conference in Amsterdam, and, about the First World War, and I went to that, and met a whole lot of people from IAMHIST. And to my amazement and surprise, shortly... I became a member of IAMHIST, and I was asked to become a member of the Council of IAMHIST. Now IAMHIST is, the International Association for Media and History is an association made up of people who are very very interested and passionate about the use of, of media in historical, use of history... Sorry, can we stop now Graham?

G: Yes.

[break in recording]

G: OK, and we're rolling, and the timecode is 18:13, and, so if you give the question please.

[0:15:32]
SM: OK. Christine, could you tell us a little bit about how much you think the job of an archive producer or archive researcher has changed since those kind of, heydays of those wonderful documentaries that you were involved in...

Yes.

SM: ...to the kind of documentaries covering history or social history and development that are on television these days?

Well I think the, the job has changed in that, obviously the way that research is done is very very different now because of the, because of the Internet. So many things are, you know, you look, people don't, they just look on the Internet and think that everything's going to be there, so... But also the kind of programmes that are made are so different in that, I think, almost everything I've worked on since I left, in recent years, have had some, some part of dramatization and reconstruction in, which was really unheard of when I was doing this kind of programme. And also, the other thing that's happened is that, there are very few programmes made which have as much archive in, particularly as much black and white archive, because obviously, most of the material, a lot of the material I've been working with over the years is black and white. And for some reason, it got into the, the powers that be's head that people didn't want to see black and white material, which I think is very very wrong and it has been proven to be wrong on several occasions. But it was felt that people would be bored by black and white film. So, they didn't want to talk about the past too much in a way that would make people turn off their screen, turn off their television. Because, don't forget, that when I was working on these programmes, ratings were not considered, were not the top of our list. We were very interested in how the programmes were reviewed, but we were also interested in how they were thought of by our colleagues and peers, because, in a way, it was that, that was what we were aiming at; it wasn't... And ratings, if the programme got a big audience, good, but it wasn't something that was considered absolutely necessary. It was quality, and big audiences were not considered... I mean I remember the first time that I heard the expression 'it did well', and that, by then I was freelancing at the BBC, I can't remember what the series was, and they said, 'Oh yes, the programme did really well.' Now what I would have thought really well said, meant, that, you know, Nancy Banks-Smith gave it a good review or something like that, or, you know, the controller of BBC2 had rung up to praise us for it. But what they actually meant was, it had got a big audience. Well of course, you know, audiences anyway, the way

audiences were searched out in the early days was not a, not as scientific as it is now. But with the competition and the multi-channels and, you know, Murdoch and all the rest of it, suddenly, the competition to get big audiences is just, everything now. And, of course with all the channels, the budgets have gone down so much as well. So, the clearing and persuading people to give you footage for a lower price is vital now, which it really wasn't for us. And that's something that I can't bear doing anyway, so that's not, you know, it's not something I'm, wish I was still involved in. Because the clearing of rights is so important now and so... We used to be allowed to put things in the BBC; we didn't do it on *People's Century* at all but in the old days in the BBC they used to have this thing called 'await claim', and some of the paperwork, you know, they didn't know where something came from, they'd put 'await claim'. Well of course, no way you would do that now. We didn't do it on *People's Century* at all either, everything is shot-listed and timecoded and so we knew where everything came from. But that was not the case in the early days. The other thing that's happened of course is, as I say, that, there aren't people doing the big series like I worked on. What you often find is that people do their research, you know, they have someone on the programme look on the computer, on the databases that are online and think they've done the research, and then they want a researcher come in to do the clearances for them or something, very short, short contract. Which, you know, is something that I'm not interested in. Also, the fact that I worked on things where I was in from the beginning, I was in on the planning of the programme, and the film was as important as the interviews. Because, you know, sometimes the film came first, as we've been discussing. So the film helped to form the programme, rather than the film just sort of, you know, illustrating some point of, whatever. So I think, I think I've just been very very lucky to be born at the age that I, at the time that I was, and, you know, having seen that era of television, because it, I mean it's just been a fantastic thing for me to do. Of course there are things now that people do extremely well, and, it's a different kind of job, and I'm not, you know, saying that my job was, I did it any better, but the kind of work that I did, I don't think really exists much now, or, if they, if it does, they have to do it on such small budgets that the pressures are absolutely terrible. Unbelievable.

SM: But as you say, some of those, those productions you worked on from that kind of heyday of television are there in the archives, and really do stand the test of time and they stand out.

Well I'm... Yeah, they do. In fact I saw one of them went out again the other night. And *People's Century* of course, they've got their money, although it cost a lot of money, they've got their money back time and time again, it's always being shown again. So, yeah, they do, I think they do stand the test of time, I think you're absolutely right. Sometimes they look a bit old-fashioned but, you know, I think they, they really do tell you something about the period, which is great, it's absolutely what our aim was. And I've, you know, just been so lucky with the people I've worked with as well, fantastic.

[0:22:02]
SM: Are there any other ways in which you think the archive researcher or archive production job has changed? Maybe thinking about the technology and [inaudible].

Well I think enormously in a way, because, when I started, as I said to you, I had to look at everything on film, so I had to learn about film, and everything went to the laboratory, you had to know about, you know, what to order et cetera et cetera.

SM: So, what happened when the film went to the laboratory?

Well first of all you had to paper up a section. You had to choose the section that you wanted. And then, it would go to the laboratory and make a dupe neg and print, reduction dupe neg and print, usually.

SM: From the [inaudible].

From the... Yes, from the footage that I sent in.

SM: Did you ever get access to the original neg?

Oh yes. Well, yes you did actually, because, what... Well, the original... I think you did actually. You'd paper... You still do this at the Imperial War Museum, you paper up the print and then they, if you're lucky they will have a neg that they will send to the lab for you.

SM: And sound, do you often have to have a sound copied as well?

Oh yes, always. Always had the sound copied, and, well not always, I mean, but yes, usually. And that sound would be, that would be... I think we actually, I can't remember if we'd have a, como[ph]... como[ph]... I think we had a separate mag track.

SM: Separate sound.

Yes, separate mag track.

SM: So there would have been, there's the[??] practical issues of keeping the sound [inaudible].

Yes. Yeah, and my memories of course of all the bin, the editors with the bins, hanging up the, you know, the sound and the, et cetera...

SM: Yes. Explain what the bins were a bit more.

The bins were... Well, whereas now everything is timecoded, so an editor will put in a timecode on a computer, in those days they would literally cut with a razor blade the bit of film, and you would join it with a piece of sticky tape. And the bits that you cut out would be hung on a peg, numbered, in a bin, with a kind of, hook at the top. And then, when... It was all put, the answer print was all put together, it would go, they were, the numbers were, were...

SM: [inaudible] edge numbers [inaudible].

Edge numbers along. Which were, what's the word? The same on the neg. So they would make a note of the neg edge numbers, and they would make the, master, what was it called?

SM: They would have to match those edge numbers [inaudible].

Yes, the edge numbers would be matched.

G: To the print.

Yes.

G: The master. Yes.

To the master copy. So, yeah, I mean it was...

SM: It was a very complicated [inaudible].

[0:24:55]
Very very complicated. Very complicated thing for editors to do. And, you know, hats off to them. But of course, that's what we did. I mean everybody worked on film. And then we... But, I do remember... Well, we worked on film; we then worked on VHS. I remember when VHS came out, and we, some series, I can't remember which series it was, but we cut it on VHS, which was appalling. Whereas now, you know... And of course the sound gets worse and worse and worse on the computer, it was cut on VHS, and then we went back to the master, the picture was, the quality of the picture was so bad, as it[??] duped and duped. [pause] But yes, so that all changed of course enormously. And, the nitrate we talked about, which, some, some material of course is still on nitrate. I do remember Jerry Kuehl launching the

Nitrate 2000 campaign, which I got on the committee of, to save all the nitrate material before the year 2000. Remember that Jerry?

JK: I do. And, I remember that [inaudible-26:20] was to transfer it all to acetate film.

Yah.

JK: But of course acetate film suffers even more severely than nitrate.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

JK: Maybe you could say that's[??-26:35], oh it's not in my[??] [inaudible].

Well, the campaign, the Nitrate 2000 campaign was an effort to save the material, the nitrate film which was going, some of which was turning to dust and mush in the cans, and if it's not looked after it does that. So, we decided that what we needed to do, and we're talking about newsreels and, and et cetera et cetera, we decided that everything had to be transferred to acetate film. Which unfortunately did have its own problems as well, the vinegar syndrome being one of them. So, every, all technology, as technology changes, there's always something else going wrong. At one point we thought Beta SP was everything perfect, and of course Beta SP degenerates as well. And then it was DigiBeta, and then it was, God knows what... I, I... Oh, high-definition, et cetera et cetera.

JK: Mm.

But everything changes all the time. So, life has changed so much, and now with things going on the Internet et cetera et cetera, I mean, I can't keep up with the new technology, but for me, what has always been most important of course is the image, and whatever format it's on, it tells you so much about, people and history and, you know, it's, I just found it extraordinarily interesting.

[0:28:04]

SM: That's one of the nightmares for the archives, is all those different formats, needing to keep up to date and keep the stuff accessible.

Absolutely. And also, in, what is sad for me about many of the archives, including the BBC archive which I know so well, is that of course, some of it, we know that not all of it's shot-listed. I know that it's not shot-listed. And I worry that when I die [laughs], you know, no, there'll be things that no one will know about, because they, how can they possibly... They're trying to keep up with everything all the time, and there are all sorts of very laudable projects about digitising and digitisation and making public, making things available to the public, but if things aren't shot-listed in the first place, it's going to be extremely difficult. And, I think that, it's not just the BBC, obviously it applies to, it's everywhere.

JK: Can you explain in simple terms what a shot list is?

A shot list is, basically a summary, a piece of film shot by shot, describing what goes on in each change of scene, who is in it, you know. People, if they've got their back to camera, then you say they've got their back to camera. But the most important thing is, who the people are, what their aims are, and... But you should only say what is in the, in the shot, not describing, you know, things that are out of vision. But, it's, it's a kind of, reference point for all future researchers. And of course, over the years, I've looked at material, you know, on shot lists or non-shot lists and... I think the most important, actually the most important thing that a film researcher has to have is a kind of, is it called a butterfly? No, not a butterfly brain. A brain that goes on, you know, you don't just accept something, you're thinking ahead. You're thinking out sideways. So if you don't find a shot of a particular, I don't know, a cat or something, you think, well maybe a shot of a, I don't know, maybe a shot of the tree with the cat, where the cat has appeared in or something might do the trick. And that's what's always been fun for me, thinking of things that might work, that might add something to the, to the programme, you know, other than a very basic...

SM: Mm. Being very literal I suppose[??].

Yeah. Yes.

SM: There's that, that awful expression, Lord Privy Seal.

Exactly. Exactly.

Perhaps we should explain that.

No, I'm not... You explain it, I'm [inaudible].

SM: Sorry, I shouldn't have referenced it[??]. [laughs] Well, didn't it appear on TW3? It was, television sending up television. Because[??], I can say this, I need to say it after[??] [inaudible]. And, they were doing news stories saying that today, the Lord Privy Seal said, something something. And so, they had to show a picture of a lord with his robe[??] on...

Oh I see.

SM: ...a privy, which is an outside loo, and a seal going, [imitating seal noises]. [laughs] And it was a way of showing how literal sometimes television was, that they had to have an image for everything and weren't being quite as clear [inaudible] as they might have been.

I think you've... I, I don't really think that I should describe that, because I don't, I never saw it.

SM: [inaudible].

But, I think you've just used the word that really sums up what I think is, what has been great fun about being the kind of film researcher that I was, to actually be creative as well as being, you know, hunting things down and being determined to find things. To be creative is what I had a chance to be, which was brilliant actually. And...

[0:32:11]
JK: What was the most, I can't say significant, but, what was the shot you most wished you could get, that you couldn't get?

[pause] *The Storming of the Winter Palace* I should think [laughs], or something of that nature where you always see the same stuff used over and over again and you know, you know, it's not the right date or whatever. Or... I don't know really, but that kind of thing. I mean history, you're always being asked for some historical event which you know was not filmed, and of course that leads to a lot of problems. [pause] But, sadly... And also, people saying, 'Oh isn't there anything in colour?' which of course, what they do now quite a lot is to colourise, which I don't like at all.

JK: Why don't you like it?

Because, for me the film is, it's almost sacred. I like to see... I can't stand film shown at the wrong speed, that really annoys me, and I, I think that the film as it stands is, has got a kind of, a life of its own which shouldn't be changed. And colourisation is cheating as far as I'm concerned. I mean it's like saying black and white's not good enough when it is for me, you know. And, I, I like to, I don't... I mean that series on the First World War in colour, which was colourised, I didn't really like, I've got to say. You know, I mean I... I love colour film but I like real colour film, I don't like it to be colourised. Mostly.

JK: And what's wrong with varying the speed at which...?

Well, I think what it, what is annoying to me, when, when you... Obviously, as we know, when, before sound came on, it was filmed, things were filmed at ten frames, fifteen frames a second et cetera et cetera, and when you are, when you are running film, if you don't adjust the speed of a silent film, it looks like Charlie, everybody looks like Charlie Chaplin. And it really annoys me when I see footage of silent films looking like Charlie Chaplin, because, it just makes them look silly and there's no need for that, and I think people should make the effort. I mean it's perfectly possible in the cutting room, you know, even if you didn't have, even if you're not on film, especially now you can get the speed right on a computer, on Avid or whatever. So, I don't... People just seem to think, if it's silent film, it's got to look, you know, look silly and look like, as I say, like Charlie Chaplin, and I find that really annoying.

SM: Shall we stop there for a minute?

Yes.

[break in recording]

[0:35:16]
Liaising with...

SM: Liaising and getting involved with the academic world.

Yes, OK.

SM: And then, you explain what IAMHIST did, and take it from there, and Jerry....

OK.

SM: OK Graham?

G: Yup. We are rolling and the timecode is 38:15. OK can I take your eye line please?

SM: OK.

G: OK.

[0:35:36]
SM: Christine, we've had a fantastic time talking about your experiences of working in the BBC and to some extent in independent television, actually making archive programmes, but another part of your, your life and your kind of record of achievement for archive is the work you've done reaching out from production to the academic world, particularly through an organisation called IAMHIST.

Mm.

SM: Could you tell us a little bit about them, and how all that came about?

Yes. Well, IAMHIST stands for the International Association for Media and History, and it's basically a group of academics, and historians and, film historians, who are fascinated about film history, the history of film, and also looking at history through film, and they use, they would be using film as primary source material. And I think I'm right in saying... I first knew about IAMHIST because I, when I started on *People's Century* there was a, they have a conference every two years and there was one in Amsterdam about the First World War. And so I went to it, and got, listened to a lot of the papers and... And, Jerry Kuehl was there of course, Jerry. And, and then, a couple of years later I was amazed... I joined IAMHIST, which is this organisation that produces this quarterly journal called *The Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, which is a wonderful publication. And then, a couple of years later I was amazed to be asked to stand to be on the Council, which is the, sort of organisation group. And, I think maybe Jerry, you, you suggested me as a possibility, but which I'm, for which I'm extremely grateful, and I've enjoyed it enormously. And so we

would meet, and we'd discuss, we, the members, you know, our projects et cetera et cetera. And after... And we'd have a conference every couple of years. And then after... And we'd have our Council meetings every year, at least once a year, and we'd talk about projects that we were interested in. And then, I was absolutely astonished to be asked to be the president of IAMHIST, which was, you know, I was the first non-academic to be president. And, I loved doing it, but, and I was president for six years, and, really tried hard, and my aim has always been, and Jerry's too, to get not only people who write books about films and television to talk, but also people who make films for, you know, practitioners. So to bring the practitioners together with the academics. And, I think we've done that pretty successfully. We've just had a conference this year actually in Aberystwyth, at the University of Aberystwyth, where I had, I persuaded Will Wyatt who, former managing director of the BBC, and Eddie Mirzoeff, my old boss, to come and talk, as well as Laurence Rees, to come and talk about his latest projects et cetera. And so that was great. And, we've, I've also, we took part in and worked on conferences in the United States, in Cincinnati, in Amsterdam, in Leipzig et cetera. So, it's... And the University of Leeds and the University of Leicester. So that has been terrific.

SM: What period were you president for?

I was president until, I think it was four years ago I stopped, so, I was president for six years before that.

SM: [inaudible].

Yes it... And it was... I mean it's not something I was paid for, but I just loved it, and I cared enormously for it. And one of my, the highlights of my, of, which I felt rather proud of, although it had sort of mixed reactions, was, I org... I helped to organise, or, it was my idea and Jerry and I helped to put it together, and organise a conference at the, a one-day conference at the Imperial War Museum called 'It May Be History But Is It True?' Which, you know, people said, what the hell does that mean? But it attracted both academics and practitioners. Because, I was amazed at what is counted

as history on television now, you know, with reconstruction, dramatization and, et cetera et cetera, not to mention colourisation. And so we had people talking from all over the place, and, tried to get practitioners.....

[break in recording]

G: [inaudible]. OK, we're running up now. It's 43:35, and, [inaudible].

[0:40:54]
So, my aim had been to get the practitioners and the academics to realise that maybe they both had a point. In fact, there was quite a scene towards the end when it was obvious that they were never going to agree on anything, but I think everyone enjoyed it, and it was a huge, there was a huge following and a lot of, a big audience for it. And, I think, yeah, I got, oh Denys Blakeway spoke, and, Dan Snow, as yet, who had just done his first series with his father, who, you know, is now a big, much bigger name than he was there. Also attacked by some of the academics for what they, you know, what they'd done, but I mean that's to be expected because that's what academics do.
[0:41:43]
But I mean, I've got to say, just to finish, that I always thought television was a bitchy place [laughs] until I had a lot of dealings with academia, then I realised how jealously they guard their own little patch as well, just as we always have done in television, but, anyway, both worlds have been a great pleasure to me. So.

[0:42:01]
SM: Mm. And did you... One last question. Did you leave IAMHIST in a strong position to carry on into the future?

Oh well I hope so. I mean, it's now... I'm still on the Council, because I, being an ex-president I'm still allowed to be on, I'll always be on the Council. And, it's, the president after me is Nick Cull who's professor of diplomacy at the University of Southern California, at the Annenberg Institute. Public diplomacy. So, you know,

I'm hoping one of these days we might even have the conference in Los Angeles, that's my aim for the next one. I don't think it'll be the next one but maybe the next one after that will be. And that'll be, I'll still be going to those.

SM: Great. Thank you. Jerry, any more to say about IAMHIST?

JK: No.

SM: Christine summed it up well?

JK: Yes I should say you've done a[??], done a good job.

[0:42:55]
SM: Well[??], I suppose we should say very quickly, you were also a pretty significant member of FOCAL, the Federation of Commercial Audiovisual Libraries and Archives International.

Oh yes, yes, I was thrilled, because I received the Lifetime Achievement Award, which, which Jerry had received a few years earlier [laughs], he said it was like listening to his own obituary, which, I suppose I felt a bit like that as well, but it was a terrific, it's a wonderful thing to, to feel that you've...

SM: [inaudible].

Yeah, it's great.

SM: Great to have seen your, your work and your contribution so recognised publicly and...

Well...

SM: ...such[??] dedication. It's great.

Oh good. Thank you very much.

SM: Thank you.

G: OK, well done, thank you.

[End of Track 2]

[End of Interview]