**INTERVIEW WITH JULIE HARRIS (COSTUME DESIGNER)**



CITATION: Women's Work in British Film and Television, Julie Harris, http://bufvc.ac.uk/bectu/oral-histories/bectu-oh [date accessed]

**BIOGRAPHY:** In a career spanning four decades, costume designer Julie Harris (b. 1921) has worked on over 80 films and television series. After studying at Chelsea Art School, Harris took a position as a design assistant at Gainsborough Studios, where she learned the craft of costume design. After working as a contract designer for Rank in the 1950s, Harris went on to have a successful freelance career, designing costumes for such films as *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), *Casino Royale* (1967) and *Live and Let Die* (1973). She won an Academy Award for her work on *Darling* (1965) and a BAFTA for her work on *The Wrong Box* (1966).

**SUMMARY:** This interview was conducted in 2000, when Julie Harris was 79 years old. Harris discusses the span of her career, beginning with aspirations of becoming a fashion artist that led her to study at Chelsea Art School. She describes her experiences during the Blitz and as a corporal in the Auxiliary Territorial Service during the Second World War. Harris recalls working as a design assistant to Elizabeth Haffenden at Gainsborough Studios, describing the eventual demise of Gainsborough and her transition to Rank's Pinewood Studios. She then discusses her work on *Casino Royale* (1967), *The Wrong Box* (1966) and other Bryan Forbes films, as well as with notable stars like Michael Caine and David Niven. The final part of the interview features a discussion on the effects of censorship – in particular, the Hollywood Production Code – on designing film costumes. Although relatively short in length, this interview is an enlightening glimpse into the history of British film costume design.



*Interviewer: Roy Lansford*

*Recorded on the 31st August 2000.*

**RL**: Right then Julie, if we could start from the very beginning, from when you were born.

**JH**: I was born in 1921, which is three years after the First World War. Totally different world, so in no way can one relate now one's kind of upbringing to what happens today. I went to Kindergarten; I mean, you don't even hear the word Kindergarten. I had a nanny. Then I went to boarding school when I was quite young, because I was an only child and probably very spoiled (so it was a good thing I went to boarding school). Then I stayed there until I was about sixteen – no, fourteen, and then I went to another day school, by which time I was starting to decide what I wanted to do. I'd always been in love with Clark Gable and other film stars, and I thought I wanted to be an actress and wanted to go on the stage. I don't think so much that I was going to be a film star; I was going to be an *actress on the stage.* Anyway, my father thought that that wasn't a proper thing to do, and I must do something to earn a proper living.

So I decided then that I would be a fashion artist. Now today, nobody in their right mind would be a fashion artist, but that's what I thought I would do. You see, back in those pre-war years (and I'm talking of 1936, 1937) some girls went to university but not very many, and you either went to finishing school or you did a domestic science course or you did a secretarial, or you got some other kind of job. First of all, I did go to art school – I went to Chelsea Art School.[1] *(Laughing)* I don't think I worked very hard, I wasn't a great artist, and the fashion course was just taken by Graham Sutherland's wife, Kathleen, who I'm not sure knew a great deal about fashion, but it was all there was in the evenings.[2] Then I won a competition in a Sunday paper and I got a scholarship to go to a dress designing/making school. I never learned to dress-make, and to this day, I'm not very good at sewing on buttons. I found it quite useful not to able to sew in the wardrobe (department) because you were never asked to do anything. So, very firmly, no, I can't sew! People wondered how you could know about clothes if you couldn't make them, but I've had many, many years in clothes, and you begin to learn. I went to work eventually for someone called a court dressmaker, and that was in the days when debutantes went to court to be presented, and they had three feathers in their hair and a long train and long white gloves, and rather lovely evening dresses. So that was the beginning of my real fashion life.

One day into this shop where I worked, came Greta Gynt, who was a great film star of the 1930s and into the 1940s.[3] I was absolutely stunned by this lady who had false eyelashes, which I'd never seen before. She was very beautiful and wearing lots of silver fox fur. She was having some clothes made for a film, and it was maybe then that I started thinking, perhaps I would like to design clothes for films. I didn't know anything about it, but I suppose we all think we can do it without any bother! So I then started thinking; this is what I'd like to do. I did lots of sketches and sent them off to people like David Lean and Alexander Korda,[4] and they all came back with, "thank you very much, very nice, but no."

Then the war came, and I left that job because the shop closed. I used to go out dancing, as other young people did, when the chaps were on leave, and I went on a fateful night to the Café De Paris when that was bombed. There were a lot of casualties – I think about 60 people were killed[5] – including Ken 'Snake Hips' Johnson, who was the band leader, and

[1] The Chelsea College of Art and Design, formerly the Chelsea School of Art, is a world-leading art and design institution in London. In the 1930s its art course included design, weaving, embroidery and electrodeposition.
[2] Graham Sutherland (1903-1980), a notable English abstract artist, was employed as a teacher at Chelsea School of Art. His wife, Kathleen Sutherland (née Barry), was also an artist.
[3] Greta Gynt (1916-2000), born Margrethe Voxholt, was a Norwegian singer, dancer and actress.
[4] David Lean (1908-1991) was an English film director best known for such films as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Alexander Korda (1893-1956) was a Hungarian-born film producer and director who in the 1930s became a major figure in the British film industry, founding London Films in 1932.
[5] Café de Paris is a London nightclub that opened in 1924. In the 20s and 30s it featured such artists as Marlene Dietrich and counted the Prince of Wales and Cole Porter among its regular patrons. On March 8, 1941, the nightclub was bombed, killing 34 people. It reopened in 1948.

quite a few of his band.[6] It was the most horrendous experience, but these things rather fade in one's memory.

**RL:** Were you injured at all in that?

**JH:** I got an injury in my arm, which was double-luck – lucky I wasn't killed, but lucky I got this injury, which is my left arm, because I draw in my left hand, and it didn't do it any damage beyond it being a bit of a mess.

After that was over, my call-up into the ATS was deferred for a while, and then I was called up at the end of 1942.[7] I went up to Harrogate to learn how to become a lady soldier (*laughing*), which I was never very good at. I don't think I did anything very brilliant, but I ended up being Corporal Harris. Just at the end of the war when I was in London, I used to go to the overseas club dancing on Thursday nights with my friends. You stood around and you got picked up by whoever there was around to be picked up. You wouldn't think of doing it today, let alone walk home alone in the blackouts with a total stranger, but my friend met a Polish gentleman that worked in the Polish film industry who knew Kleeman at Gainsborough Studios, who was the studio manager.[8] So cutting a long story short, even before I got demobbed, I got an introduction to Gainsborough Studios, and I trolled along in my uniform, and was taken on the set of *The Wicked Lady*, which was being filmed with Leslie Arliss doing the directing, so then it really got into my blood.[9] I mean, the smell of the whole thing, and standing in the lift with James Mason[10] – I thought, this was the place to work. Anyway, nothing happened of that, I got my demob, I came out, and I firstly worked in the Canadian officers' club for a brief while.

Then I went to Nathan's, the costumers;[11] now, that was beginning to be really useful stuff to learn. Whilst I was there, I heard from Gainsborough, and would I go for another interview? They wanted an assistant for Elizabeth Haffenden, who was the queen of dress designers then; she did all the Gainsborough – *The Wicked Lady*, *The Man in Grey* – all those costume films.[12] She was the (*indistinct*) of dress designers, although in those days, there weren't very many dress designers. It was only after the war when I was there, and she had

[6] Ken 'Snakehips' Johnson (1914-1941) was a jazz band leader from British Guiana. Johnson was leading 'The West Indian Orchestra' on the night of the Café de Paris bombing. He and most of his band were killed.
[7] The Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), founded in 1939, was the women's branch of the British Army during the Second World War. It functioned as a voluntary service until the National Service Act was passed in 1941, calling up all unmarried women between the ages of 20 and 30.
[8] Gainsborough Pictures was a British film studio founded in 1924 and associated with Gaumont-British Picture Corporation from 1927. Gainsborough was best known for producing popular melodramas in the 1940s.
[9] *The Wicked Lady* is a 1945 film starring Margaret Lockwood. Leslie Arliss (1901-1987) directed several films for Gainsborough Pictures, including *The Man in Grey* (1943) and *Love Story* (1944).
[10] James Mason (1909-1984) starred in *The Wicked Lady* as Capt. Jerry Jackson.
[11] Nathan's costume house was a dressmaking firm established in 1790. In the twentieth century, Nathan's hired and made costumes for thousands of plays, films and television productions.
[12] Elizabeth Haffenden (1906-1976) was an Oscar-winning costume designer who, after working for Gainsborough, went on to design costumes for such films as *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *The Fiddler on the Roof* (1971).

an assistant called Doris Lee who subsequently married John Box, and there was Joan Ellacott and Phyllis Dalton, and we all eventually made it.[13] But we were initially Haffenden's assistants, so all our sketches were exactly the same way that Liz used to do hers, on tracing paper and varnish. But eventually, particularly when Gainsborough stopped making pictures and it became Sydney Box,[14] there was Pinewood and we all went to Pinewood,[15] and Liz went her way and did films like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, which was probably one of her last films. Joan Ellacott eventually went to the BBC and Phyllis Dalton, who has two Oscars, did *Doctor Zhivago* and most recently, *Henry V*. So we all went away and did our own thing.

**RL**: Fantastic. What was Gainsborough like; because it was a magical name to most people that went to the cinema, but what was it like to actually be part of it?

**JH:** It was lovely. I suppose by today's standards of making films, it was Toyland, but it was happy. There wasn't the pressure, there wasn't the money. I mean, nobody was paid these fantastic salaries; particularly, even the stars were not. I earned seven pounds ten shillings as an assistant, and got up to £20-25 at the beginning of the 1950s. There wasn't the money to spend on costumes. If you had £1000 in the budget, that was a lot of money then.

**RL:** Things have moved on quite a lot now.

**JH:** Things have moved on, I can't believe what it costs now. But I'm sure it's just that there's never enough. I mean, there was never enough for us; we were always whinging about it, and I'm sure designers today say they don't have enough even if they have a couple of million.

**RL:** The designers of today owe it to yourself and people that were working at that time in design; they owe it to you, really, that they have what they have today, because you had to struggle to get that far.

**JH:** I suppose – there weren't a lot of designers about, but gradually, there became a whole nest of us; there was Maggie Furse and there was Bumble Dawson, and Joan and Phyllis, the

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[13] Doris Lee (1926-1992) went on to design the costumes for *A Christmas Carol* (*Scrooge*) (1951). Her husband, John Box (1920-2005), was a production designer and art director. Joan Ellacott (b. 1920) designed costumes for several television series and mini-series, such as *Doctor Who* (1963-89) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1980). Oscar-winner Phyllis Dalton (b. 1925) had a prolific career, designing costumes for such films as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *The Princess Bride* (1987). She was awarded the M.B.E. (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in 2002 for her services to the film industry.

[14] Sydney Box (1907-1983) ran Gainsborough Pictures from 1946 to the studio's closure. He was appointed by J. Arthur Rank (1888-1972), who had acquired the company in 1936. Although Rank initially had a hands-off policy with the company, he began intervening more directly, leading to disillusionment among Gainsborough specialists, who one by one resigned. Box was appointed to continue the studio's popular melodrama trajectory, but he was more interested in realism and shifted the studio's focus. This, along with Box's ineffectual leadership, led to a steady decline in Gainsborough's box-office success, and Rank finally closed the studio in 1950.

[15] Pinewood Studios is a major British film studio founded by J. Arthur Rank in 1935. The prolific studio is best known for the *Carry On*, *Superman* and *James Bond* film series. Julie Harris was working with Pinewood consistently by 1950, designing costumes for such films as *Trio* (1950) and *Hotel Sahara* (1951).

ones I mentioned, and Tony Mendleson.[16] But in a way, there probably were only us, because there weren't that many films made, so we kind of rotated them all between us. Then in the 60s, that's when it began to broaden out and other designers came in. The approach to costume grew rather as the films got bigger, and there were co-American productions as well. Of course, when I first started, clothes were still rationed, so we had coupons to think of. Every costume you did, you had to indent the number of coupons, so you always put in a few extra things; extra petticoats, extra pairs of stockings – stockings, not tights! (*laughs*) – so that you would have some coupons to spare.[17] But one would be walking with about 2000 in your pocket, and on the black market they would have fetched quite a lot of money. They were sort of worried. You had to make a return to the board of trade for every coupon you used, and say why you used it and for what, and return the ones that you hadn't used. So all that sort of thing, I mean, it all takes so long doing budgets and getting the film off the ground now, that how one would have had time for that fiddly-dee-dee, I don't know.

**RL:** Did you work for the Rank Organisation [18]too? He did a lot of costume-films, or was responsible for distributing costume films. Was he very involved in design, did he understand it?

**JH:** After the Ostrers, it then became Sydney Box, and then when I went to Pinewood, it was Rank.[19] But I never saw Rank himself; he wasn't personally involved. There were people like Earl St. John, who was an executive producer, who did have a certain amount of flair, I think.[20] But otherwise, you dealt really with the producer and the director of whichever film you were working on, and it varied as to who had the most say. Sometimes the producer

[16] Oscar-winner Margaret Furse (1911-1974) designed costumes for such films as *Becket* (1964), *A Shot in the Dark* (1964) and *The Lion in Winter* (1968). Beatrice 'Bumble' Dawson (1908-1976) was the Oscar- and BAFTA-nominated costume designer for films such as *The Pickwick Papers* (1952) and *A Doll's House* (1973). Oscar-nominee Anthony Mendleson (1915-1996) was the chief costume designer and wardrobe supervisor for Ealing Studios from 1947 to the studio's closure in 1959, where he worked on popular films like *The Ladykillers* (1955).

[17] During and after the Second World War, food and several other products were rationed in Britain due to extreme shortages. This was controlled by a system of coupons contained in a ration book. Clothing was rationed from 1941 to 1949.

[18] The Rank Organisation was a British entertainment conglomerate founded by J. Arthur Rank in 1937. The largest and most vertically-integrated film company in Britain in the 1940s, Rank owned, among several other companies, the cinema chain Odeon Cinemas, the film studios Pinewood Studios, Ealing Studios and Lime Grove Studios, and the distribution company General Film Distributors, including UK distribution rights to Universal Pictures.

[19] See footnote 14. Before Sydney Box was appointed head of Gainsborough Pictures, it was headed by Maurice Ostrer, who had founded, with his brothers Isidore and Mark, the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation with which Gainsborough was associated. After J. Arthur Rank acquired an interest in the company in 1936, Ostrer continued to head production at Gainsborough, but the Rank Organisation became increasingly dissatisfied with both the small number of films produced and Oster's stylised and lurid production sense. Ostrer eventually resigned in 1946 and was replaced with Sydney Box. The Rank Organisation also controlled Pinewood Studios from the 1940s to the 1960s.

[20] Earl St. John (1892-1968) was an American film producer who headed production for The Rank Organisation at Pinewood Studios from 1950 to 1964.

wanted to know everything, and sometimes he just left it to the director. The one who *least* got their own way was the costume designer, because you had to please so many different people.

**RL:** So when you were actually started to make it, you were nominated a few times before you actually won the Oscar. So you were accepted for your ability long before you got the Oscar?

**JH:** Yes, in a way, but of course, the Oscar did make a difference. Only for the next year or so (*laughs*); it doesn't go on. I'm just so pleased now to say now that I had it. I mean, to have done 45 years in the industry with nothing to show for it; I would sort of mind, I think! But no, you just went from film to film, there wasn't too much pick and choose. I had a contract with the Rank Organisation in the fifties to do two films a year, and to look after their contract artist for the Venice Film Festival, the Cannes Film Festival, personal appearances. I mean, the likes of Diana Dors.[21] Diana Dors was always being photographed wherever she went; she was the sort-of 'Spice Girl' of the day I suppose. There was one dress for instance, which was dyed blue to match her car. It had fox fur dyed blue to match the car. And in a funny way, it sounds terribly extravagant – the cost was a lot – but things were not exorbitant then. They were expensive, but they weren't over the top. Today, if you attempted to do such a thing, it would cost thousands. But it was fun doing those things because it had nothing to do with the script or action or what people had to do. You could just put them in, you hoped, very glamorous clothes.

**RL:** Yes, it reminds me of a story I heard about you, you're probably going to tell me more; it was *Casino Royale*, where you did costumes, and apparently the colour had to change?

**JH:** Oh, there was a dress of Ursula Andress'.[22] Because when we first started that film – I mean, there were five directors in the end. But with the first one, there were going to be all sorts of crazy things. It wasn't a serious Bond film by any means, and there was a moment when Peter Sellers was photographing Ursula Andress. No, *she* was photographing *him*, and he kept changing his costume from being Hitler to Napoleon to Toulouse Lautrec, which was great fun because all the clothes that were actually used in that film, same way of doing it, and it was amazing how, with a full front camera angle, it looked as if this man had very short legs. But Ursula had on a chiffon gown with feathers, and it was my idea, because it went on a long time, that it would start pale pink and end up deep pink. I mean, talking about it now I think, "Goodness, what a funny idea," but it seemed at the time to be fun. So there were four of these negligées made with these pink feathers, but of course when it was

[21] Diana Dors (1931-1984), born Diana Mary Fluck, was an English actress and sex symbol known as 'the English Marilyn Monroe'.

[22] Ursula Andress (b. 1936) is a Swiss-American actress and sex symbol of the 1960s, best known for her role as Bond girl Honey Ryder in *Dr. No* (1962). In the Bond-parody *Casino Royale* (1967), Andress starred as Vesper Lynd.

cut, it wasn't cut in sequence so you really lost the whole point, and probably people might well have thought, "Oh what a funny print," so it was a shame.

**RL:** I had heard that story, but it's really quite amazing that all the things that happen in films, the public never really understand it because they never see behind the scenes. But the most difficult thing, I think, for the audience to understand, is what the relationship is between the designer and the artist they design for. Does the artist have any input at all?

**JH:** Oh, the artist has a lot of say. "Oh, I can't wear this," or "I never wear blue," or whatever. But it varied – there were ones like Deborah Kerr, who I worked with several times, who was a great pleasure to work with and I knew the kind of clothes she liked, and she liked what I gave her.[23] So, it was a pleasure from start to finish because she was a lovely person. The other one, having talked of Ursula Andress, was great fun, and there were lots of laughs at fittings. If you have a fitting room where everyone is rather solemn and silent, it's hard work. But if you work with someone a second or third time, of course it helped because you knew what they liked. Period films, in that sense, were easier because they couldn't say too much about, "oh, I want a skirt here" or "can I have a short sleeve," or something; I mean, within reason, it had to be what was the period. So that was different. There was always a fuss about the corsets – "oh, they're too tight, I can't stand that" – but in the end, they kind of got used to it! (*Laughs*)

**RL:** You had another award. I suppose we would call it a BAFTA award today, but it was before BAFTAs.

**JH:** Yes, it was for *The Wrong Box*. In those days, the award for costume, all their awards were very much for British films. Things made here, so you didn't have the whole wide open market to contend with. So I got it for *The Wrong Box*, which was the first film that Dudley Moore and Peter [Cook] did.[24] It was great fun; it was an amusing period film, shot in Bath – oh, Michael Caine was in it! It was an early Michael Caine. So it was very nice to have that award.

**RL:** Were there many designs for that that you had to do?

**JH:** Not a huge amount. There was a lot of background dressing, but Pete and Dudley had – not a lot of changes, but they had to have period clothes, which of course, they had never worn before. And then Nanette Newman, who looked very good in her clothes, and Michael

[23] Julie Harris worked with Scottish actress Deborah Kerr (1921-2007) in such films as *The Naked Edge* (1961) and *Casino Royale* (1967).

[24] *The Wrong Box* (1966) is a comedy film starring John Mills, Ralph Richardson, Nanette Newman and Michael Caine. Peter Cook (1937-1995) and Dudley Moore (1935-2002) were a comedic duo who first worked together on Moore's television series *Not Only…But Also* (1965). *The Wrong Box* was the first of several films in which the two appeared together; others include *The Bed-Sitting Room* (1969) and the Conan Doyle spoof *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1978).

Caine, and there was Ralph Richardson.[25] I think when you see it now, it holds up. It's quite an amusing film.

**RL:** What was the director of that film?

**JH:** Bryan Forbes.

**RL:** Ah yes, Bryan Forbes. Oh, that's why it was Nanette.[26]

**JH:** Yes.

**RL:** But she was actually quite a statuesque lady.

**JH:** Yes, she was very beautiful.

**RL:** It must help a lot when they are like that, because they have the presence that transfers itself to your (*indistinct*). Did you ever have problems with anyone that you couldn't get right, either that they looked too elegant when they weren't supposed to or vice versa?

**JH:** Yes. Not a smart one but one who always rose above what you put her in was Dame Edith Evans. She did a film called *Whisperers*,[27] where she was supposed to be a poor old age pensioner, elderly, a bit dotty, and we tried on many occasions to get her to look sufficiently downmarket. But she had this wonderful presence and flair and style in her grand way, not chic or anything, but a style, and she rose above it. I bought a dreadful fur coat for her for a pound in Portobello Market, but she wore it and she looked like Mrs Exeter;[28] very grand, so it wasn't any good at all. It was the most mothy old thing, but she just gave it something. Some people can do that: whatever you put them in, they look good. Others, and men included, it's hard to – you know, Michael Caine. I once tried to make him look smart and it was quite difficult! I think he's better at it now! (*Laughs*)

**RL:** Yes, we don't have the Errol Flynns today that seem to look good whatever.

**JH:** Well, David Niven was marvellous; he always looked good. He was very particular about his clothes. He was delightful to work with. But it was the iron fist in the velvet glove, because what David wanted, he got. I don't mean as far as clothes went, because it happened to be they were all modern films – oh, except Casino Royale, of course. He had

[25] Sir Ralph Richardson (1902-1983) was an English stage actor known for, alongside Sir Laurence Olivier, re-establishing the Old Vic theatre in London, which had been damaged in the Blitz. He also appeared in several films, such as *Long Day's Journey Into the Night* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965).

[26] Bryan Forbes (b. 1926) is an English film director, actor and writer. He has been married to English actress Nanette Newman (b. 1934) since 1955.

[27] Dame Edith Evans (1888-1976) was an English stage and film actress best known for portraying condescending aristocratic characters like Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (on both stage and film in 1952). However, in Bryan Forbes' *The Whisperers* (1967), Evans plays a reclusive and impoverished elderly woman.

[28] Mrs Exeter was a fictional character invented by *Vogue* magazine in 1949 to bring older women into the forefront of fashion. Recurring in *Vogue* throughout the 1950s, Mrs Exeter was originally depicted in sketches but was later portrayed by model Margot Smyly (1911-2005).

some rather semi-period clothes in that. But it was all fun, and it was something to laugh at, and I so enjoyed it.[29]

**RL:** There are many stories about him with fittings, taking forever to get fitted?

**JH:** Yes, because he goes on telling stories, and he was highly entertaining.

**RL:** He did concern himself with trying to look right, and so he would have had an affinity with you anyway.

**JH:** You had to do fittings with David all over the place. We had to go to Paris, and we fitted in the Hilton Hotel at Paris airport because he was going from A to B. So often, they were so busy, and had barely finished the picture before, when you were wanting to costume them for the next one. Petula Clark, for instance, couldn't come to the country for a certain number of days, so on *Goodbye, Mr Chips*, we were going to France or Geneva to do her fittings.[30] It may sound fun, but it isn't; there's a lot of trailing about with all the bits of clothing and all the bits of fabric, and the extra things you want to try all have to go as well.

**RL:** When you're designing for a film, does everyone get designed for?

**JH:** Everybody in a film, whatever they wear, whether it's a monkey on an organ grinder, the costume designer is responsible in some way. It may be the supervisor that takes over to a certain amount, but initially, the costume designer has to work it all out and organise what is going to be hired, what's going to be bought, what you're making. Sometimes doing the sketches is the least of it. It may be the most agreeable part, but there's so much else, and so much sheer physical slog, going from A to B in the shops, and the costumers, and the stock, and raking through the stock, and seeing things you've seen time and again – you know, "Oh, I can't face that jacket again!" But you rely on the costumers to a great extent.

**RL:** I was wondering with all the students in *Mr Chips*, they would require costuming?

**JH:** Oh, all the boys; they had to be bought, had to be ordered. It was quite difficult because the boys ranged from twelve to about eighteen, and when you were ordering the sizes – you know, how [tall] is a fourteen year old boy? They vary, one up, one down. I had a very good wardrobe supervisor called Betty Adamson, but getting those boys' clothing, with the ties, and the blazers and the straw hats, which they used to bang about and play football with in the lunch break. You had to have an inexhaustible supply of that sort of thing. That was quite separate from designing. You wanted them to look right, and it was period again; it was the twenties and thirties and then into the forties. The whole thing was very much getting the numbers right of the stock, because you can fall into just as much trouble because you haven't got enough, and it doesn't fit them all, as if you've mis-designed

[29] Aside from *Casino Royale*, Harris also worked with English actor David Niven (1910-1983) on *Prudence and the Pill* (1968) and *Candleshoe* (1977).

[30] *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1969) is a musical film starring Peter O'Toole as a withdrawn English schoolteacher who falls in love with a music hall soubrette, played by English singer, composer and actress Petula Clark (b. 1932). At the time of the film's production Clark was living in France, where she had a successful recording and composing career, and frequently toured Europe as a multi-lingual performer.

something. There are all sorts of pitfalls for a designer that you wouldn't actually think actually happened.

**RL:** You actually worked again with Bryan Forbes on *The Slipper and the Rose*?

**JH:** Yes, I did *The Wrong Box* and *Deadfall*,[31] and this one – I can't think what it was called – *The Whisperers* with Dame Edith. And then *The Slipper and the Rose*, which was one of my favourite ones because it was a musical, and it was period, and there was the lovely Richard Chamberlain, who was just divine, and lots of good people like Michael Hordern.[32] My favourite moment in that, oddly enough, is the mice. We had some of the Royal Ballet being the mice, and doing mice costumes was quite difficult, but it worked. I just loved that little moment in the film.

**RL:** Of course, the Oscar came for *Darling*[33] didn't it?

**JH:** The Oscar was *Darling*. Dirk Bogarde and Laurence Harvey; it was very much of its time, the sixties. Still, I think it holds up quite well, but clothes were very much on the change from what we'd all been used to. There was Mary Quant, Courreges in France, and there were the little white boots and the short skirts. It was Julie Christie herself who was always saying, "Make it shorter, make it shorter," and because her legs were a bit bandy, I thought, "Oh dear, oh dear!" But she was right. It was nice to do, because while it wasn't exactly Cinderella, she went from an ordinary model girl to an Italian princess. So she was able to have the clothes that I felt I understood and loved more than the early ones, which were King's Road in the Swinging Sixties.

**RL:** I always thought the King's Road models were like the principal boys in Pantomime. Short skirts and big boots! I thought, I can't see this as a new design; it's just copied. How do you feel about that?

**JH:** I don't understand today's clothing at all. I wouldn't want to do a modern film today. I imagine that they must buy. I think of my era of doing modern films, which I rather stopped doing in the seventies, but we *designed* things. Most of the leading ladies' clothes were designed. But you wouldn't do it today; it just wouldn't be worth it. Clothes don't look designed. Look at something like *Notting Hill* and Julia Roberts' clothes. Very peculiar! I suppose it's what people wear today, so it wouldn't have done for me to do a film like that. I think I belong to my own period. I was brought up in the thirties, when there was an elegance in dress, and my mother was very elegant. Today, the young designers, they've never seen elegance, it's a word that isn't used very much and there certainly isn't a lot of it about, I must say.

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[31] *Deadfall* (1968) is a heist film starring Michael Caine and directed by Bryan Forbes.

[32] *The Slipper and the Rose* (1976), also directed by Forbes, is a musical adaptation of the Cinderella story. As well as Richard Chamberlain (b. 1934) and Michael Hordern (1911-1995), the film also stars Gemma Craven (b. 1950) and Dame Edith Evans.

[33] John Schlesinger's Swinging Sixties film *Darling* (1965) stars Julie Christie as a London fashion model. For her work on this film, Harris won the Academy Award for Best Costume Design, Black-and-White; the film also won Oscars for Best Actress in a Leading Role (Christie) and Best Original Screenplay (Frederic Raphael).

**RL:** You did another film which was almost futuristic in its style.

**JH:** Ah, *Rollerball*, yes.[34] Mercifully, I had John Box to work with, because he was a brilliant production designer.[35] It was done in 1974, and it was meant to be thirty years on or something. Well, we are thirty years on and we're not wearing funny clothes at all. They may be wearing things I don't like (*laughs*), but everyone's wearing suits and jeans, much as people were in 1974. So it was fortunate that we didn't go for anything stupid, like space age. John said, "Oh, take a rather Grecian air about the evening clothes and things." It wasn't futuristic. The difficulties in that film were doing the bikers' clothes and the leather. Because of the rake of that stadium that they were skating around, they fell. We first of all had them in nylon legging trousers, and when they fell, the speed was so much that it burned them, burned their legs and their bums. So we had to change them about two days before shooting and get leather trousers, which probably would have been better in the first place; I don't know why it wasn't. But there was a whole lot of padding and American football padding, and helmets and things. Very – not me. But I enjoyed it; it was a good film to work on. And Norman Jewison.

**RL:** I can't remember the actor now – he was very famous but his name's gone out of my head!

**JH:** James Caan?

**RL:** That's right. You did a casting for him – he had a little tunic?

**JH:** Yes, with a slight Spanish flavour about it.

**RL:** That was quite futuristic.

**JH:** Yes, and a couple of things that Maud Adams had were slightly ahead of their time, but they look all right today.

**RL:** When did you decide to stop filming?

**JH:** Well, I think in the eighties I began to do less, not necessarily through choice, I must be honest, but probably because I partly lived in the country and I didn't seek long locations – I didn't want to. So, perhaps people think, "Oh she's retired," because you're not there all the time. I did about four things in the eighties, and the last thing I did, which was in 1990, was a television series with Nigel Havers called *A Perfect Hero*.[36] It was a six-parter, which I hadn't done before. I was moving house at the same time, so it was a hectic time. But there just was never anything after that. It just suddenly stopped. I now paint. I was doing painting

[34] *Rollerball* (1975) is a dystopian film set in 2018, wherein the ultraviolent sport of Rollerball reflects global corporate control. It stars James Caan (b. 1940) and was directed by Norman Jewison (b. 1926).
[35] Oscar-winning production designer John Box (1920-2005) is best known for his work on such films as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *Oliver!* (1968).
[36] *A Perfect Hero* (1991) is a television mini-series starring Nigel Havers (b. 1949) as a flying officer in the Second World War who is badly burned after his plane is shot down.

then anyway, but I've been able to concentrate on painting, which I thoroughly enjoy. For a while, I did mind, to be honest. I thought, "I can do this and I can do that." But it sort of didn't happen. I don't know; we came out of fashion, I suppose.

**RL:** Yes, possibly because the elegance doesn't seem to be right today.

**JH:** Well, there's probably a certain amount of the younger people that are making the films that thought, "We don't want people that have been in all those years. We don't want to be told what to do." (*Laughs*) I think maybe not wanting those that have been around a long time: "We want a fresh approach."

**RL:** I should think the hours, too.

**JH:** I couldn't do it now. The hours are very long; they always were. It was a day without end.

**RL:** It's an even longer day now, isn't it?

**JH:** Well, I think if you're actually working on a film on the unit, yes, and my costume friends who work now say that their contracts are for a six day week and unlimited hours.

**RL:** They're so wrapped up with health and safety today in films. Was there ever any problem there, with flammable materials and things like that?

**JH:** No. More of the problems we had, going way back to my days at Gainsborough and into the fifties a bit, were sound: taffeta and rustle. There was a huge performance of taffeta dresses which had to have flannelly petticoats and things to keep them quiet. The soundman would be sitting there with his headphones making a huge fuss about a little bit of rustle of something. But fortunately, when technology got better, that went away. So there was that problem, and there were censorship problems. You couldn't have cleavage and you couldn't have navels.

**RL:** When did that change?

**JH:** I think in the late fifties. It was very much in the mid-fifties; when I did something called *Value for Money* with Diana Dors,[37] we had to do two versions: an American version, which we couldn't – I can't remember which one it was – one of them couldn't show the navel. Perhaps it was the Americans who didn't want to see the navel (*laughs*) and no cleavage, and for the English version it was all right. But there were two versions – it was extraordinary![38] And going even further back, the whole thing of people being in bed: one had to have their feet on the ground.

[37] *Value for Money* is a 1955 comedy film directed by Ken Annakin. It stars Diana Dors as a London nightclub performer who takes a wealthy patron (John Gregson) for all he is worth.

[38] Harris is correct in assuming that the American version could not show the navel or cleavage. Between 1930 and 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (formerly the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors

**RL:** *The Wicked Lady* – I can't remember which year it was, but that was a cleavage film, wasn't it?[39]

**JH:** Well, then they had to touch up every single little frame of film to get rid of those bouncing boobs of Margaret Lockwood's. (*Laughs*)

**RL:** I suppose Jane Russell in *The Outlaw* probably changed all that, didn't it?[40]

**JH:** It changed it, but I remember this brooding figure in Piccadilly with this braless dress, and that film wasn't shown for two years after it was made, was it? It was tucked away somewhere, and by the time it came out, I think it was all right. Was it *The Outlaw*? But it was certainly not shown for a couple of years after it was made. I don't know the reasons, whether it was censorship or what. But it made a difference.[41]

**RL:** Would you do it all again?

**JH:** Yes, I'm sure I would, but in life you often wonder. There are moments when, for reasons you don't know, you go along a certain path, and you can't draw backwards. If I go right back to the beginning of what I was saying, when I was in the ATS and I met this Polish fellow who got me the right introduction. If I hadn't met him, or if I had gone abroad in the services, any of those things, I would never have gone into films. I can't say whether my life would've been better or not. But it was a good life, and I've mostly hugely enjoyed it.

**RL:** We've enjoyed having you. Thank you very much Julie Harris.

*Transcribed by Kat and Caitlin Shaw, De Montfort University, 2013*

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of America) employed a Production Code that set forth moral censorship guidelines. Films that violated the guidelines of the Production Code, which included strict guidelines on nudity, could not be released in American cinemas. In 1968, the Production Code was deemed outdated and was replaced with what eventually became the current rating system. By contrast, Britain has never used a distinct code of practice, but has instead employed the British Board of Film Classification's rating system since 1912.

[39] *The Wicked Lady* (1945) was the first British film to be cut for violating the Hollywood Production Code due to Margaret Lockwood's revealing cleavage.

[40] Howard Hughes' western film *The Outlaw* (1943), starring Jane Russell, marked a turning point in perspectives on Hollywood film censorship. Although the film was completed in 1941, it was met with scrutiny from the Hays Office, responsible for enforcing the Production Code, for heavily emphasising Russell's breasts. When the 37 cuts Hughes made were still insufficient to satisfy the Hays Office's demands, he shelved the film. Hughes eventually generated enough interest in *The Outlaw* to have it released in February 1943, but it was withdrawn a week later when the Hays Office ruled that it had violated too many decency codes. The film was again released in 1946, and although the Hays Office revoked its Seal of Approval and several cinemas refused to screen it, it was a major box-office success.

[41] It is likely that Harris is referring to seeing a poster for *The Outlaw*, which featured Jane Russell braless in a peasant's dress.