

## The Connected Histories of the BBC

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START AUDIO

[0:00:18]

Trevor Hill: A history of North Regional broadcasting, interview number 48, Arthur Smith. When the BBC's Alexander Palace television transmitter flickered back to life in 1946, after the end of the war, only those in the London area had receivers. Noteworthy sport and news events in the North were occasionally filmed and seen in and around the capital.

Much of that film was shot for London by [Eric Barrow 0:00:48] and his national film agency based in Deansgate, Manchester. Eric himself had been one of the ace wartime newsreel cameramen, and much of the action footage shot by him is now treasured archive material.

The BBC has to thank Eric for providing at least four of his former staff: lighting cameraman, the celebrated Gerry Pullen; another cameraman, Bill Baglin, who eventually, I think, had the distinction of working in that capacity for the Royal Family; Arthur Smith, and John Buttery.

One of Eric's engineers was Steve Stephens, who left to become a stringer, as they were called, a freelance cameraman. On one occasion, Steve turned up to see those of us in my department on the top floor of Old Broadcasting House, Piccadilly, Manchester, since 'Children's Hour' at that

time had also become Children's Television. With him that day was the young man named Arthur Smith.

0:01:51

My first question to you, Arthur, is what brought you into the business of filming?

Arthur Smith:

I always thought I was going to work in the film business. I'd never considered any other career. At the age of 11, I sold my electric train set and bought a movie camera. I was so in love with movies. I used to go fairly regularly, even at that tender age, to see a) the Saturday morning pictures, and anything in the evening that my parents thought suitable. I used to sit there, looking up at this big black-and-white screen and thinking, "I must get involved in this. This is absolutely magic."

I always thought of myself as the cameraman. I had no desire to be a movie star, or to direct the film or do anything else, but I just wanted to take the pictures. In fact, I used to do very strange things for a teenage boy: I used to go and see films and then give them a star rating based on the quality of the photography.

I used to try and imagine how they got the particular effects – particularly the lighting effects. I used to do floor plans of what I thought the setup was on the particular shots. If I could get hold of some production photographs from the film, then I would look at them very carefully and plot where the lights were, what height they were, what intensity. I just got totally wrapped up in it.

0:03:35

Trevor Hill:

Did you buy 'Picturegoer' magazine in those days?

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: James [Jachet] and his marvellous studio photographs.

Arthur Smith: Yes, all that kind of thing, 'Picturegoer', even 'Film Fun'. I used to read that. When the opportunity arose to get a movie camera, I got one. We started as kids together, making films. In fact, three of the four of us ended up in the film business: Alan Howden, who is now, BBC's chief film buyer; Philip Jenkinson, who used to present a television film programme and runs a company called 'Filmfinders'.

Trevor Hill: And started with us here in Manchester in 'Children's Hour', yes.

Arthur Smith: Yes, as an actor; yes. The other friend, who still regrets not being in the film business, a man called Peter Wright, who still yearns for the bright lights and the movie cameras but is now working as a bank manager and looking forward to his retirement. We made films and we won a couple of awards for our films. This is when we were in our 14s and 15-year-old filmmaking days.

When it came time for me to leave school at 16, I had a slight problem with my headmaster. I went to Stratford Grammar School, and they were very keen to supply cannon fodder to banks and research laboratories. I said I didn't want to do that, I wanted to work as a cameraman. He said, "There are no jobs in the film business, and there's no way you'll ever get a job in

the film business,” so I said, “Well, can I please have the afternoon off to go and have a look?”

I went into Manchester, went to the National Film Agency, and I was fairly well known there because I spent... I think all my pocket money went into National Film Industry’s coffers. I walked in and said, “Can you give me a job, please?” and they said, “Yes,” which totally surprised me. So, I had the great pleasure of going back to school and telling the headmaster that I’d got a job and I could start straightaway, as soon as I’d left school.

Initially, I was there to help out as an assistant cameraman, projectionist, anything that was required, but I had a lucky break within a couple of weeks of starting. We went out on a newsreel story. I think it was for the BBC, for ‘BBC News’ and ‘Newsreel’. The two official cameras who were covering the event got waylaid, and I ended up shooting some footage for this newsreel.

It was well received, so I was immediately promoted to cameraman, to do odd shoots. I was still doing all the other dogsbody jobs, as well, with National Film Agency, but I was on their list as one of the cameramen. We used to do quite a bit of stringer work for the BBC, and Movietone News, and Pathé News. I think that must have been why I was with Steve Stephens on that particular day.

Trevor Hill: Occasion when you came in, yes.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

0:07:31

Trevor Hill: You eventually joined the BBC in, when was it, 1959, as a film editor?

Arthur Smith: Yes, that was a bit of a shock to my system because I'd always been working behind the camera. In fact, I'd shot on a freelance basis a couple of BBC documentaries, Stanley Williamson's 'Pastures in High Places'. I must have shot about a third of that. It was an ongoing documentary, about a year and on a sheep farm, and I'd done other bits and pieces for Denis Mitchell. I shot an opening sequence for 'Morning in the Streets'.

Trevor Hill: The award-winning 'Morning in the Streets'.

Arthur Smith: Yes, but my little bit was only right at the beginning of the film when the clock is chiming and we cut to various images around the deserted city. In fact, I don't have a credit on it.

Trevor Hill: No. You had a credit, though, for 'Pastures in High Places'.

Arthur Smith: Yes, I had two credits on 'Pastures in High Places' because I shot quite a lot of it as a freelance cameraman and then joined the BBC as a film editor and edited the film, as well, so I had a double credit on that.

0:08:46

Trevor Hill: The other distinction about that film, Arthur – I don't know if you remember this – was the actual placing, the choice of placing. It was miraculous. The BBC put it out on Good Friday, the most marvellous time to see a film like that.

Arthur Smith: Yes, and I know it had tremendous audience reaction. I think it was one of the most popular programmes of the year when they do the... Is it 'RI' they used to call it?

Trevor Hill: Yes, that's right.

Arthur Smith: Yes, the reaction index.

Trevor Hill: Reaction indices, yes.

Arthur Smith: Yes. How I came to become a film editor is rather strange. I'd been freelancing around, I had to do my national service, and I came out of the RAF and, quite unusually, I'd managed to get a job as a photographer in the RAF. Usually, the services always seem to stick the most unlikely people into jobs. If you knew anything about anything, you never got that, unless you were-

Trevor Hill: And went somewhere else.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I did a couple more freelance jobs with the BBC, and then I thought, "This BBC North Region Film Unit looks a very good

thing. I must try and get in on this.” At the time, it was run by a man called Roy Harris, who was ex-Shell.

Trevor Hill: Film Unit.

Arthur Smith: Yes, Film Unit but Roy was one of these people who was very good at self-promotion. In fact, if you look at the credits on ‘Morning in the Streets’, his name appears about four times and I think Denis Mitchell appears once. (Laughter) Roy had got himself down as cameraman, sound recordist, and his name was there quite a lot.

I’d met Roy Harris before he joined the BBC, because he’d been involved in one of the other companies I’d been shooting for. He was my intro to the BBC Film Unit. Of course, I knew Gerry Pullen and Bill Baglin, who were already working here. I said to Roy, “Let me know if any vacancies come available in the film unit.”

I got this call saying, “We’re expanding the film editing. We have one editor, which is Don James, and one assistant, Peter Marsh. We want to take on another editor and another assistant.” I thought about it and I thought, “It’s a way in.” Also, I felt I needed to know more about film editing, because this is really where films are made in the cutting room, so I thought, “I must get to know more about it.”

I had done little bits of editing on my own films, but nothing professionally, so I wrote in to the BBC, got an application form and applied for the job as assistant editor. I went along to the board, and sat and told all the people on the board my theories about filmmaking, and film editing, and everything I wanted to do. To my surprise, I was called back into the boardroom and

they said, "We're very impressed with you. Would you consider taking the film editor's job?"

Always being overconfident, I said, "Yes, of course I'll do that," so I had the slightly embarrassing thing of coming into work to work in the film unit as a film editor, and my assistant initially was Peter Marsh, who had applied for the film editing job. I had to rather shamefacedly ask Peter, "How do you switch on the editing machine?" because I had no idea how to do this, but we managed. We [struggled 0:12:57] through and started editing.

0:13:01

Trevor Hill: You were at Dickenson Road at that time, were you?

Arthur Smith: Yes.

0:13:05

Trevor Hill: How long, Arthur, before the film unit moved across to Stockport Road?

Arthur Smith: I think it must have been about two or three years before we moved.

0:13:19

Trevor Hill: It was a very small area, wasn't it, you had at Dickenson Road, as I recall?

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: Very cramped.

Arthur Smith: Dickenson Road always had a great appeal to me because it was the old Manchester Film Studios, and the ghost of Frank Randle still burped its way around the corridors, so it was a nice place to be.

It was very crowded, but you felt involved in the whole of the television output because you had next to you a studio. At that time, programmes were going out live and you could see some amazing sights, like one time there was a live drama being produced by Vivian Daniels.

Trevor Hill: Vivian Daniels.

Arthur Smith: The set started to collapse partway through this live transmission, and the ladies from the canteen ran into the studio and helped hold the set while the play went on. It's something you don't get nowadays in television, this kind of excitement.

Trevor Hill: Perhaps it's just as well. (Laughter)

Arthur Smith: Yes. While I was starting off my film editing career, I also got involved in directing odd bits and pieces. At that time in television, it was far more pioneering attitudes, and people

turned their hand to all kinds of jobs. In the time I was a film editor, I actually shot a couple of bits of film for documentaries. I directed a couple of film sequences, including one for Denis Mitchell's 'Tales of Soho'.

I, on one occasion, floor managed a live television show because the floor manager was taken sick. I happened to be in the building, and put the headphones on and waved at the people, telling them when to talk. I even directed a live television show once and did my own vision mixing.

0:15:43

Trevor Hill: It must have been a bit of a wrench to have been taken away from the action, as it were, and taken across to Stockport Road, which was above a garage, as I remember, wasn't it?

Arthur Smith: Yes, a garage and an ironworks. It was a very bad place to be, because we were totally isolated. We did have the space. We had camera rooms, we had three cutting rooms, we had a canteen of our own, which meant we could make cups of tea, but nothing else was there.

We had many hair-raising evenings where, if you were doing a high-speed edit job, a panic edit job, you would have to edit the film and then rush out of Stockport Road Film Unit, get into a car and drive a couple of miles to where the telecine machine was. Anything could have happened. We could have crashed, we could have broken down, and there would have been a nasty 30-minute gap in that night's television schedules.

0:16:54

Trevor Hill: Was there ever such?

Arthur Smith: No, it's amazing; we always managed to do it – sometimes by the skin of our teeth. I've actually been running upstairs to telecine in Dickenson Road with the film when the show has been actually on air. The announcer has been announcing this thing and we still haven't got the film on the projector, but it always managed to get there.

Trevor Hill: 'It'll be alright on the night' syndrome.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: I have a very clear picture, Arthur, of meeting you in one of the cutting rooms at Stockport Road. Lime Grove had given me the go-ahead to make two films in Norway. My unit, incidentally, consisted of Bob Sleigh, lighting cameraman, Gordon Entwistle as the assistant, Margaret Potter as the scriptwriter, and the fourth member of the team, myself. I was the sound recordist, the producer, and the director. The unions, of course, soon put a stop to that type of working. You weren't allowed to do all the things.

0:18:00 When I boast of being the soundman, we'd shot the film mute on 16mm. BBC budgets were very tight in those days, so the sound for both features was down on a Midget tape recorder that I carried around with me. It was then up to someone else to synchronise all that wild track.

Arthur Smith: Yes. The most important thing you've missed out was the sound was done on a Midget tape recorder but it was done two weeks after you'd filmed the pictures, so it wasn't a question of recording at the time of the filming. You had dialogue scenes which the pictures were taken one time and then two weeks later you went back and said, "Can you remember what you said?"

Trevor Hill: In Norwegian.

Arthur Smith: In Norwegian, and do it again. I thought, "This is some kind of ground-breaking synchronising system that Trevor Hill has devised [here, then 0:18:55], where you do the film and then devise the soundtrack at a much later stage."

Trevor Hill: By Jove, you have put me to shame. (Laughter) The unit, as you and the listener may imagine, it worked very long hours in those days – not only trying to sort out my mistakes. You've mentioned Denis Mitchell and the fact that you did just the opening to 'Morning in the Streets'. Another of his films – I'm not sure if you worked on this; I think it came before – was 'In Prison'.

Arthur Smith: Yes, 'In Prison', I think, was Denis' first film. It was made with mainly the National Film Agency crew. Gerry Pullen was the cameraman, and I think Steve Stephens and Ernie Evans did quite a lot of the sound. Of course, being a Denis Mitchell production, most of the soundtrack was taken from a radio programme he'd done previously, but the live sound recording they did was, I think, done by Steve Stephens.

The interesting thing I found out about that film is because of the wonderful BBC film equipment. It's unlike any other film equipment anywhere in the world. It was designed by P&ID: Planning and Installation Department. People had a joke, saying that a camel was a horse designed by P&ID. This gives you some idea what the camera equipment was like.

Their 35mm sound camera was a huge box, about half the size of a wardrobe, and took two people to lift onto the tripod. If you think of trying to do a documentary film with a piece of equipment like that, you realise the problems that would be involved.

In fact, a lot of the scenes in prison were actually filmed in the television studios at Dickenson Road Studios. They built a prison cell, which was a replica of one of the Strangeways prison cells, but it had removable walls so they could actually get the shots that were required to go with the particular sequences.

0:21:25

Trevor Hill: You mean there wasn't room in the real prison cell in which to get this BBC equipment?

Arthur Smith: No, I don't think so. I'm sure you could never get it in. It was a monstrous piece of equipment. It was called a 'double camera' and it had its own sound recording, 35mm magnetic sound recording apparatus within the same housing as the camera itself. I suppose it was an interesting idea, but, seeing as Hollywood had been managing very well without that since 1929, why the BBC had to design their own I don't know.

0:22:05

Trevor Hill: We later on, though, as I recall, working with Gerry Pullen as cameraman, we did a lot better with the Arriflex.

Arthur Smith: Yes. Yes, once the film usage became more intense with the BBC, they had to catch up with the industry standards, so a lot of the double cameras were scrapped early on, and blimped Arriflexes were used, and Mitchells. Then 16mm started to be used for documentaries, the [Orican 0:22:44] American sound camera was used, and then Arriflex brought out the BL and Eclair, with the NPR \_\_\_ self-blimped cameras.

When I first started shooting for the BBC, the BBC would only accept 35mm film. This was even for newsreel, as well. I think, possibly, if you had a really hard news story, like a plane crashed in front of you, they would reluctantly accept 16mm film, but everything had to be 35mm. Grudgingly, over the years, they started to accept 16mm for documentaries.

One or two things, like 'Morning in the Streets', had been shot on 16mm, but even on 'Morning in the Streets' the sound sequences were shot on 35mm and then reduced to 16mm [to insert into 0:23:45] the film. It was only when the 16mm equipment got better – and, I suppose, costs got more – that BBC, as the norm, accepted 16mm for documentaries.

0:24:03

Trevor Hill: For children's television I was debarred, because of the cost of 35mm, from doing quite a few film subjects in the early days. The first time the BBC at Lime Grove gave me a budget sufficient to meet the requirement was for a story of a

Christmas card. It was called 'A Greeting for Christmas', which I think you edited, Gerry shot, and all that was done on 35mm.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: It was a long time after that we were [allowed a 0:24:33] budget again, and that came with 16mm and with... That's why we were able to go to Norway, because it was on 16mm.

Arthur Smith: Yes, you did the 'Speedbird' film, which was just-

Trevor Hill: Hong Kong, 'Speedbird 933', yes.

Arthur Smith: Yes, you and Gerry on your own, on the Bolex. (Laughter)

Trevor Hill: Yes, but this time, by this time I had learned not to go and record the aircraft in the air, the air hostess speaking and people rustling, all on one track, Arthur – at least I hope I had.

Interestingly to me, you mentioned the fact that there was I, a sound person – sound radio person – recording everything at once. You referred to Denis Mitchell, 'In Prison', doing a film of a radio programme; Stanley Williamson, his films. Stanley, Geoffrey Bridson very early on, Olive Shapley, Joan Littlewood, Norman Swallow, they were all radio people who eventually came to television.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

0:25:36

Trevor Hill: As such, of course, it was a totally new experience for them. I think a lot of us felt a lot safer working with you as a film man, with Gerry as a film man, than we did in the studio.

Arthur Smith: Yes. The nice thing about film was the fact that it was a recorded medium. Normal television was always live. Once it started rolling, that was it. It happened, it went out, so it was a nerve-wracking business.

Also, because it was, at that time, difficult to record synchronised sound with film, the techniques used by Denis Mitchell, and Stanley Williamson and yourself worked very well because you virtually had silent pictures which you added sound to.

It's only when you tried to have the potential of dialogue scenes that it got complicated when we were trying to have synchronised lip movements with the sound, because all of Denis' films were based on previously produced radio programmes, I think. Yes, at that time. Little bits of synced sound were added, but, if you look at 'Morning in the Streets' now, I think there are only about four sequences in the whole film which are synchronised sound.

Trevor Hill: And, of course, his technique was to use what he called 'think tapes'.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: The person was speaking his or her thoughts aloud, which is interesting.

0:27:15 Another person I haven't mentioned, of course – you did, I think you have mentioned – who was very much part of the... Became part of North Region features, a very important contributor, and that's Don Howarth. You worked with him early on.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I first met Don before I joined the BBC. Don used to work in the news department in Manchester, and we did a round-Britain cycle race. I think once we went to the Isle of Man to do the TT races.

Don moved on to London and eventually on to the 'Tonight' programme. I went into the RAF to do my national service for two years. When I came out, Don was very well established in London, doing his 'Tonight' stories and various other documentaries. I think it was round about 1961 Don moved to Manchester as, virtually, head of documentary films. It was a new department.

I was then on the BBC staff, working as a film editor, and I did some extra bits for Don on the first film he made up here, which I can't remember what it was called now. It was a science fiction documentary. It was about a look into the future to see how things were going to turn out, and I did a couple of trick shots for him, which were done on the quiet because I wasn't officially a special effects man or a cameraman. I was a film editor then, but I went and did a couple of shots London

[supposed to be snarled up 0:29:11] with traffic, and shots of Big Ben and things like this. That was it.

In 1963 I changed from being a film editor to being a film cameraman and started working with Don straightaway. We did the Beatles documentary, 'The Mersey Sound', which I think must be the most shown documentary ever made. I've seen that footage all over the world. [Switch a 0:29:48] television on anywhere. If anybody mentions the Beatles, some of those shots seem to turn up.

That was done in early 1963, and I think I've worked pretty well solidly with him since 1963, apart from a very short spell when I first left the BBC to go freelance in 1970. Don worked with a couple of other people and then he did something which I was very pleased about: he got it written, I think, into his contract that I would shoot everything he did from then on. We must have made hundreds of films. We made the reasonably well-known Fred Dibnah series.

Trevor Hill: The very celebrated Fred Dibnah series.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I think we shot 18 of those. (Laughter)

Trevor Hill: 'Living on the Land'.

Arthur Smith: 'Living on the Land' and lots of one-off documentaries, a series called 'Making a Bob or Two', quite a few one-off documentaries. We did one about the Chatsworth and Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. We did one about travelling fairgrounds. We did one called 'Singing City' about the musical

element of Liverpool, apart from the pop groups, the folk singers.

0:31:29

Trevor Hill: Apart from documentaries, there are two lighter sides I associate with you. One is you and Barney Colehan working together.

Arthur Smith: Yes, I worked with Barney when I was Film Editor. By the latter part of my editing career, telerecording was being established, but it was film telerecording, not tape as we use nowadays. What would happen would be the picture on the television tube was filmed by a 35mm film camera. Then the film was developed, and then you could edit that film if you needed to cut down the running time of a programme.

Barney used to do a lot of light entertainment shows. He did the City Varieties 'Good Old Days'. He also used to do 'The Ken Dodd Show'. Ken Dodd is very funny and I like working with him, but he is the world's worst timekeeper. He's got no concept of time at all.

Barney used to do what was in theory a half-hour show with Ken Dodd, but he would bring around about 30 rolls of film into the cutting room. You would have Ken Dodd doing a stand-up piece for 90 minutes, which I had to try and reduce down to a third of that time, without making it look choppy and bitty.

I always remember Barney. I think he used to get totally bemused by all this material, and he used to sit there looking very worried and say, "Now, is this funny, or do you think this is funny?" I'd say, "Yes, I think it's funny." It's very difficult when

you're sitting in front of an editing machine, with piles of film, trying to decide what is funny and what isn't.

0:33:28

Trevor Hill: Yes. Do you remember a battle cry that arose from another well-known artist this time, I suppose, to celebrate a producer: "Never fear, Arthur's here." He said it in rather a broad Bradford accent. Who am I talking about?

Arthur Smith: That's dear old Harry Corbett, one of my favourite people to work with – Harry, and Sooty and Sweep. I always enjoyed working with Harry, because he had an adventurous spirit. You could suggest absolutely crazy things to him and he would try and come up with it.

The 'Sooty' shows I always enjoyed, because it was more like proper films because you had the superstar, Sooty, who didn't speak. You were into making silent movies. Some of the things we did, the 'Sooty's Safari', which I edited, that was shot by Gerry Pullen, I think. Yes.

Trevor Hill: It was partly – three-quarters – on location at Chester Zoo. We also did quite a bit of studio work. You did some of that shooting. I remember that.

Arthur Smith: Yes. That's right, yes. It was always very complicated doing 'Sooty Show', because you'd got a puppet which must have been 18 inches high, but you had to introduce it into a real world, so some of the camera angles we got up to to shoot this puppet without showing Harry's arm disappearing up its

underside. We even introduced legs at one stage. Harry made up legs for Sooty.

0:35:28

Trevor Hill: Yes. Do you remember what that was for? That was Sweep going in for the still, I think, unclaimed Daily Mail 'Man Powered Flight Competition'. I think it still exists today. The first person who will power their own machine gets £1,000, and we decided that Sweep was going to have this flying machine, which Bill Garrett – you remember Harry's brilliant prop man – made.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: For this it was pedalled. It was a pedal machine.

Arthur Smith: That's right, yes.

Trevor Hill: If you remember, we had the little feet in Wellington boots.

Arthur Smith: Yes. (Laughter)

0:35:57

Trevor Hill: I remember, Arthur, saying to you... The machine, of course, flapped its wings. We went to Blackpool Airport and I said to you, "Really, to win the prize at Blackpool, Sweep must circuit Blackpool Tower – the top of the tower – in-flight. How are we

going to do this?” Again Harry’s battle cry: “Do not despair, Arthur’s there.” Do you remember what you did?

Arthur Smith: This was before the days of the modern techniques like blue screen, and chroma key overlays and things, so anything we shot had to happen. We couldn’t do special effects; we couldn’t do trick photography on it really. So, I asked if we could find a plane that was manoeuvrable enough to fly close round the top of Blackpool Tower but big enough that we could set up the model of the aircraft inside the plane against the window and the camera – our camera.

So, that’s what we did. Inside an aeroplane, we put our model aeroplane, with Sweep in it and Harry lying flat on his back on the floor, working Sweep. Inside also had the film camera and enough lights to light the model aircraft to make it look like it was outside, and then we got this... I think it was [Dennis Westaby 0:37:33], the pilot. He was a brilliant pilot and I think broke every aviation rule in the book and flew close round and round Blackpool Tower. We had the tower in the background, and Sweep flapping away in the foreground.

0:37:48

Trevor Hill: Circling. I don’t recall the Daily Mail awarding Sweep that £5,000 prize, but that year they did give Harry and the programme a National Television Award. Part of that award, I think, still goes to Arthur Smith as the cameraman. But you not only worked in the North during your time with the regional film unit, Arthur.

Arthur Smith: The North region went into a bit of a lull as far as drama and some of the more adventurous documentaries. We weren't always fully employed, so we often used to go down to Ealing and work at Ealing Studios. There I shot some of 'The Great War' series, and I did episodes of 'Z-Cars', and 'Dixon of Dock Green', and 'The Wednesday Play', 'Play of the Month'.

I think I'm right in saying that I shot the first 16mm drama, which was another milestone in the BBC. They'd never considered using 16mm for drama, but we had this script for a play which was mainly set in the back of Morris 1000 van. I pointed out that the only way we could do it was to use a smaller camera or buy two Morris 1000 vans and cut them in half, which the budget didn't run to, so we did this film on 16mm.

I also went on attachment to BBC Bristol and worked with John Boorman when he was on the staff there. I did a couple of documentaries with him. One was a series called 'Citizen 63', which was made in 1963, of course, and then after that a series called 'The Newcomers', which was not... There was a soap opera called 'The Newcomers' on television at the time, but this was a documentary series. I think it was about six half-hour films about a young couple coming to live in Bristol.

I also did other bits and pieces at BBC Bristol with Michael Croucher and various other directors there, but the Ealing factor was quite busy because that was our major source of doing drama. I think I may be right in this: by the time I was a cameraman here, Vivian Daniels, I think, had finished doing drama in Manchester.

Trevor Hill: Finished, unfortunately.

Arthur Smith: I'm not quite sure about that.

Trevor Hill: Yes, I think the time factor is right here. London had decreed that there should be no more regional drama, and that affected North more than any other of the regions because North did the majority.

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: In a year, Vivian would do – Vivian and one or two other directors, perhaps a couple from London visiting – they'd do seven, eight play productions.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I edited a couple of drama film inserts that Vivian did, a couple of the plays he did that had to have film sequences in them, which I edited. The major thing I remember with Vivian, working with him, was I worked as a kind of associate director with him on a series about industrial archaeology.

I'm trying to think where that came, whether that came between the editing and the camera work or in the middle of the camera work. I can't remember exactly, but that was quite an interesting thing to do.

0:41:43

Trevor Hill: You always looked as if you thoroughly enjoyed your work – enthusiasm, Arthur. I think that is the word. You had some rather good one-liners for some of us, as I recall.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I think-

Trevor Hill: I'm talking about producers, or people who think they're producers.

Arthur Smith: Yes. I do enjoy my work. I still enjoy my work. I don't like to say it too loud, in case anybody hears, but I would do it for nothing if there was no other way of doing it. It is a great pleasure to me, but, because it's a great pleasure to me, I sometimes get exasperated by people who don't understand the business and don't feel the same kind of passion I feel for filmmaking.

This one time I rather lost my temper with a director in the North region here, and it was something that was said totally in the heat of the moment but has been relayed to me afterwards. I actually grabbed this chap by his lapels and said, "If you don't shut up, we'll shoot this film your way." Thinking about it afterwards, it was a very cruel thing to say, but he wasn't cooperating.

0:43:14

Trevor Hill: I mentioned the fact that you went a very long way to seeing that Harry Corbett and Sooty got a National Television Award. My personal award, Arthur, goes to you for your skills as lighting cameraman on the half-hour Dick Turpin feature, done in colour and mostly on location, with the legendary but totally untrue ride from London to York sequence, filmed with the aid of coloured smoke.

Arthur Smith: Yes. When you spoke to me about the film, you said you wanted to make a factual film of the true story of Dick Turpin, but we had to put into it the legend, so I was trying to think of a visual way of bringing in the fact that we are now in fantasy, we are now in legend.

This was one of the early colour programmes. It was the first time we'd really worked in colour, so there were lots of good opportunities to try things. Obviously, in the Dick Turpin story all the interiors were flickering candlelight and firelight, so that was quite nice to do that in colour and get the nice warm, rosy glow.

Most of the exteriors took place at night, and we did what we call 'day for night shooting'. We actually shot during the day but made it look like night by turning it slightly blue and darker, so those colour elements were there. We needed something that was going to be quite startling, so I suggested to you that we used coloured smoke, because I'd used it before, or I'd seen it used, but I think it was by an RAF parachute team. They'd used these coloured smoke markers to where they were going to land.

I said, "If we build up a big wall of coloured smoke, we can get Dick Turpin on his horse to ride through the smoke, and he will suddenly appear out of this swirling wall of yellow smoke. Then we know we're into the fantasy sequence." So, we organised this. We got these canisters – smoke canisters. One thing we didn't realise was that it was [annealing 0:45:41] dye and had dyed everything for miles around bright yellow. [There were] parts of Derbyshire that took about 10 years to get rid of the yellow stain across the countryside.

But the shot turned out a lot more interesting than we initially thought. We asked the person who was doubling for Dick Turpin, because this being television, of course, we had a Dick

Turpin who couldn't ride a horse – he was a good actor, but he couldn't even climb on one, so we had a double to do all the riding – and I explained to... It was a lady who was also, I think, about four months pregnant, but that was another story.

I explained to her that I wanted her to ride the horse through the yellow smoke, towards the camera, and come bursting through so it would look quite dramatic, but we forgot to tell the horse. The horse made up its own mind, when it was rushing at this wall of smoke, that smoke must be solid, so the horse tried to jump this wall of smoke.

We ended up with an even more dramatic shot than we thought, because this horse appeared 10 feet above the ground, coming through the yellow smoke. It really gave us a quite startling intro to the legendary ride from London to York.

0:47:01

Trevor Hill: The ride itself, as I recall, with great help from Mother Nature, it snowed, so we did the rest of it, didn't we, in snow-covered Derbyshire Moors?

Arthur Smith: Yes. It helped enormously because we were going for this night effect. If you can imagine, if we'd had dark countryside, a black horse, and you're trying to do night scenes, there's not a lot for the viewer to see, but having a black horse galloping across snow-covered hills looked quite dramatic.

0:47:34

Trevor Hill: You said at the beginning your boyhood ambition was always to be a cameraman. You didn't want to be a performer; you

didn't really want to direct anything. That is being passed on in your own family.

Arthur Smith: Yes. My eldest son, Howard, is now 26 and at the age of 26 had 10 years in the film business. He was very keen to join the film business. He's an enthusiast, like I was at that age. He is more technically minded, I think, than I was. He's built up a very good reputation as a Steadicam operator and focus puller, goes off around the world, doing various documentaries, working on the camera side all the time. I think, like me, his ambition is to be a cameraman.

0:48:41

Trevor Hill: How did you take to coming away from film, be it 35mm/16mm, onto video – video camera?

Arthur Smith: Video is getting better all the time. The cameras are not so temperamental, and you can almost do everything you can do on film with the cameras. Initially, I hated working on video. There were so many restrictions and you were in the hands of the engineers.

Unfortunately, a lot of engineers don't have much imagination. They're inclined to look at an oscilloscope and say, "This shot is no good." You say, "Why isn't it any good?" and they will not look at a monitor, they'll only look at the oscilloscope and say, "Because this part of the picture is too bright."

If what you're shooting is snow, with sunlight glinting off it and a black horse galloping across, like we had in Dick Turpin, the early video cameras would not have coped with that. It would

have been green snow with a purple horse on it, and it would have looked really awful, but now the cameras are better.

The engineers – God bless them – are now moving more into the background and just are concerned with the nuts and bolts of keeping the things working. They don't dictate how you've got to light a scene and what you can do with the camera, so the cameras are now freed from that terrible engineering wet blanket.

I think in another couple of years the cameras will be able to do exactly what film cameras can do. The only problem I find, working now with video, is that, because video tape is comparatively cheap, a lot of the discipline has disappeared from the production people.

When you start shooting 35mm film and you know, as that camera is running, it is costing something like £10 a minute, it really sharpens your senses. You don't just say, "Leave it running and we'll try it again." You think about what you're going to do before you switch the camera on, and make sure that what you do is effective, but, when you can shoot 30 minutes of video tape for £25, standards get very sloppy and people don't think before they start performing.

0:51:41

Trevor Hill: You still go around, though, from time to time – I hope – with your beloved film camera.

Arthur Smith: Yes. Fortunately, there are still people who make films. Don Howarth still makes films. We've just made one more Fred Dibnah film, and I think we're possibly going to do some more in the near future.

Certain projects where you need extensive editing are much better, I think, done on film. The editing process on film is difficult to describe. It's, kind of, more tactile. You've got something that you can hold. You can hold the film up to the light, you can juggle things around. Everything with video editing is like working a computer: it's numbers and it's transferring things around. It's a technical exercise. It doesn't feel the same to me.

0:52:46

Trevor Hill: It's rather like playing a fruit machine, is it?

Arthur Smith: Yes.

Trevor Hill: A video game.

Arthur Smith: Also, of course, the cinema still uses film. I've not been very much involved with cinema, unfortunately, because this country the film industry has been staggering from crisis to crisis since the early '30s, but I was very happy last year to go to Singapore and do Singapore's first feature film, which I was originally contracted to photograph. I ended up, due to a variety of circumstances, directing it, as well. [I know 0:53:31] I said I didn't want to be a director, but directing a feature film is quite nice. I enjoyed that, yes.

[Break in audio 0:53:44 - 0:55:53]

END AUDIO

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